

Writing Around Sound



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WRITING AROUND SOUND

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Design: Peter Wright
Editor: Richard B. Keys

Front cover image: Jurgita Ratkevičiūtė
Back cover text: Dani Cunningham

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FOREWORD

The *Writing Around Sound* initiative grew out of an ongoing attempt (spearheaded by the Auricle) to facilitate greater discursive engagement within the context of contemporary sound practice in New Zealand. Much of what has been written and published about sound practice in New Zealand has tended towards the historiographic. And the avenues for developing discourse around sound practice further, in terms of on-going journals and other such forums, have generally been somewhat limited. Furthermore, it seems that many who operate within the field of contemporary sound practice lean towards an anti-conceptual stance. Whilst the precise reasons for this latter tendency are unclear, one might speculate that the anti-conceptual tenor of contemporary sound practice reflects a desire on the part of practitioners to distance themselves and their practices from the forms, theories, and perceived cultural baggage of the academy and the “classical avant-garde”, as well as the conceptual (and textual) turn of the contemporary visual arts.

Whilst contemporary visual art has its own distinct set of issues in regard to its relation to discursive practices; for example its sometimes problematic tendency to appropriate theory and philosophy in order to justify “the work” as such. It should be acknowledged that nevertheless, contemporary visual art, with its myriad journals, essays, reviews, reading groups, and its engagement with poetry and other experimental forms of writing, has indeed forged its own productive relationship with textual and discursive practices. This productive relationship both reinforces and extends the work that underlies it and simultaneously constitutes a form of cultural production in its own right.

It is my personal contention that for the most part contemporary sound practice in New Zealand is still yet to develop such a productive relationship with *the text*, on its own terms. Sound practice has its own distinct forms of writing and textuality that are inherent to it and the various intersectional domains of practice from which it has emerged. These forms of writing range from notation and the score

RICHARD B. KEYS

(traditional, graphical, found, or otherwise), to poetry, circuit diagrams, and code. All of which offer themselves up readily for textual experimentation. Furthermore, sound itself has a certain grammar, which can be readily transposed to other visual and textural registers, as the works of the various authors and visual artists included in this volume are testimony.

The textual and visual materials included in this journal, whilst focused on a diverse range of topics, and differing widely in form, all share at least one defining feature; they employ the sonic as a point of departure that enables exploration along many different trajectories. In this sense, it is not so much that the articles in question are writing *about sound* (and sound practice) as much as they are *writing around, through, with, or against it*.

It is our hope that this journal will be received as more than an isolated gesture or end unto itself. We hope that this discursive experiment will enliven and take its place as part of a broader dialogue through which contemporary sound practice in New Zealand can continue to articulate and extend itself.

ON A COMMUNITY OF AURICULAR PRAXIS

*Of all the activities necessary and present in human communities, only two were deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called the *bios politikos*, namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*), out of which rises the realm of human affairs ... from which everything merely necessary or useful is excluded.*

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

The Borderline Ballroom collective formed around a kernel of like-minded sonic arts practitioners in Christchurch New Zealand c. 2007 in order to provide a creative outlet for sonic experimentation in Canterbury and beyond. Over the following 7 years the collective developed a community of praxis in Canterbury that became an active, regional locus in a nationwide sonic arts network that continues to support emerging and established, local, national and international sonic artists¹. It is this enduring community of praxis, both pre and post the Canterbury earthquakes, that created the potential and formed the executive basis for the Borderline Ballroom's legal incorporation as the Cantabrian Society of Sonic Artists (CSSA) and the development of its Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery² in 2013.

From the beginning of the CSSA the term 'sonic arts' was deliberately defined in the broadest sense as encompassing both performance and installation practice, where a sonic artist is simply anyone who works creatively with sound via the mediation of the ear and other organs of hearing. This rather open ended definition

1 See <http://cssa.org.nz/category/events/page/4/>

2 See <http://auricle.org.nz>

of what constitutes the sonic arts has provided for an eclectic approach to its practice organized around the Auricle's events, exhibition and festival programmes. In the case of performance practice this has ranged from free jazz to taonga pūoro along with electroacoustic improvisation, electronica, soundscape composition and extreme noise to whatever else the events committee decided to support. While Jazz, contemporary or western art music performance has not generally been supported in the gallery, their use of Occidental tempered scale and metric rhythm is merely one form of organized sound production within an eclectic range of performative practices that has depended on the preferences of the sonic artists involved. Through active collaborations across diverse practices the delineation between noise and music has depended entirely on where each artist prefers to place their performance practice, and whether or not one might consider that all forms of sonic performance are musical in the broad sense for which all music is noise and vice versa.

The Auricle's exhibition programme has been informed by contemporary sound art practice with exhibitions chosen by the curatorial committee on the basis of works that have a conceptual rather than a musical aesthetic and yet still retain an emphasis on producing sound in the gallery. This emphasis on the sonic aspects of contemporary sound art was chosen to contrast the work of the Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery with other generally more visually focused contemporary arts galleries such as the Physics Room³ in Christchurch. Beyond these broad practical concerns to do with varying performance and installation disciplines, the 'sonic arts' in 'CSSA' was primarily conceived as an open question to be answered in practice, and in this sense as a community of praxis the Borderline Ballroom's Auricle sonic arts venture has been first and foremost defined by its community of practitioners.

This 'community of doing' is perhaps a defining feature of the sonic arts as a historical discipline, where the artform has been defined by its cross disciplinary and hybrid approaches to sonic creativity, and where any disciplinary knowledge arises from the communal act of doing sonic arts rather than from the cultural constraints of a more pre-defined artistic tradition. The historical roots of sonic arts practice are now well over half a century old following on the rapid development of electronic technologies enabling hybrid cross disciplinary arts practices in the 50's and 60's

3 See physicsroom.org.nz/

starting with post-WW2 avant garde electronic music. From Cage's experimental composition lectures to Fluxus performance art; or Max Neuhaus' *Drive in Music* and Braxton's 'creative music' to Throbbing Gristle's *D.o.A: The Third and Final Report*; and on to the ubiquity of 21st C laptop computer music; sonic performance and installation practices have been informed by an openness to experimentation and a deliberate confusion of traditional art and genre categories. At very least, one might say that there is still today far more confusion in the general public about what might constitute a sonic as opposed to a visual arts practice.

The Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery has over the last two years provided the community venue and thus organizational focus for just such a confusion of sonic praxis along with the open ended question of its relation to contemporary and performance art practices as well as to the wider community of the ongoing Christchurch rebuild. The definition of the sonic arts that has organically arisen from this Cantabrian community of praxis has as many facets as it has had practitioners, and it is this community network with its recurring engagements that has fostered a collaborative sharing of skills and ideas while learning about sonic art by just doing it. Towards this end the Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery has been actively supporting sonic arts events and exhibitions since it opened in October 2013, and to date the venue has hosted over 150 performance nights, workshops and artist seminars as well as 22 monthly sonic arts exhibitions by emerging and established local, national and international sonic artists⁴. The Audacious Festivals of Sonic Arts 2014 and 2015 have and will feature public sonic art installations by over 30 NZ, UK, US and Australian artists in multiple locations around the central city⁵. Over this time, more than 170 individual performances have been recorded in the Auricle's surround sound gallery representing a significant survey and archive of Cantabrian sonic arts performance over the last two years of the post earthquake rebuild.

The Auricle's Reading Around Sound discussion groups, organized in collaboration with Audio Foundation in Auckland, have complemented this brief history of sonic arts praxis by opening a space for reflection on that praxis by the practitioners themselves. And if the answer to the question of what constitutes the

4 See <http://auricle.org.nz/exhibition-archive/> and <http://auricle.org.nz/archive/>

5 See <http://audacious.org.nz>

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‘sonic arts’ is found in its practice, then perhaps all that remains is the question of why we ‘do’ sonic arts in the first place? For Aristotle all praxis has as its ultimate goal what is good for one’s own life, rather than merely working towards the preconceived production of crafted works. If we do sonic arts for the sake of doing rather than merely producing then it has become a vocational calling and an end in itself. The Auricle has been just such a product of the sonic artist’s drive to live the ‘good life’, as a communal effort to do sonic art for one’s own sake and along with the others. As a community of auricular praxis it has been organized around a dynamic artistic process of doing and reflection on doing for the sake of being. Reflection and action together are here the embodiment of writing around the doing of sound.

CRUEL NOISES

Artaud and the Semiotics of Sound

Antonin Artaud's seminal work *The Theatre and its Double*, in which the fundamental axioms of the Theatre of Cruelty are outlined, transformed the face of contemporary theatre. His vision of a new, metaphysical, theatrical language; one that "simulates the dark, unindulged passions, the abnormal feelings of mankind"; and, through exposure to a kind of cruelty or suffering, thereby "cleanses the performer and spectator alike in its collective experience";¹ quickly established him as "among the most fertile and vigorous influences on the development of twentieth-century Western theatre."² Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty has significant sonic implications, Artaud identifying the use of sound and music as one of the theatrical parameters in need of urgent reinvention.³

Due to the holistic, all-encompassing nature of Artaud's corpus (with his focus on theatre as a kind of "*gesamtkunstwerk*"),⁴ and our composer-centric approach to music history, it is easy to neglect Artaud as a musical theorist. Yet Artaud's ideas on art and sound have had a resounding influence on music in the 20th Century. In the 1950s, Pierre Boulez acknowledged the influence of Artaud on his own musical

1 Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2001), Kindle edition. Location 185.

2 Adrian Morfee, *Antonin Artaud's Writing Bodies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 4.

3 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1994), 12.

4 Matteo Colombi and Massimo Fusillo, "Artaud, Barney, and the Total Work of Art from Avant-Garde to the Posthuman," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15, no. 7 (2003): 2, accessed September 18, 2015, doi: 10.7771/1481-4374.2392.

language, writing that “music should be collective hysteria and magic, violently modern – along the lines of Antonin Artaud”;⁵ and John Cage, in an interview on *Theatre Piece no. 1*, admitted “I was under the influence of that text of Artaud.”⁶ In 1928, Artaud himself even began work on a libretto for an unfinished opera with music by the then *enfant terrible* of the French musical avant-garde, Edgard Varèse.⁷ Today, Artaud’s ideas on the semiotic relationship of sonic elements in the theatre and their visceral, kinetic value remain a rich field of exploration for the sonic artist. This paper will primarily examine Artaud’s ideas on sound as they are presented in *The Theatre and Its Double*, and further speculate as to the possibilities of their practical musical application.

In the “First Manifesto” of the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud envisions a “unique language half-way between gesture and thought.”⁸ This typifies what Susan Sontag describes as a kind of unification of body and intellect in Artaud’s writings, whereby “Artaud’s notion of truth stipulates an exact and delicate concordance between the mind’s ‘animal’ impulses and the highest operations of the intellect.”⁹ For Artaud “intellectual distress is at the same time the most acute physical distress.”¹⁰ Thus, Artaud’s theories apropos sound’s theatrical application are two-pronged; a duality of reforms: one concerning the intellect, the other the body and the senses.

The so-called intellectual prong of Artaud’s sonic reforms deals with the semiotics of sound: the way that sounds signify. The Theatre of Cruelty is often referred to as an “impossible theatre.”¹¹ Finter and Griffin, drawing on the work of philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, argue that Artaud’s conception of theatre, as outlined in his writings, represents a kind of unattainable utopian

5 Eric Smigel, “The Recital Hall of Cruelty: Antonin Artaud, David Tudor, and the 1950s Avant-Garde,” *Perspectives of New Music* 45, no. 2 (Summer, 2007): 3.

6 Lucy Bradnock, “Life in the Shadows: Towards a Queer Artaud,” *Papers of Surrealism* 8 (2010): 4.

7 Robin Maconie, *Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 378.

8 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 89.

9 Susan Sontag, “Approaching Artaud,” in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Random House, 1981), 22.

10 Ibid.

11 Helga Finter and Matthew Griffin, “Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre: The Legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty,” *The Drama Review* 41, no. 4 (MIT Press, 2007): 15.

ideal, as it exists outside of our semiotic, linguistic world.¹² They note Artaud's placement of the Theatre of Cruelty within Lacan's order of the Real, defined as a realm constituting all which cannot be subject to signification, "the world before it is carved up by language."¹³ It exists separately from the Symbolic (the signifier) and the Imaginary (the signified) which collectively comprise a 'Saussurean' dyadic model of the semiotic world. Finter and Griffin therefore note a kind of paradox, in that Artaud is concerned primarily with "integrating unconscious emotional affects into the Symbolic, by way of the Imaginary, in such a way that the force of these affects could not be sublated in the symbol."¹⁴ Cruelty, for Artaud, is an attempt to translate the Real, which, by its very nature loses its 'realness' when subjected to linguistic signification, into the semiotic realm, begging the question: "How can the Real of suffering be translated into language without being sublated?"¹⁵ Thus, Finter and Griffin argue, Artaud's Theatre of the Cruelty represents a kind of utopia, made unattainable by its central semiotic paradox.

This conclusion, however, is not very useful for sonic artists attempting to put aspects of Artaud's work into practice. A better solution is to closely examine Artaud's attitudes towards the dyadic model of the sign, as expressed in *The Theatre and its Double*; exploring their implications for the way in which sound, and music, signifies. Artaud stresses the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified (a concept mirrored in de Saussure), noting that words and sounds only signify by social convention. This set of social conventions equates to what de Saussure calls the *Langue*,¹⁶ a system of signs governed by arbitrary rules and magnetised through the differences between individual sign operations. For sounds, the signified tends to be the sound source itself; however Artaud notes even this to be an arbitrary relationship. An example of this, outlined in "Metaphysics and the *Mise en Scene*," is the association of a melodious singing voice with a beautiful woman, an association

12 Ibid.

13 Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2003), 25.

14 Finter and Griffin, "Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre," 16.

15 Ibid., 18.

16 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 16.

which, Artaud argues, exists only by convention: “if, since the world began, we had heard all beautiful women call to us in trumpet blasts and greet us like bellowing elephants, we would have eternally associated the idea of bellowing with the idea of a beautiful woman.”¹⁷

Artaud proposes to bring the arbitrariness of this relationship to the foreground in what he describes as a “reconquest of signs,”¹⁸ a process whereby the subjective void between signifier and signified, rather than the sign itself, is thrust into focus. Symbols are disassociated from their socially determined denotations, sounds detached from the context of their source and words alienated from their explicit meanings. The semiotic dyad is forced apart, tearing a kind of rift between the symbolic and the imaginary, somewhat nullifying the terms ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, until the *Langue* begins to deteriorate and all sounds become abstracted.

This process is evident in Artaud’s approach to the spoken word in theatre, on which he argues for the necessity of breaking down words into their respective phonemes, thereby subjugating their semantic meaning. Artaud laments the state of contemporary Western theatre, which, he argues, has been “prostituted,”¹⁹ becoming slave to the written text; reliant solely on the stale “literary masterpieces” of the past, “fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of their time.”²⁰ Occidental theatre has been bogged down in its fixation on the spoken word, monopolized by dialogue used only to “express psychological conflicts particular to man and the daily reality of his life”; dialogue which is “lost at the moment of its own exteriorization.”²¹ Artaud proposes to “put an end to the subjugation of theatre to the text”²² and the “impotence of speech”²³ and thus “restore to the language of speech its own magic.”²⁴

In order to achieve this, Artaud proposes to break down the semantic meaning

17 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 42-43.

18 Ibid., 63.

19 Ibid., 37.

20 Ibid., 75.

21 Ibid., 70.

22 Ibid., 89.

23 Ibid., 37.

24 Ibid., 111.

of words through a kind of phonetic deconstruction and sonic exploration. Artaud argues that it is not a word's meaning that is important, but rather the way it is pronounced and the sonic properties of its phonemes. "This is the hour of intonations, of a word's particular pronunciation,"²⁵ Artaud declares, as he extols the sonic characteristics of the act of speech itself, "the faculty words have of creating a music in their own right."²⁶ In the Theatre of Cruelty, words are chosen for their sonic potency and sometimes subjected to a process of syllabification, their phonemes strung together according to their individual vibratory power, forming a kind of elaborate glossolalia which is "neither an imitative language nor a creation of names."²⁷ The actual meaning of a word becomes immaterial, subordinate to the electricity of a sonically rich and varied incantation, or, as Derrida describes it, "the flesh of the word... the word's sonority."²⁸ The word, the individual act of speech (parole) as signifier, is torn from its traditional semiotic relationship to the signified; this arbitrary link weakened, and eventually destroyed, by the sonic force of a word's delivery.²⁹ In other words, it is the actual vocalization of a word, the timbral and registral inflections of an utterance, that signify; their semiosis eclipsing the semantic meaning of the words. Denis Hollier argues that this tearing of words from their meaning creates a kind of "sound system," the word moving off paper and into a truly sonic existence: "it is the acoustic deconstruction of the voice, the liberation of sound from the tyranny of speech... a transgression of literariness indeed."³⁰

For Artaud, the deconstruction of these arbitrary semiotic relationships creates a sense of danger, of magic, and through that a kind of poetry. Poetry, for Artaud, is "anarchic," as it "brings into play all the relationships of object to object, and of forms to signification."³¹ To elucidate this, he looks to the realm of cinema concluding that "in a Marx Brothers' film a man thinks he is going to take a woman in his

25 Ibid., 90.

26 Ibid., 38.

27 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), 327.

28 Ibid.,

29 Felipe Otondo, "Rediscovering Artaud's Sonic Order," *The Journal of Music and Meaning* 9 (Winter, 2007): 5.

30 Denis Hollier "The Death of Paper, Part Two: Artaud's Sound System," *The MIT Press* 80 (Spring, 1997): 28

31 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 43

arms but instead gets a cow, which moos. And... that moo, at just that moment, assumes an intellectual dignity equal to any woman's cry."³² The poetic anarchy here lies in the unexpected displacement of signification. The conventional relationship between signs suggests that we will be presented with a woman onscreen; however, the signifier 'woman' is displaced by the signifier 'cow' and thus a rupture appears in the *Langue*. In this case, the sudden severing of these traditional semiotic relationships elevates the unexpected, the anarchic and the dangerous to a new poetic level. Artaud conceives this on a much larger scale, with all sounds in the theatre relating to each other in a way that ignores, circumvents, and even contradicts the socially subjective nexuses of our sign system: "theatrically these inversions of form, these displacements of signification could become the essential elements of this humorous poetry."³³

David Roesner posits that the ultimate effect of Artaud's process of semiotic displacement and abstraction from semantic meaning is the creation of the "sound object"³⁴ in theatre. Roesner argues that "what Artaud promoted... was sound onstage as an autonomous part of performance";³⁵ a move away from the "sound effect," the traditional use of sound in theatre where sounds are chained to dramatic context (the "fictional place, time or character").³⁶ The sound object is entirely self-referential; it is without context or source and does not signify. Roesner describes this as a kind of defamiliarization:

He already sought after the unheard sound... after estranged and unfamiliar sounds, which would allow and/or force the audience to engage with sound as a physical... experience, rather than a process of signification.³⁷

It is certainly true that by exposing the arbitrariness of the semiotic dyad, all sounds become unfamiliar, reduced to mere blunt objects valued for their sonic

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 David Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre: Music as Mode, Method and Metaphor in Theatre-Making* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 105.

35 Ibid., 106.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

power. However, the issue with an object-orientated ontology of Artaud's sounds is that it deals only with the individual sonic utterance as an isolated phenomenon. If each sound object is self-referential, then how do sound objects within a work relate to each other?

Perhaps an alternative would be to view Artaud's process of abstraction as a small scale occurrence of what Deleuze and Guattari call "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization". Deterritorialization, in its broadest sense, is a process that "frees an act or event from its actual origins";³⁸ it is the dismantling of existing structures, the act of a socially constructed entity "becoming other than itself,"³⁹ the "detaching" of "a sign from its context of signification."⁴⁰ When Deleuze and Guattari say that "the club is a deterritorialized branch,"⁴¹ it is because the branch, in its repurposing as human tool, is removed from its original context of 'tree'. To give a musical example, in a theme and variations by Mozart, the theme undergoes a process of deterritorialization:

...it uproots the refrain from its territoriality. Music is a creative, active operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain.⁴²

Reterritorialization is the replacement, reconstruction, or restructuring of that which has been deterritorialized. This is certainly homologous to Artaud's "reconquest of signs." In Artaud's conception of the theatre, sounds are deterritorialized; removed from their traditional syntactical structures that allow signification, but then are reterritorialized, realigned with a new semiotic fabric forming new linguistic relationships to other sonic signs.

It becomes evident that what Artaud proposes is the creation of a new and unified semiotic syntax. Having broken down the signifier-signified relationship through the abstraction of sonic material from denotative meaning, these newly liberated signs are regurgitated and reorganized into what can only be described as a

38 Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2001), 58.

39 Ibid., 56.

40 Cæmeron Crain, "What is a Territory," *The Mantle*, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.mantlethought.org/philosophy/what-territory>

41 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 172.

42 Ibid., 300.

new *Langue*. This act of systemization, the reforming of new relationships between constituent sonic objects, working alongside the process of semiotic abstraction of individual sonic utterances, is central to Artaud's conception of the theatre, and, he argues, creates a kind of unification, the formation of a new, incantatory language. Artaud conceived this semiotic amalgamation from a perceived coalescence of theatrical components in Balinese theatre, a spectacle he encountered in 1931 on its visit to the Colonial Exhibition in Paris.⁴³ For Artaud, Balinese theatre represents a kind of lexical or symbolic totality where a "language, based on signs, and no longer on words, is liberated."⁴⁴ Artaud attributes this syntactical cohesion to a "spiritual architecture created... out of the evocative power of a system." This "spiritual architecture" is mathematical in its systemization, which, Artaud argues "creates a richness of fantasy"⁴⁵ and links individual sonic elements. He often uses the analogy of hieroglyphs to describe the reorganization of these semiotic elements, speaking of "making a kind of alphabet out of these signs."⁴⁶ For Artaud, this restructuring of semiotic relationships is both holistic and panoptic in that it applies to all existing sounds, from the starkest silence, to the most deafening roar, and everything in between. This new morphology would be all-encompassing, with all sounds finding a place in the semiotic network: a totality in the truest sense of the word.

Artaud's concern with the systemization of sounds is analogous with similar advancements in the musical avant-garde of the time. The 1920s had seen the rise of systemization in the form of dodecaphonic serialism in the Second Viennese School, which later developed to complete/total serialism with the Darmstadt School in the 1950s. The musical move to serialism mirrors exactly the process of abstraction and systemization Artaud panegyricizes in *The Theatre and Its Double*: sounds are removed from their traditional formal contexts (the ubiquitous fabric of tonality) and reorganized according to mathematical principles, thus forming new

43 Lyne Bansat-Boudon, "Artaud and Balinese Theatre, or the Influence of the Eastern on the Western Stage," *Sanskrit Vimarśah* 6 (2012): 345, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.sanskrit.nic.in/svimarsha/sv.htm>

44 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 54

45 Ibid., 55.

46 Ibid., 90.

and sonically rich semiotic relationships.

Artaud's preoccupation with the sonic properties of human phonation in speech, not only his semiotic concerns, but also epitomizes the prong of his bifurcate conception of sound that relates to the body and the senses. Artaud is concerned with sound as a spatialized force, physical and kinetic, an "active component"⁴⁷ in the theatre. In the Artaud-ian model, sound is movement, sound is vibration; it is the displacement of air particles and therefore a physical, reified presence within the theatrical space. For Artaud, sound is a mere extension of physical gesture; the two are inexorably fused. This is evident in his writings on the Balinese theatre, where depictions of movement are adorned with vivid sonic descriptors until the distinction between sound and movement becomes diluted, a false dichotomy, immaterial. He writes of the "equally sonorous interlacing of movements," of "the musical angle made by the arm with the forearm", and "human limbs... resonant with echoes."⁴⁸ For Artaud, sound is inherently a form of kinesis, possessing a kind of visceral dynamism, expressed perfectly in his statement that "all these sounds are linked to movement, as if they were the natural consummation of gestures which have the same musical quality"⁴⁹ and therefore "there is no transition from a gesture to a cry or a sound."⁵⁰ In the Theatre of Cruelty, vibration is the essence of sound, and movement the initial agent, the *primum mobile* that triggers its actuation.

If sound has its genesis in movement, it has its expression in space. Sound, through its activation and energisation of particles, has a physical presence in the space in which it resonates. This physical presence, according to Artaud, "exists in the air of the stage, which is measured and circumscribed by that air and has a density in space."⁵¹ Artaud's theatrical vision involves a space "crammed with sounds,"⁵² utilized in its entirety, and "by utilizing it, to make it speak."⁵³ The actualization of

47 Otondo, "Rediscovering Artaud's Sonic Order," 4.

48 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 56.

49 Ibid., 59.

50 Ibid., 57.

51 Ibid., 56.

52 Ibid., 87.

53 Ibid., 111.

this spatialization involves the liquidation of the ‘stage’ in the traditional sense, with theatrical events spilling out into the auditorium, colonizing, and hereby activating, every angle, every corner of the performance space to create the “immense area of widely diffused signs”⁵⁴ that Artaud describes. This sonic activation of space has been a continual preoccupation of the musical avant-garde, with spatial elements, formerly existing at the periphery of musical thought, being thrust to the conceptual centre over the course of the Twentieth Century. One of its greatest proponents, Karlheinz Stockhausen, famous for his adventurously spatialized works, summed up this preoccupation beautifully:

Please do not forget that we musicians have air as our material. For a whole life, we do nothing but form and shape air, making invisible sculptures and compositions of movements in air.⁵⁵

Artaud’s emphatic fixation on the sensory effects of sound is a definitive step towards what Jacques Derrida describes as “pure presence.” Artaud, having been “dispossessed”⁵⁶ of his own body since childhood by a crippling disease, saw Western theatre, with its basis in Aristotelian mimesis (art imitating life), as numb, phlegmatic, insensate, sterile; in other words, lifeless. The Theatre of Cruelty sets about to liberate theatre from this perpetual inertia through the galvanising osmosis of ‘life’ itself into the theatrological framework. In Derrida’s reading of Artaud “the Theatre of Cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable.”⁵⁷ Artaud’s conception of the theatre is an “affirmation”⁵⁸ of life, rather than a shallow emblemization of it. Here, parallels can be drawn between Derrida’s description of ‘life’ and Lacan’s concept of the Real, both being a description of all that exists in the world outside of the realm of representation. When sounds become kinetic objects they are placed in the realm of the Real, outside the realm of mere representation. Accessing this ‘life’ can only be achieved through the forced activation of the senses.

54 Ibid., 65.

55 Karlheinz Stockhausen, “Closing Speech,” *Stockhausen Courses Kürten* (2004), quoted in Kathinka Pasveer, Stockhausen-Konzerte und –Kurse Kürten Facebook Page, accessed September 18, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Stockhausen-Konzerte-und-Kurse-K%C3%BCrten-489115294569607/timeline/>

56 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 294.

57 Ibid., 294.

58 Ibid., 293.

When sound becomes a physicalized force, it becomes a living power within the theatrical space; the puissant effect of the energized vibrations upon the senses taking on a life-affirming function. We feel these vibrations therefore we are alive. When Derrida speaks of the “re-education of the organs,”⁵⁹ this is the power of the energized, physical sound coming into collision with the sensory organs, stimulating them, and through that stimulus, forever changing them.

This leads us to the importance of extremity in Artaud’s revitalization of sound. In order for a sound to truly vibrate and energize a physical space and through that effectively stimulate the organs, it has to push at the fragile edges of our sonic consciousness. As Derrida states “Artaud kept himself as close as possible to the limit.”⁶⁰ This pushing of the limits encompasses all extremes: registral extremes, timbral extremes (highs and lows), and dynamic extremes (Artaud muses on a “space stocked with silence”).⁶¹ Through the embracing of these extremes, a variety of vibratory characteristics are present in the soundscape, optimising its sensory effect. These extremes operate on a kind of boldness, a shock to the senses directly resultant from a “spectacle unafraid to go as far as necessary,”⁶² a theatre “pushed beyond all limits.”⁶³

The ultimate goal of Artaud’s sonic revitalization is the creation (or rather recreation) of a kind of universal, primordial language capable of speaking to desires and instincts locked deep within all humanity. His new sonic vocabulary would allow both listeners and performers to access a kind of primal, totemistic, glossolalic language that inhabits the collective human subconscious; normally inaccessible as it antecedes the semiotic order on which society functions. Artaud ultimately posits this overhaul with the intention of redirecting the esthesis of the listener; from a passive listening experience, to an actively cathartic one; exposing the listener to violent emotional paroxysms in order to purge them of similar primal urges repressed by society. It is a form of primitivism that views sound as a kind of deeply

59 Ibid., 318.

60 Ibid., 314.

61 Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 87.

62 Ibid., 87.

63 Ibid., 85.

entrancing chthonic force. Artaud uses the analogy of snakes being affected by music only because their bodies “touch the earth at every point,” the musical vibrations transmitting through the earth to create a “very subtle, very long massage.”⁶⁴ The Theatre of Cruelty proposes to treat the audience “like the snake-charmer’s subjects,” moving them by the means of their primal connexion to the earth, an effect that can only be achieved via the dual processes of semiotic disintegration and physicalized, spatialized vibration.

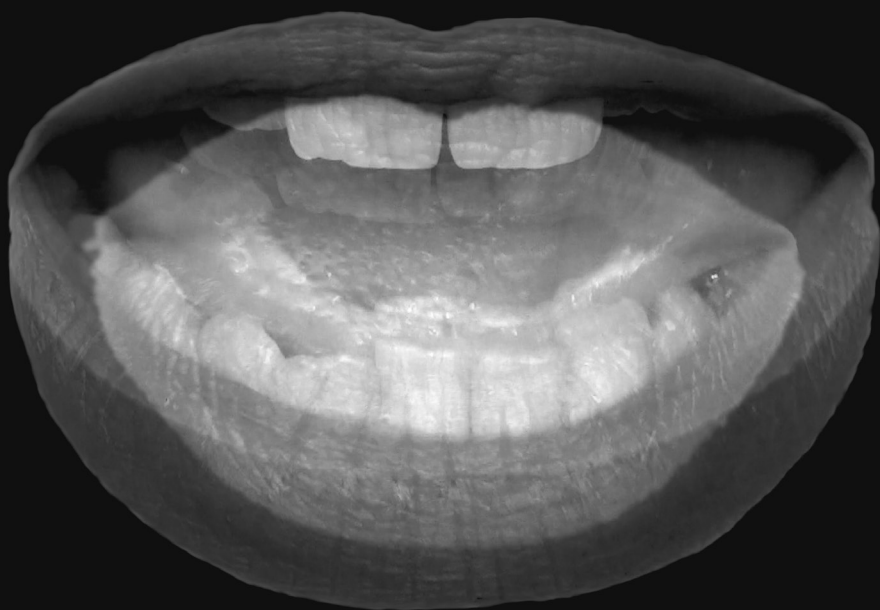
Whether or not this primordial language is the ultimate aim of a sonic artist, the means to achieve it, as outlined in Artaud’s writings, offers up exciting, relatively untapped, aesthetic possibilities for future compositions. Artaud’s theories on both the semiosis of the individual sound event, on the structural relationship between sonic phenomena as sign operations; and on the spatial-acoustic properties of sound are a rich source of inspiration for the sonic artist. Artaud’s ideas, when practically applied to music (either in part or in full), have the potential to greatly expand our sonic vocabulary and explore previously untapped musical territories.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

Jo Burzynska

MISHEARINGS

Exploring the multisensory
intersections of sound



What do you hear? Often something quite different from the actual sounds that enter the ear, filtered as they are through the multisensory environment in which they are produced. When hearing is crossed with our other senses the listener's perceptions can be intensified, confused or even completely altered, provoking sensorial, emotional and intellectual responses beyond that offered by a sound alone.

The way sound interacts with other sensory stimuli is something I investigated in my *Mishearings* exhibition at The Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery in June 2015. In this collection of multisensory installations, mishearings arise when our auditory focus is directed to the intersections with other senses, in the process revealing the complex way our senses combine when navigating our sonic environments.

"The ear subtly and actively connives to make what it takes to be sense out of what it hears, by lifting signals clear from noise, or recoding noise as signal," suggested literary and cultural theorist, Steven Connor in *Earslips: Of Mishearings and Mondegreens*¹. "In other words, listening is full of replay, relay and feedback, the ear monitoring or listening in on, and out for, its own operations. Perhaps, in this sense, all hearing is mishearing, and a kind of deterrence of sound."

Over the clamour of everyday life, the brain regularly manages to construct meaning through noise, making fairly accurate judgements from snatches of conversation heard above the din. However, replace this noise with silence and it struggles to make sense of what it's hearing. This phenomenon was employed in the work "Poetry as I need it" in *Mishearings*, an interrogation of sound, silence, form and time using John Cage's "Lecture on Nothing". A reading of the text is cut with blasts of white noise, through which much meaning can still surprisingly be discerned. However, when passages are interspersed with silence, disorientation ensues.

"Hearing perception is interception, the making out of sounds – not least by making them out as distinct and separate 'sounds' – as what they will have been before they have a chance to resound as what they might be," Connor states. "Without such systematic mishearing, there can be nothing to be heard, but only

1 Steven Connor, "Earslips: Of Mishearings and Mondegreens," Paper presented at Listening In, Feeding Back, Columbia University, February 14, 2009

the raw and amorphous racketings of noise.”².

Individuals will always arrive at their own and often diverse interpretations of raw sound. However, mix the cues and the individual can be faced with multiple and potentially conflicting meanings, a concept at the heart of “Hearing Lips and Seeing Voices”. This audiovisual poem created for the exhibition in collaboration with the British psychologist, Paul Higgard uses the McGurk Effect³, an illusion that occurs when the auditory component of a word is paired with the visual component of another. The visual information overpowers what we actually hear, resulting in the viewer hearing a completely new word, which in this work is used to transform a poem that sounds innocent when simply listened to into something more sinister when the lips are watched.

Audio poem

With a grin I veer,
neat and pale.
I ran and lay
my bait in the bay.

Visual poem

With a grip I gear,
peat and nail.
I rap and lay
my gate in the gay

McGurk poem

With a grim idea
(meat and tail),
I ram and lay
my date in the day.

A mishearing such as this highlights the overpowering and often powerful influence the senses have over one another. These crossmodal correspondences have been the subject of a growing body of research in recent years, which includes my personal investigations⁴, as well as psychological studies.

Through hosting workshops, creating works that combine sound and taste and curating wine lists for The Auricle’s wine bar around the exhibitions in its gallery, I have observed how sound can radically change a person’s perception of the flavours and textures of what they are tasting. For example, in the case of wine, I have discovered that harsher timbres harden acidity, reduce aromatics and emphasise tannins, while lower frequencies enhance the perception of body and

² Ibid

³ Harry McGurk and John MacDonald, “Hearing lips and seeing voices,” *Nature*. (1976)

⁴ Jo Burzynska, “Wine and Music: the synergies between sound and taste,” *Food design on the edge: Proceedings of the International Food Design Conference and Studio*, Ed. by Richard Mitchell (Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin)

high frequencies have synergies with acidity. Synchronise the characters of the wine with the sound/music in the environment and the experience of both is enhanced.

While my own studies to date have been informal, more rigorous scientific experiments have been conducted by experimental psychologists. A review of current research in the area by Knöferle and Spence (2012) concluded that there "...is now a solid body of experimental research to show that neurologically normal individuals map tastes (and other aspects of flavor/oral-somatosensation) and both musical and nonmusical sounds in a nonrandom manner".⁵

Sensory synergies

I have used findings from this research as tools in the creation of the conceptual as well as the sensorial elements of the multisensory works of *Mishearings*, such as "Bittersweet", an installation for eight speakers and chocolate.

This draws directly on the research paper, "A Bittersweet Symphony"⁶, which provided "...the first convincing empirical demonstration that the crossmodal congruency of a background soundtrack can be used to modify the taste (and presumably also flavour) of a foodstuff". In this, a toffee was tasted with two different soundtracks, each employing previous findings of a crossmodal correspondence between sweet tastes and high-pitched sounds and bitter tastes and low-pitched ones. Participants rated the toffee as being significantly sweeter when sucked on with the higher pitched soundtrack designed to complement sweet flavours and more bitter when consumed with the lower 'bitter' track.

In "Bittersweet", these correspondences are used to intensify and add ambiguity to a soundscape created from field recordings made in the Italian region of Irpinia, a rural district in which food and wine production embrace both tradition and technological innovation. The work cycles between the low drones of modern equipment in the region's wineries and the high pitched tinkling of the traditional

5 Klemens Knöferle and Charles Spence, "Crossmodal Correspondences Between Sounds and Tastes," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 19 no. 6 (2012), 992-1006

6 Anne-Sylvie Crisinel and others, "A Bittersweet Symphony: Systematically Modulating the Taste of Food by Changing the Sonic Properties of the Soundtrack Playing in the Background," *Food Quality and Preference* 24, no. 1 (2012), 201-204

bells worn by dairy cows that roam its mountains. The fluctuations between pitches change the perception of the chocolate's taste from bitter to sweet, shifting perspectives that reinforce difference while suggesting the pleasures of both approaches.

Despite experience involving complex interplay of the senses, this is not something reflected in the majority of Western art. The senses are separated out, with the visual given preference. Sound is typically considered to be of secondary importance and only starting to resonate in the gallery, while taste and smell are often scorned, despite their ability to connect with vivid and emotionally charged memories.

Recent developments in psychology and neuroscience are now proving what philosopher, Merleau-Ponty proposed seventy years ago in his *Phenomenology of Perception*: that the senses are not separate but inextricably intertwined. He suggested, "...my body is not a sum of juxtaposed organs, but a synergic system in which all the functions are taken up and tied together in the general action of being in the world, and insofar as it is the congealed figure of existence".⁷

Mishearings endeavours to utilise these synergies, combining sensory stimuli to produce strong and often subconscious sensory associations and heightened experiences. It builds on the earlier investigations of my site specific wine and sound work, *Oenosthesia*, whose three parts - made from recordings of the vineyards and wineries around the Southern Italian wine village of Tufo - were designed to enhance the positive attributes of three different local wines when it was presented at the FARM2012 Festival in Tufo itself.

The work, "Carbonic Oscillation" in *Mishearings* is an evolution of "Oenosthesia", an immersive chamber that embodies effervescence and in which sparkling wine forms the focus of a fusion of all the senses. An effervescing environment is created through a sound work created from recordings of fizzing wine reinforced by a bubbling light projection and the taste and tactile elements of the sparkling wine consumed within it. A work such as this aims to blur the boundaries between the senses and the art and its audience, breaking down the limiting Cartesian dualism

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes, (Abingdon: Routledge), 330

between body and mind.

“Our body has difficulty in knowing where one sense, place or part begins and where another sense, a second place or nearby patch ends,” declared Serres (2008) in his multisensory treatise, *The Five Senses*⁸. “The striped, mingled body is made up of the proximities between gradations. It moves from one sense to another, imperceptibly.”

In *Mishearings*, hearing mingles with smell, taste, sight and touch, intensifying perceptions and creating new meanings. What is heard is rarely identical to what is actually being played into the space, but is the product of complex connections that have the potential to create something more profound than that perceived by one sense on its own.

8 Michel Serres, *Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 228-229

Universal Vibration

“A new piece of music is a new reality.”
- Igor Stravinsky¹

It emits from a cluster of galaxies called Perseus, 250 million light-years away: a B flat, 57 octaves below middle C.²

This is the lowest sound ever detected - a million billion times deeper than the limits of human hearing - and carries an amount of energy comparable to that of exploding stars. The cause is an incomprehensible cosmological event at the edge of a black hole, from which enormous pressure waves are oscillating, five million years from peak to trough, and 30,000 light-years across.

There are countless more celestial objects that sound, including our own sun, which resonates due to its own turbulence. So too planets and their moons can ring out like bells or drums when hit by meteorites, with the tones created being determined by their own specific physical composition and dimensions. While it may be rewarding to imagine the possibility of musical interactions between these large heavenly bodies it is important to remember that sound cannot be transmitted in the vacuum of space where there is nothing to vibrate.

Without this knowledge the great mathematician Pythagoras conceived of the possibility of a ‘music of the spheres’ in around 590BC. His theory was that the universe resonated in eternal harmony; a great cosmic chord that created us and everything else. While this cannot be true of sound per se, there is an analogous

1 Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (New York: Ballentine, 1993)

2 Nasa, *Black Hole Sound Waves*, accessed September 18, 2015, http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2003/09sep_blackholesounds/

modern equivalent to this theory that lies way down at the level of quantum physics. String theory postulates that within every tiny particle is a vibrating string, resonating at a specific frequency that dictates its function and the way it interacts with other vibrating particles around it. In this sense it is possible that vibration may be the basis of the entire physical universe.

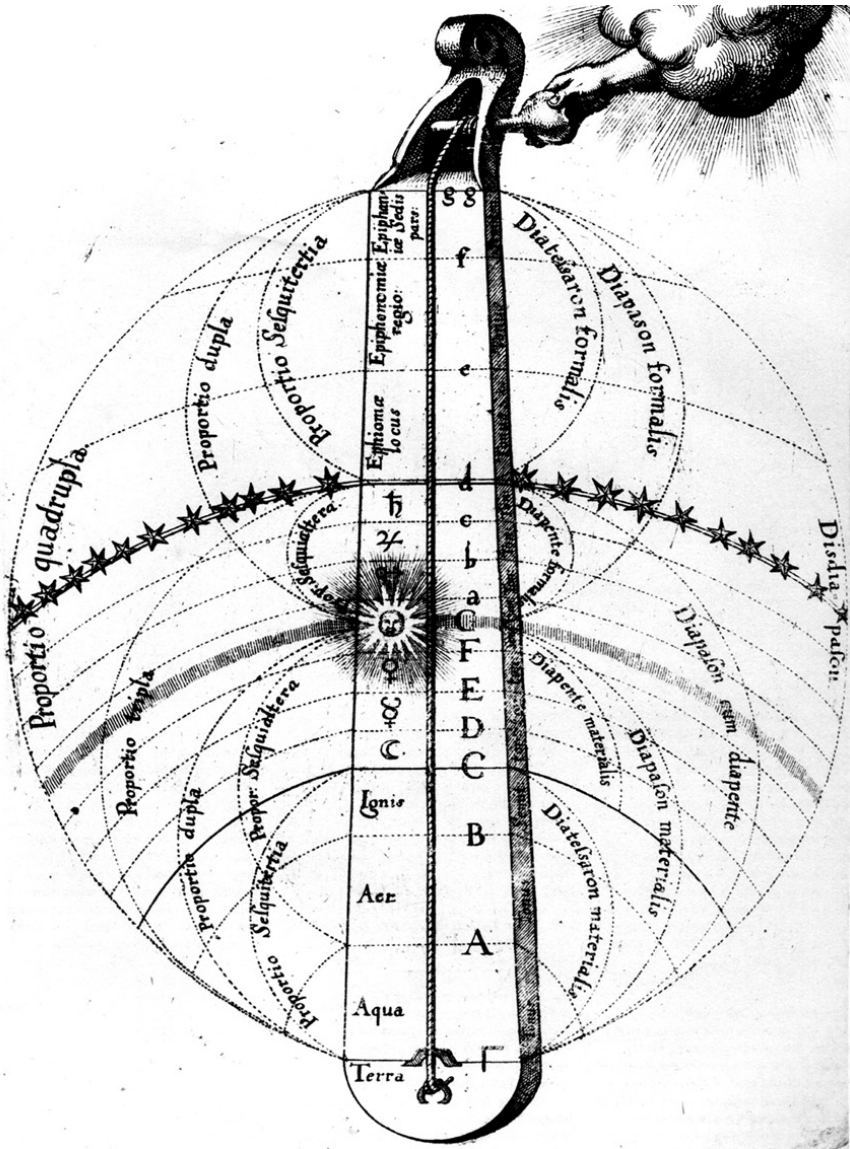
The phenomenon of cymatics allows us to see with the naked eye how sound moves through matter. As it travels through a given physical medium it creates distinct vibrational patterns that evolve towards greater complexity as frequency increases. Given the significance of vibration to matter on a basic level, I am interested in how sound interacts with the human organism in more subtle ways, resonant and musical as we are.

Our perceptual apparatus makes audible only a miniscule fraction of the total sound spectrum, which on earth proves clamorous enough. Even in the womb our forming selves were resonating to a complex variety of sounds: from our mother's voice, to the relentless pulse of her heartbeat, to her whining-gurgling guts and the muffled cacophony of the external world beyond. The bones of the human ear are fully formed at around four months after fertilisation at which point these sounds begin calling our minds to play and forging some of the very first neural pathways as we wake to our own existence.

It seems we have a certain inclination towards musicality even at this early stage of our development. Rhythm is one of the innate sensibilities common to us all, with the brain effortlessly regulating the steady pulse of such vital bodily functions as our beating heart, breathing lungs, and walking legs. In the uterus we are even capable of responding to auditory stimulation, moving in time with music and adjusting our heart rate to match. This shows that our young brains are naturally inclined to register pulse and synchronise with it, whether consciously or not. Even our neurons fire at the same rate as the fundamental frequency of the music we hear. Our brains tune themselves to the world around us.

At birth we are introduced to the sound of our own body through our very first automatic utterances. This is equally true of modern humans and our ancient ancestors; before we can command language we have to discover the body's resonant capacities just as one learns to play a new instrument. Controlling the voice requires extremely fine muscle movements in order to shape the mouth and lips, position the

UNIVERSAL VIBRATION



The Divine Monochord by Robert Fludd

tongue and control the passing of breath over our vocal chords. This calls for the development of advanced cognitive skills to focus our attention and synchronise the mind and body.

After discovering and exploring our innate ability to wield sound - and before the emergence of complex language as we understand it today - it seems likely that early humankind would have explored the possibilities of what we may now term musical expression. This would have been great exercise for the developing human mind. As modern neuroscience shows us, musical activity involves almost every region of the brain in order to process the constituent components of rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, and bring them back together into a perceptual whole.

Far more than plain, spoken language, music also taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward and emotion. This may hint at a primal impulse toward pure musical expression in order to communicate our inner strivings and interact with the world. Just as babies instinctively vocalise and discover the ability to communicate emotion through simple variations of tone, so too did our ancient ancestors.

Archaeologists have unearthed a number of flutes skillfully made from the bones of now-extinct animals, some dating back as far as 50,000 years ago to the time of the Stone Age, even before the advent of agriculture. Whether these were used to lure unsuspecting prey, to attract like minds, or simply to stimulate or relax one's self we can imagine the sense of pure Paleolithic magic created by the sound of these early instruments reverberating through caves. And still to this day music remains a ubiquitous human experience.

As a physical representation of the vibrations of mind, music is a cultural artifact that reveals volumes about our innermost nature and the world in which we live. The French economic theorist, Jacques Attali, believed music could indicate and anticipate new social relations; "what is called music today is all too often only a disguise for the monologue of power... music now seems hardly more than a somewhat clumsy excuse for the self-glorification of musicians and the growth of a new industrial sector."³ This still applies to a lot of popular music today, which,

3 Jacques Attali, "Noise and Politics", in *Audio Culture Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 8

being primarily profit driven tends to conform to the expectations of the masses by limiting anything overly challenging or progressive and thus maintaining the status quo.

‘Free sound’ or ‘sonic experimentation’ as we may call it, is the antithesis of this kind of rigidity. It represents a politics of liberation; there are no rules, no boundaries, not even any necessary requirements for technical proficiency or the need to appeal to anyone else. Rather, the aim is to exercise autonomy, to open the mind, explore, collaborate, experiment with infinite possibilities and express the latent potentialities of the mind – whether or not the result happens to fall within the established frame of music. Theoretically then, this art form is open and accessible to all. In practise, however, so many of us are conditioned to close our minds to radical freedoms and we are all the poorer for it.

The benefits of open experimentation and improvisation cannot be underestimated. For the practitioner, music is a means to focus the attention, release tension and actively create a more ideal state of mind, which can be shared or remain private. If one chooses to present work to peers or the wider public they can communicate and influence (if minds are open to it) while at the same time open themselves up to critique and thereby come to understand how their own ideas interact with others. As listeners we can open our ‘neural doors’ to new possibilities of experience offered by those around us and in doing so extend the limits of our own frames of reference.

Examples of musical and artistic censorship from oppressive regimes - in Soviet Russia, modern Mali and certain areas of the Middle East, for instance - are testament to the fact that artistic expression can pose a threat to existing order in society, simply by influencing the inner world of ordinary people. In Western democracies outright censorship is replaced by the subtler pressures of the political economy with artists being encouraged to create for mass consumption rather than to push in challenging new directions. Therefore it is the role of progressive artists and audiences in any society to resist this inclination so that the public freedom for creative thought, discourse and personal liberties will not stagnate.

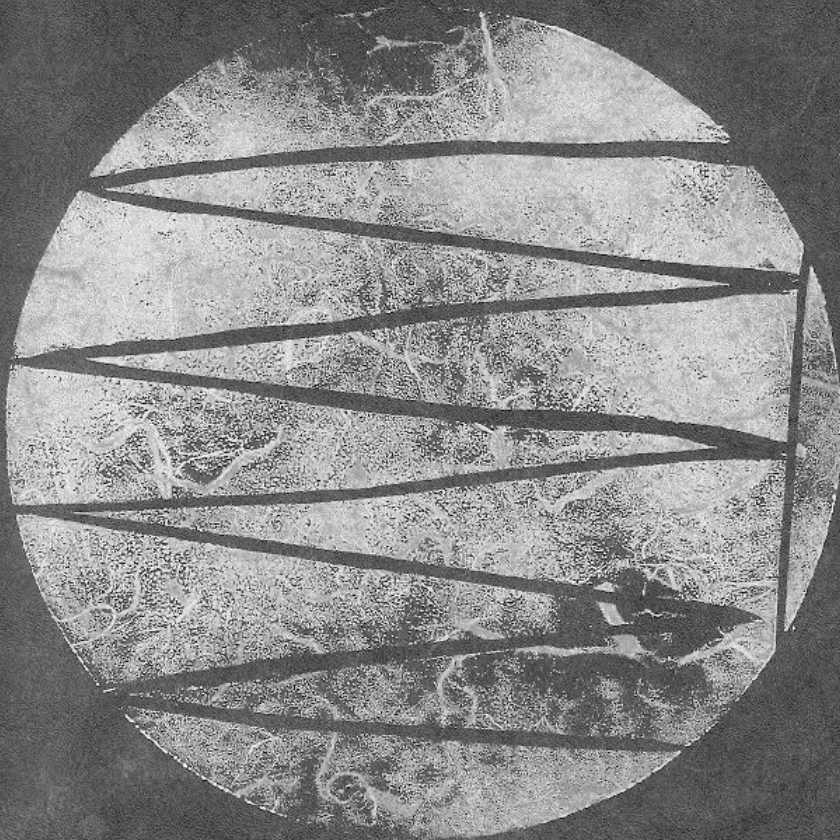
Whether we like it or not, we have been on an evolutionary trajectory towards greater complexity since the beginning of time. If we are to continue to adapt we must listen closely to the fast-mutating world around us and emit our own vibrations

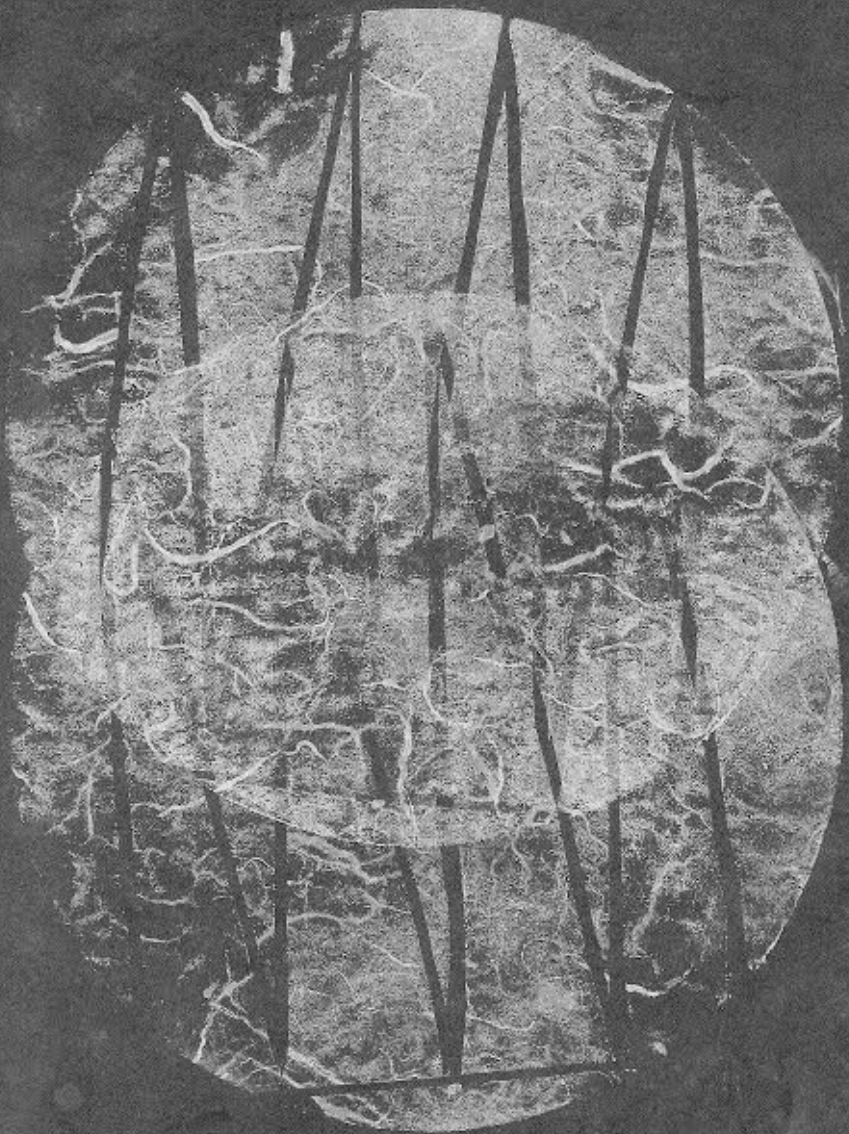
THOMAS LAMBERT / I.RYOKO

in response, then listen again. This process of experimentation and feedback, sonic or otherwise, is how we will learn and grow, pushing forward into a more ideal and all-inclusive future.

Jurgita Ratkevičiūtė

DISHARMONIA PREASTABILITIA





SHIFTING SOUNDSCAPES: ABSORPTION

Excerpt from Shifting
Soundscapes: A Musical
Framework For the Creation
of Spatial and Temporal
Atmospheres

“The eye appeals to the outer man, the ear the inner”

Richard Wagner¹

Sound is unavoidable even in silence.² Sound has the capacity to produce atmosphere and environment, experienced through emotional, visual and physical response. This research extract considers the effect of sound in space, by applying musical theory to spatial and temporal practice. Visceral or affective responses are altered through a designed soundscape and new perception of space and virtual environment is experienced through the design of sound. This passage adopts the methods of R. Murray Schafer outlined in his *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and The Tuning of the World*.³ He argues that soundscapes should be considered from a range of perspectives, informed by architectural and design concerns as well as

1 Mark Smith, *Hearing History*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2004), 9

2 John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press 1971)

3 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, (Rochester, Vermont:

ecological ethics and extra-musical considerations.

The arts organization Pure Concrete and I.Ryoko a Wellington based sonic artist, combined sound performance and spatial installation at an event hosted by the Pyramid Club, on the 30th of April 2015, in Wellington, New Zealand. The space in question was a small room with a cube in the center that the performer occupied. The soundscape was essentially the only form of sensory stimulation due to the cube concealing the performer. Consisting of 28 minutes of sound manipulation, the soundscape comprised of layered musical elements expressed through a sequential timeline of events. In this exploration unpacking these elements has been achieved through painting and written responses depicting the affective dimension of the soundscape in question. These responses were made in real-time, whilst listening to a recording of the performance.

The overall effect of the experience is one of absorption.

The room is small.

Breathing.

Pitted drones coming from this box.

In out, sweeping.

Static.

Moving past me.

Stopping but moving.

Steady horn.

Not horn, voice.

Beat not obvious just gentle. Clash, exiting the room.

But then returning from nowhere. Rising.

Up to down.

Where is the noise? Vibrating, in my fingers.

Halting ring.

Above me but where?

Warning, faster.

My eardrums; pulsing to the low tremor.

Where is this sound coming from?

SHIFTING SOUNDSCAPES: ABSORPTION

Pulsating echo.
Song, I am scanning the room for where the sounds are going.
I don't know.
It's all becoming stupendous. My fingers are tingly. Where am I?
Deep undulating.
Where do I look? As I close my eyes.
High long squealing: no, no, no.
Walking, along a track, in and out in and out.
From my heart the echo going in and out, in and out.
I'm losing touch. Where am I?
The sound is everywhere but coming from nowhere.
I grip onto my seat. The rain.
Water trickling, I grip to the rain.
I can get through.
So much noise. Focus on the tittering.
The wind. The wind moves the chimes.
Conversations. Muffled.
Woven between a low hum.
The rain, focus on the rain.
Indigenous singing.
Gentle twinkling.
I am shuffling in my seat.
I cannot control what I hear.
Where do I listen, where do I look?
Dripping.
I'm overwhelmed.
Low warbling is where I am sitting.
I'm rocking, being pushed everywhere.
Squashed in between.
There is no room for me here, louder; they are all coming towards me.
Breathe.
My muscles tighten.
Pushing my back into the chair.

DANI CUNNINGHAM

*Why are they still coming?
I stomp my feet in the ground and clench my toes.
Clenching my fingers one at a time, rubbing my palms.
It's slowing but not leaving.
Still lurching towards me.
I need to breathe. In, out, in, out.
I need to regulate; I am light headed.
Fighting each other.
Licking my lips.
In, out, in, out, in, out.
I want to stand and move from here.
Quick, quick, quick, slow, quick, quick, quick, slow.
I feel it leaving out the door but returning as if it had never left.
One meshing into the other.
Noises but that's all it is noises no sound.
All loud.
Clash.
All weaving into one.
Higher, lifted. The pressure is lifting.
I'm regulating.
Rain resonating, echoing, softer.
Transient.
My mouth filling with water again.
Jaw relaxing.
In out in out in out.
Stagnant rain; regulating me.
My knees flex.
Body softening.
Echo leaving room.
The rain.
Just static.
I open my eyes.*

“...openness to absorbing a self altering experience”.⁴

Absorption is the narrowing of sensory activity to one element resulting in the dissociation of self from physical world, to a state of changed perception and experience. In this state of absorption, the “available representational apparatus seems to be entirely dedicated to experiencing and modeling the attentional object”⁵, of which this virtual environment is produced.

White noise is identified, and the motion of breathing in and out. This leads the audience into the composition gently, utilizing a familiar sound sweeping through the space. Breathing in and out is mentioned consistently throughout as this beginning sets the ‘spatial tone’ the listener wishes to maintain. The white noise represented in (see figure 1) is grey, signifying a flow of time passed and an introduction of louder sound events. A framing of the room is felt through vibration. The enclosed space responds by reflecting multiple echoes, bouncing off the close surfaces of wall, ceiling and floor. Through the amplification of sound, the source of the sonic events soon becomes unknown. The listener is perplexed to the source even though it is obvious as it is always coming from the cube. This is clear sign already, of the transportation from the normative reality to the construction of an alternative experience of self-

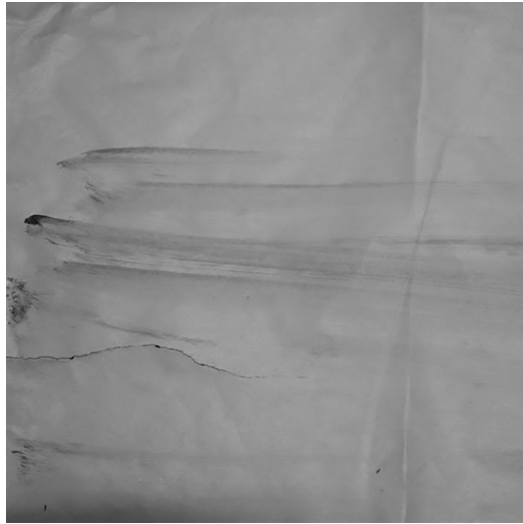


Figure 1. Cunningham, D. 2015. Extract from : *Pure Concrete/ I.ROYOKO*. Acrylic on Paper.

4 Lisa Butler. “Normative Disassociation,” *Psychiatrics Clinic of North America* 29 no. 1 (2014), 47

5 Ibid, 49

in-world through sound.

Keynotes plateau out of control becoming overpowering and stupendous joining figure at equal volume to become one noise as seen in figure 2. Background joins foreground and they intertwine, reverb wavering them to meeting. Through this section ideals of time are lost in the chaos that the sound incurs. This section that includes figure 2 contains a compilation of back and forth, layer upon layer rather than unfolding events. There appears to be no pattern just carnage. Breathing becomes difficult to monitor.

A loss of consciousness as to where the listener is situated is experienced. Grounding is obtained to wake from this state. The regulating rhythm of rain attracts

the listener to obtain some sense of familiarity. There is an overwhelming sense of bewilderment as the listener questions their surroundings. A need to grasp onto any sound that identifies place, such as indigenous singing or outside wind.

Absorption has been achieved. The listener physically feels the squish of high and low frequencies coming together as they fill the air. Fighting each other for space between listener and room. Through the reverberate qualities applied to the composition there is a true sense of forward movement in space. Sounds loom towards the listener, always being located at



Figure 2. Cunningham, D. 2015. Extract from : *Pure Concrete/IROYOKO*. Acrylic on Paper.

SHIFTING SOUNDSCAPES: ABSORPTION

a distance. Although they never reach the listener's location there is still a strong impression of anticipation.

A clash followed by reverb breaks the chaotic soundscape. This sonic event is identifiable as the break in paint to the far right of figure 3, taking the piece from light to dark. There is a relief of pressure signifying a shift in tone as it carries up. The soft frequency of rain is introduced, the effect amplified by reverb becoming figure, but a more comfortable figure. There is a clear foreground over background and the keynote becomes white noise just like breathing, a reminder to breathe and a safe passage back to reality.

DANI CUNNINGHAM



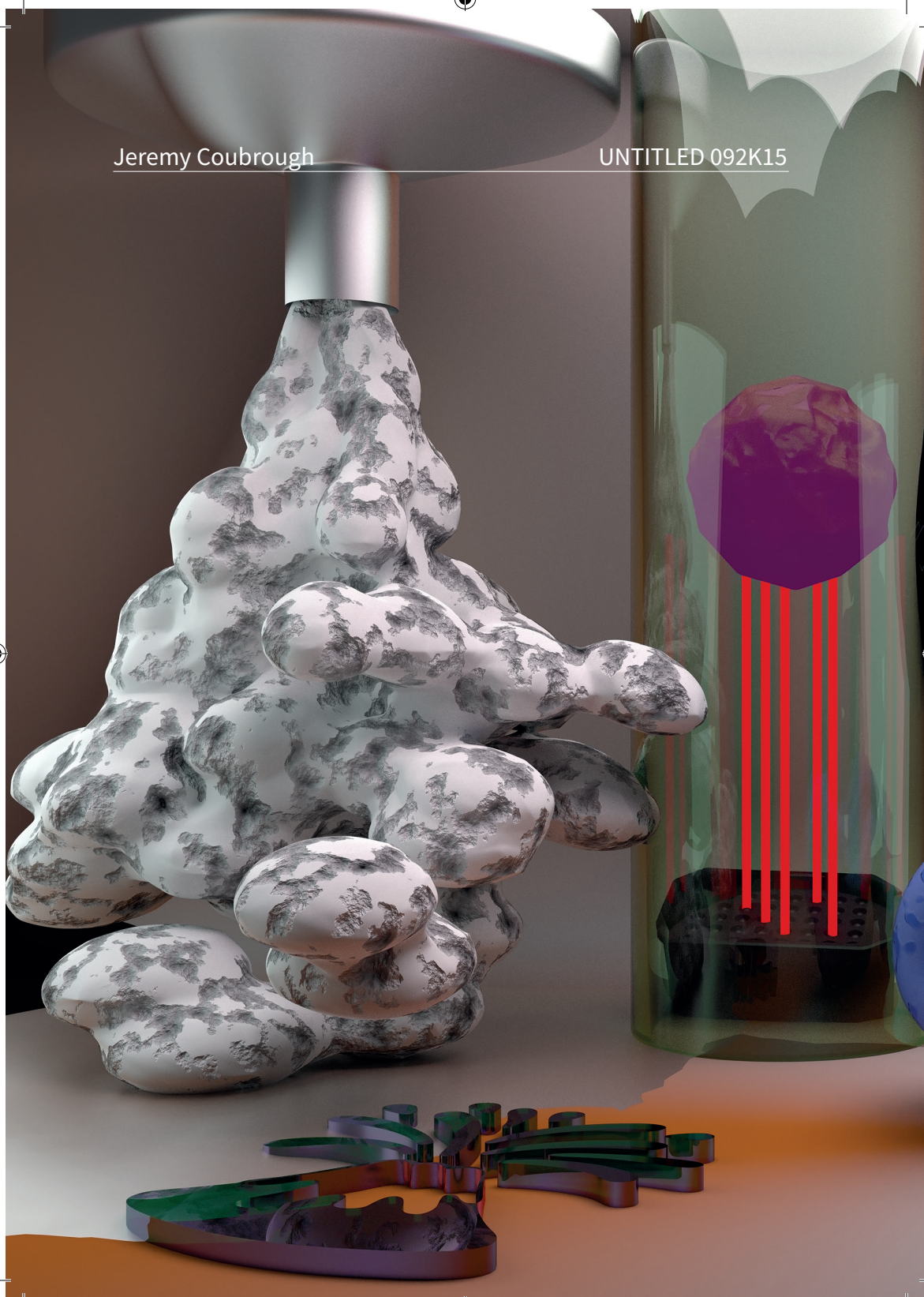
Figure 3. Cunningham, D. 2015. *Pure Concrete/ I.ROYOKO*. Acrylic on Paper.

SHIFTING SOUNDSCAPES: ABSORPTION

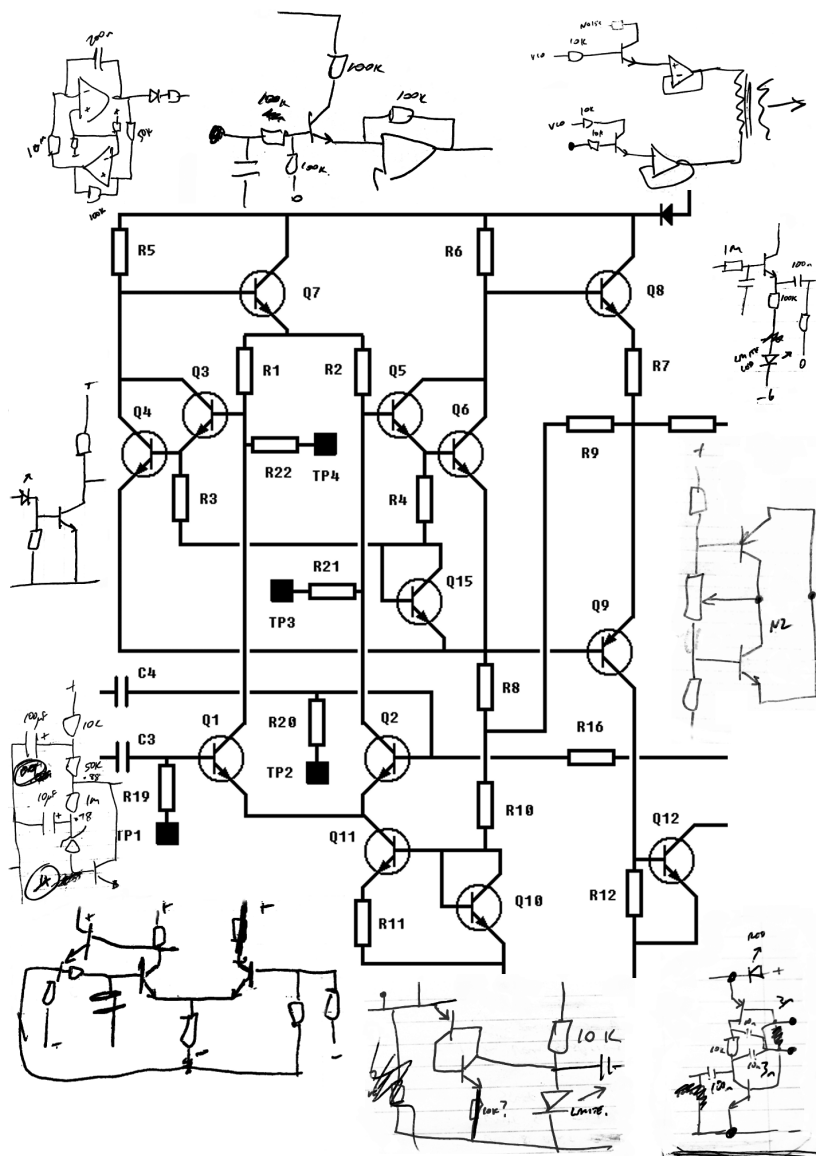


Jeremy Coubrough

UNTITLED 092K15







DE-CONTAPTION



SOUL BEATS, HEART BREAKS



Rory Dalley a.k.a. IRD, The Auricle, Christchurch, 7.06.2014



BRAIN TWISTER Paul Sutherland of Les Baxters, Tommy Changs, Lyttelton, 20.06.2014

MARINE AUBERT

DEEP THROAT



Campbell Kneale, a.k.a. Our Love Will Destroy The World, Lines of Flight festival, Chicks Hotel, Port Chalmers, 21.03.2015

DEEP THROAT

DAB HAND



Pat Kraus, The Auricle, Christchurch, 21.06.2014

MARINE AUBERT



100% PURE
ORGANIC METAL

Alex Donnithorne, a.k.a.
Regressor, The Auricle,
Christchurch, 26.07.2014

MR NOISY

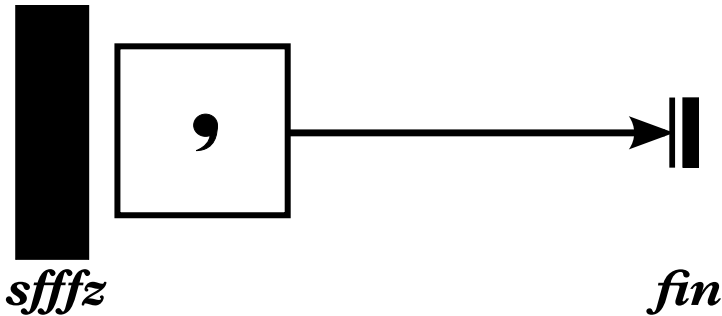
Bruce Russell, The Auricle,
Christchurch, 25.10.2014



WHIPLASH

Jeremy Symonds of
Coal, The Auricle,
Christchurch, 27.06.2014

till...
(for solo human)
kerian varaine 2013)))



till...

performance within a space

architectural
impulse response
emotional

the first cry of a newborn human
breathe
repeat
repeat
...

performances within a performance

Performance notes:

The symbols used are from contemporary music notation practice.
The initial black rectangle is a symbol for a cluster chord, or in this case due to the lack of a musical clef, it refers to a collection of closely spaced frequencies.
The letters *sfz* indicate the dynamic/amplitude, very loud and abrupt.
The comma indicates when to take a breath.
Any notation held within a square is to be repeated until the end of the arrow proceeding it.
Fin. is the End.

kerian varaine

EAR CLEANING

An un translation

Te frist (t)ask of te akustisk designer ist o learn now two (g)listen.

Ear cleaning is l'expression oui use hier.

Many exercises can be de vised to aide cleanse l'ears

but te most importante at frist are those which teach la whakarongo

to achtung silence.

This is especially importante in a bizzy, nerveux society.

Won exercise we often give our stew dents is to declare a moratorium

on speech for a full dag.

Stop making sownds for a while and eavesdrop ont hose made by (m)others.

C'est a challenging and even frightening exerise and not everyun can accomplish it,

but those who do s(peak) of it après-wards

as a spécial event in there vies.

On (br)other occasions we prep are for (g)listening experiences avec elaborate relaxation

ou concentration exerise.

It mey take un heure of preparation in order to be able to (g)listen

clearaudibly to te neckst.

Sometimes it is useful to s(eek) out won sownd avec particular caractéristiques.

For instance, try to find a sownd with a rising starting putch,

or une that consists of a series of petite nonperiodic bursts;

try to find won that makes a dull th(u)d followed by a high twitter;

or juan that combines a büzz and a squeek.

Such sownds will not be fownd in every environment, of course,

but te g(listener) will be forced to inspect every sownd carefully in te search.

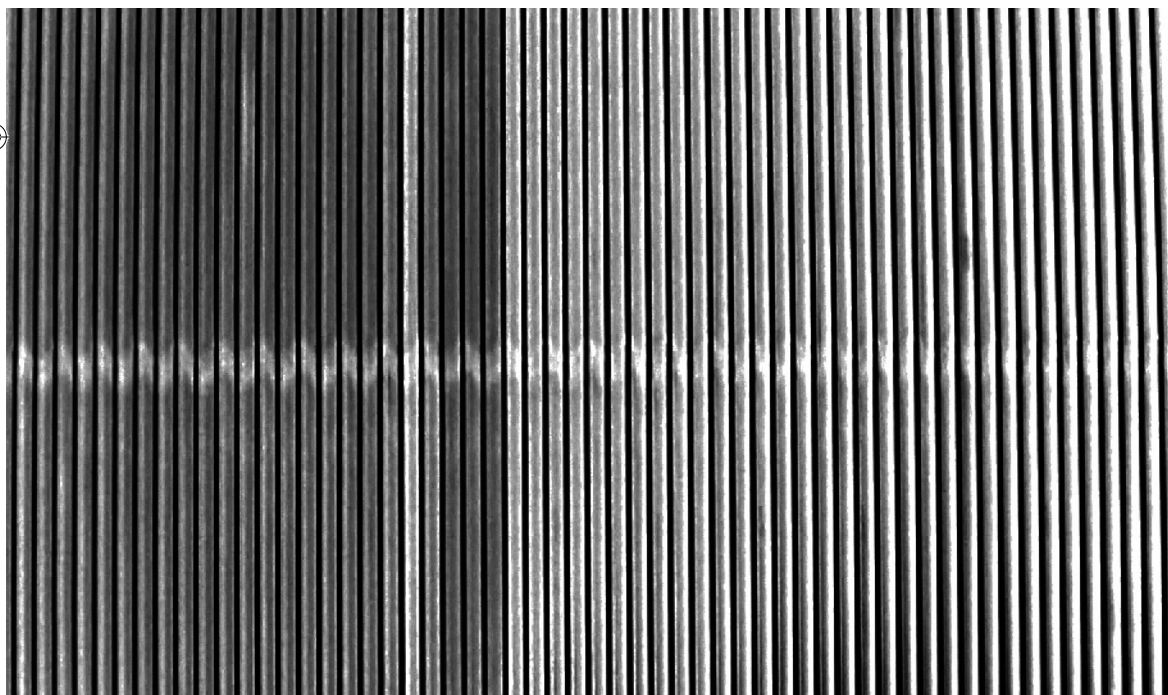
Their are numeroneous (y)other exerise like this in mye music edukation book lets.

The above text is based upon an excerpt of the same name from R. Murray Schafer's landmark book, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977). This version of the text utilises vernacular, plurilingual and phonetic versions of Schafer's words. The message of his book remains intact, but is written here in a kind of double-speak. It is an attempt to appeal simultaneously to the sonic, phonetic and semantic, playing these elements off against the each other in the process of producing sound. It aims to be performative, and as such, to perform a kind of sonic translation; an un-translation.

David Khan

MAKING A PLACE FOR SOUNDING OUT THE VISUAL

John Chrisstoffels' The
International Step at the Auricle



The International Step by John Chrisstoffels

Apologia

Early in 2014, John asked me if I would like to contribute to the pamphlet intended to accompany his audiovisual installation *The International Step*, presented at the Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery, New Regent St., Christchurch, 4-21 February 2014. As one of the first shows presented at the Auricle, John's proposal had raised interesting questions for the curatorial committee, of which I was part. A key consideration for us was to establish the Auricle as a place for the sonic arts in an institutional landscape dominated by visual culture. Nearly two years later, this aim seems largely realised – but not, I would suggest, through any thorough-going exclusion of the visual. On the contrary, in many monthly exhibitions the visual often has been present – either working in concert with the aural (as in the filmed component of *The International Step*, the wall-mounted documentation supporting Graham Dunning's *For Posterity* show of October 2014, or the sheer visual appeal of the hand-crafted synthesisers featured in Nicolas Woollaston's *Alive to the Timbre of your Touch* exhibition of May 2015) or as the frame within which the aural is presented (e.g., exhibition flyers, printed didactics, the Auricle website, etc). The same goes for most Auricle live events: audiences being there as much to look as to listen – this fascination with looking often encouraged by performances emphasising theatre (Reuben Derrick's *Party of Special Things To Do* improv evenings come to mind) or employing visual aids (e.g., projected backdrops, film, etc).

The question that informed the short piece I wrote for John's exhibition (presented, with a few small modifications below), and which seems even more relevant after two years of Auricle operations is: what is the place of the aural in a culture where the visual reigns supreme as the privileged mode for the revelation of reality and truth? Perhaps part of the answer lies in a more productive re-stating of the question so that one asks not 'what is' but rather 'what can be the place of the aural within the hegemony of the visual?' The subtle substitution of 'what can be' for 'what is' redefines the question in a way that enlivens the possibility that the aural might be more than the secondary, margin, ancillary to the visual primary, centre, essence. Indeed, this marginality even might prove to be the very measure of the aural's efficacy – its subversive potential to interrogate, undermine, *sound out* the hegemony of the visual. Of course, to frame the question this way is to relinquish any idea that the Auricle might be (or even should be) a place for the sonic arts purely

and simply. Even if the establishment of such a place were not, practically speaking, an impossibility, in a culture dominated by the visual, it's important to appreciate that the Auricle was, in any event, never conceived as such. As signalled by the door and window signage that advertises it as 'The Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery' and 'The Auricle Wine and Sound Bar', and as implicit in Auricle co-founder Jo Burzynska's 'Oenosthesia' sound and wine performances, and the wine list she curates for each monthly exhibition, the Auricle has come into being premised on synaesthetic conversations between hearing and tasting, at least. Perhaps we should own up and concede that the visual has always been part of this multi-sensory encounter that is the Auricle. Then again, it's in the nature of ideals to be impossible and, perhaps, it's, precisely, in dreaming this impossibility that is the Auricle Sonic Arts Gallery that we've been able to excite conversations between the senses and the sites they would seek to privilege.

Argument

Let's begin with an awkward question. What is John Chrisstoffels' audiovisual installation *The International Step* doing at the Auricle sonic arts gallery? Perhaps that's stating things too baldly. Perhaps that question presupposes a division of creative labour that need not, indeed, cannot obtain. Let's put the question another way. How does *The International Step* function in the context of the Auricle space? Better still (given Chrisstoffels' interest in Marc Augé's concept of 'non-places'), *what is the place of the work?* Relevant, here, is Augé's definition of non-places as spaces that 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity'.¹ In keeping with Augé's formula, then, to ask 'what is the place of *The International Step*?' is precisely *not* to ask: 'where does it belong?' The only place an artwork *belongs* is where it sustains preconceived notions of what art is or should be – that is to say, where it satisfies a demand for identification on behalf of the audience. By virtue of such identifications, we say: 'this work represents us, our concerns, our place'; we identify with the *work* in order to find or *place ourselves*. To be more precise, we *re-*

1 Marc Augé, *Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), originally published as *Non-Lieux, Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Éditions du Seuil, 1992), 77-78.

find, *re-place* ourselves insofar as, always already, identification, as enshrined in the philosophical formula $A = A$, involves repetition, to saying that *the same is again*. This isn't, necessarily, a criticism: identification is how we make sense of the world. It *is* this making sense. But in this re-finding and re-placing of ourselves, necessarily, we lose something in and of the work. Re-placing ourselves, we *displace* the work, which is then no-place. And at this point, we encounter a paradox: the only place the art *belongs*, the only place the art is what we expect it to be, is the very place where it isn't, and where it can't be.

In order to avoid this conundrum, let's try a different tack. Let's suppose that asking 'what is the place of *The International Step*?' is *not* to ask 'where does it belong?' – a question that, in the very asking, presumes there already exists a place that calls the work into being, that defines its meaning; a place in which, hand-in-glove, the work fits and is fitting (that is to say, the place we call *ours*). Let's suggest that the question *what is the place of the work?* is to be read: *what does it mean by virtue of its placing?* and, equally, *what kind of place does it make?* In other words, let's read the question in a way that understands the relationship between art and its context to be reciprocal so that, even as the context defines the art, so too does art define the context. The work *finds a place* through being exhibited *and a place is made* through the exhibiting of the work.² *The International Step* finds a place *at* the Auricle and makes a place *of* the Auricle – which is to say that this particular instantiation of Chrisstoffels' *audiovisual* installation responds to the status of the Auricle as a place for the *sonic* arts *and*, reciprocally, the status of the Auricle as a place for the *sonic* arts is reaffirmed or realised through the exhibiting of this (audio)*visual* work.

This is not to imply that what *The International Step means* (i.e., what kinds of places it may find) and what *purpose* the Auricle is intended to fulfil (i.e., what kinds of places may be made of it) are questions that admit any final determination. We posit this idea for the sake of having a conversation. In keeping with that aim, let's propose that one way to think the 'responsiveness' of Chrisstoffels' installation and the 'realisation' of the Auricle is to read 'the work in context' and 'the context

2 Perhaps it's worth reflecting on the corollary of this idea. Namely, that the work that is not exhibited is no place, indeterminate, waiting-to-be. Similarly, the art space that does not exhibit (or that is between exhibitions) is a non-place, an indeterminate place, a place-in-waiting.

in the work' in terms of a questioning and, possibly, a reversing of the privileged status of the visual over the aural. More simply, let's say that the symbiosis of *The International Step* and the Auricle inheres in 'making a place for sounding out the visual'. Here, the expression 'sounding out' carries a dual resonance. In the first place, it implies that attending to the aural provides a way to interrogate certain prejudices and preconceptions attending the experience of the visual. Secondly, however, the term 'sounding out' implies subversion and supplementation – a sounding that that plumbs depths hitherto unseen and, perhaps, unseeable; a sounding that supersedes, overrides, *drowns out* seeing. A sounding, in other words, that offers to make the aural (and not the visual) the measure of reality and truth.

In the presentation of *The International Step* at the Auricle, this sounding out of the visual is enacted spatially and temporally. It is the former that is most immediately obvious. Ascending the stairs leading up to the exhibition space, one *hears* Chrisstoffels' installation before *seeing* it. After all, sound travels. Walls that block light transmit sound, so sound overflows space where light is trapped. And, indeed, in the space of the installation proper, Chrisstoffels has taken steps to ensure there isn't much light to trap. Windows are shaded. The visual component of *The International Step* (escalator steps filmed in such close proximity that the regular patterning of metallic grooves trembles on the edge of pure abstraction) is projected dimly on a single wall and, periodically, faded. Then there is nothing to prevent a complete immersion in the sonic component of the work (two mono recordings of escalators and background hubbub at the Westfield Mall, subsequently processed for quadraphonic presentation) – even if, by virtue of its loudness, and its four-corner, speaker placement, the aural dimension of Chrisstoffels' installation does not, already, claim the entire territory of the exhibition space.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the manner by which *The International Step* sounds out the visual temporally resides *in temporising* – in relinquishing the near instantaneous gratification of light in favour of becoming attuned to the very much slower speed of sound. Relevant, here, is Chrisstoffels' interest in Henri Bergson's notion of 'Pure duration... the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.' From such a perspective, past and present moments are experienced as an 'organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to

speak, into one another.³ If we grant credence to Bergson's notion of 'pure duration' then the possibility of being as immanent, organic totality necessarily demands suspending all the objectifying processes of identification by which, as noted earlier, we make sense of the world and find our place within it. Indeed, I would suggest that it is, precisely, in seeking to realise this Bergsonian ideal that Chrisstoffels' installation makes a place for sounding out the visual.

At first sight, this does not *appear* to be the case. Before it can be effective in sounding out the visual, the aural component of *The International Step* must contend with a basic happenstance that speaks volumes about the privileged status of the visual. Namely, that (sighted) visitors to the Auricle, however familiar they may be with the gallery's stated purpose, do not seem to be able to enter the Auricle exhibition space without, almost immediately, succumbing to the urge to *look*. To look for a focus, and finding one, to be absorbed in looking.⁴ *At first sight*, then, the visual component of Chrisstoffels' installation seems purposefully designed to feed this hunger for visual captivation – the desire to occupy a state in which time is not stopped so much as looped back on itself; the desire to exchange the experience of a forward-flowing, ever-changing world for one in which there is a perpetual reiteration of the same. In short, the desire to repeat and thereby sustain identification. The visual register of *The International Step* is defined by such repetitions: in the regular patterning of grooves on the escalator steps – a positive-negative array of closely packed, vertical lines; in the regular passage of a horizontal band, proceeding across the projected image, from the bottom to the top – like a raster scan; in the periodic fading of the film projection – a subliminal heartbeat powering swifter rhythms in the work.

- 3 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will, An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans E.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Company Ltd, 1912, originally published as *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: 1889), 100. Bergson goes on to ask, rhetorically,

Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected?

- 4 Auricle staff observe that, upon entering the exhibition space, visitors often stop in confusion – unsure of where to look to see the art. Whilst, no doubt, 'revealing', this amusing anecdote gathers its own quotient of irony insofar as it is, itself, a sighting made in a space for listening.

And yet, in the same way a mantra, endlessly repeated, becomes a series of meaningless sounds, so too does the perpetually arrested gaze eventually cease to see. Thus, the hypnotically repetitive, visual component of *The International Step* negates the self that looks in fascination, setting the stage, perhaps, for the reception of information on a longer wavelength or (as Bergson might have it) in a purer time. From this perspective, would it be unreasonable to propose that, through the gradual accumulation of aural data, there may swell a plangent resonance, in the wake of which the luminous surface of Chrisstoffels' installation disappears into its sonorous body? So that, in this low rate, narrow bandwidth, sounding out of the visual, we come to hear, with unprecedented immediacy, the muted, mechanical clattering of escalators. The ambient roar of speech and movement in a busy shopping mall. Doors squeaking prominently. Kettledrum knocks and clatters resounding in a medley of timbres. The booming dissonance of a shopping trolley trundling over the textured, metallic surface of an escalator tread. Suddenly emerging from the aural background, a tissue of words playing backwards. And now, courtesy of some quadraphonic trickery, a sequence of sonic incidents that, literally, seem to peel away from themselves, smoothly transiting, across the exhibition space, from one stereo field to another.

The more the aural dimension of *The International Step* commands our attention, the more it offers to supplant the visual as the measure of truth and reality. Intrinsic to this aspect of sounding out the visual is the fact that the sonic aspect of Chrisstoffels' work is not obviously periodic. Of course, it is certainly the case that we hear many sounds more than once: the squeaking door, the thunderous shopping trolley, the burst of backwards voices. We can appreciate that the audible component of *The International Step* (however cut and spliced, reversed in sections, duplicated and post-processed) is some kind of a loop. Nevertheless, the period of this repetition (a little under an hour) exceeds the interval over which our cognizance can assert dominion; thus, its components repeat arrhythmically, aperiodically, unpredictably. In comparison with its trance-inducing, visual aspect, the aural continuum of Chrisstoffels' installation persists only in rudely awakening us to the intractable problem of its assimilation within a regular pattern of repetitions and identifications. And now, perhaps, we have arrived at an answer to the questions that opened this conversation – namely, how does *The International Step* function in the context of

DAVID KHAN

the Auricle space? and *what is the place of the work?* It's really very simple: it finds a place to ask this question, and it makes a place in which this question can be asked.

MOMENTUM: ONLINE PUBLISHING AND CREATIVE COMMONS

Collaborative Possibilities of Working with Sound in a Digital Age

The ability to record and document compositions, improvisations, and performances is a great gift for the modern sound artist. Recording audio and video from rehearsals and performances allows us to step back from our work and view it at arms length - something that is otherwise difficult for performance and time-based artists.

With time comes perspective and it is interesting to observe changes in opinions of a particular performance or composition at different times after the initial event, and to have recorded evidence to be able to contrast works from different stages of one's career.

Add to this the options of affordable home and field recording, plus instant publication via all the various online platforms, and it has never been easier to make, share, and collaborate on sound art projects.

In the time that I have been making and documenting composed and improvised sonic works, I have been able to independently create, record, collaborate on, and share my compositions, recordings, and performances with friends and audience members around the world. "The digital stage can reach audiences who would never

enter your gallery or theatre – including those on the other side of the world,”¹ writes ArtsHub Australia editor Deborah Stone. The ease of accessibility that social media and streaming platforms allow makes reaching out to show or share work simple and instantaneous.

My largest creative project to date, *Momentum*² (2012-13), is an enormous collection (400+ tracks and 5+ hours) of recorded sonic arts works, all shared online on the day they were created and released under a Creative Commons³ license, alongside information about sound sources and creative processes used in each composition. I labeled this ‘open resource’ art, in that I was readily sharing not only the results of my work but information about the process, also, with an online audience.

From my own experience as an artist and audience member I know that people are interested in how creative work is made. I endeavoured to share as much of what I was doing and how I was doing it as possible whilst creating *Momentum*, and an engaged and interested audience grew around this process. I posted about each step of *Momentum* on a blog and sound hosting site with the aim of sharing the process of creating a sound work with an audience *as* it was happening – not only after the fact, in the form of a complete work, CD etc. This kind of end result was always in mind, however “the moment of publication (the moment, that is, of engaging with the public) was not deferred to some future moment when the artwork was deemed to be complete.”⁴ My blog site also gave people the option to subscribe to receive an email with each new blog post. This resulted in audience members ‘following’ my progress each day throughout the project, and coming to a greater understanding of the kinds of processes involved in creating my music than from merely hearing finished tracks.

Similarly, books such as Joe Fig’s *Inside the Painter’s Studio*⁵ give valuable insight

1 Deborah Stone, “Five Ways to Make the Most of the Digital Space,” http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/artshub-conference/grants-and-funding/deborah-stone/five-ways-to-make-the-most-of-the-digital-space-248698?utm_source=ArtsHub+Australia&utm_campaign=0c7085be23-UA-828966-1&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2a8ea75e81-0c7085be23-304103629.

2 Nat Grant, “Momentum,” <http://momentumproject.blogspot.com>.

3 “Creative Commons - Attribution-Noncommercial-Sharealike 4.0 International - Cc by-Nc-Sa 4.0,” <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

4 Lucas Ihlein, “Framing Everyday Experience: Blogging as Art” (Deakin University, 2009), 58.

5 Joe Fig, *Inside the Painter’s Studio* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

into how, where, and why certain artists work the way they do, whether by choice or circumstance. Blogs like Noah Scalin's *Make Something 365*⁶ and Keith Stanley's *365 Days of Ikebana*⁷ also provide a snapshot of the evolution of an artist, sharing work and process at regular intervals over the course of months and years. For someone who often works alone this kind of insight into other artists' creative processes can be really inspiring.

My *Momentum* Project had a large collaborative element, with over 60 sound artists from around the world contributing recorded material for me to incorporate into the compositions. The resulting works have also contributed to many new mixes, remixes, and derivative works. At the conclusion of the project I was still receiving recorded contributions, which led to me setting up a collective group on SoundCloud⁸ for sharing and repurposing audio recordings, so that the spirit of the project could continue, but with everyone having access to all the source material as well as re-mixed tracks (within the confines of a Creative Commons license).

The online nature of *Momentum* and the ability to send media files easily via email and dropbox made collaborating straightforward and instantaneous. When someone sent me a sound I would usually incorporate it into the work straight away, meaning I could also send them the link to a completed track with their sound included within a day or so. This made for several repeat contributors to the project, as it was a fairly quick and also fun way to contribute, collaborate, and hear a finished product without waiting months for an album to be released. Contributions came from ongoing or previous musical collaborators, from friends with no musical knowledge or experience, from followers on social media sites, from people who had learnt of the project by word of mouth, and from those who had found the project online or in other ways.

In addition to this there were inadvertent collaborations along the way between various contributors, as on occasion I would receive contributions to the project several days in a row. Sometimes these contributors knew each other, other times not, and at times I was able to introduce artists to each other in this way. Conducting

6 Noah Scalin, "Make Something 365 & Get Unstuck," <http://makesomething365.blogspot.com.au/>.

7 Keith Stanley, 2011, <http://keithstanley.com/?p=312>.

8 "Momentum: Collective's Stream on Soundcloud," <https://soundcloud.com/groups/momentum-collective>.

Momentum also gave me the confidence to approach other artists and ask for a contribution. Given the small request, that there were no limits on the type or length sounds to be contributed (it could be as little as a few seconds), I felt able to ask, and most people obliged. New connections were made and new collaborations were borne out of this; creating work collaboratively has been a springboard for many new and shared ideas and projects.

Momentum sought to explore the ways in which artists engage with their audiences and communities via the networked world utilising non-traditional and community oriented approaches. Social networking and media platforms such as Facebook, SoundCloud, Bandcamp, and Twitter allow instantaneous interaction and data sharing. There are an abundance of different sites and apps that harness the collective knowledge of others in the fields of art, science, and technology to develop open source and open resource creative tools – tools that have become the “Swiss Army Knives”⁹ of contemporary artists and professionals.

For me, creating work in an accessible and transparent way was about building a community around the creative work as it was being created. By the time *Momentum* was ‘finished’ there was an audience ready to receive the final product. They had been along for the journey and perhaps even contributed in some way to the project. “Participation is the key, and that means that not only the end result is shared, but the whole process,”¹⁰ observes Maja Kuzmanovic in the open source handbook *FLOSS + Art*, on getting the full benefits of an open source, or at least partly open source, situation.

This can involve some level of trust and letting go of ego, as well as blurring of authorship if others are allowed to contribute to a project. In the case of *Momentum* I felt completely able to do this, as final creative control did rest with me, and I experienced the benefits of what Charles Green call’s the ‘third hand’ – where the outcomes of my work, with the contributions of others, turned into something that none of us would have necessarily done or thought to do on our own.¹¹ Open

9 “Open Culture: Participatory Practices in Art & Science,” Subtle Technologies, <http://subtletechnologies.com>

10 Aymeric Mansoux and Marloes de Valk, eds., *Floss + Art* (France: GOTO10, 2008), 27.

11 Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), x.

source black metal band Nahvalr has a crowd sourcing process for collecting musical material that is similar to *Momentum*. The band invite recorded contributions via their website, resulting in unseen collaborations between dozens of fans, audience members, and fellow artists on each release. They describe their process as “several people, operating anonymously around the globe, have their work hacked, chopped, distorted, fused and recorded over to create something altogether new.”¹²

All the *Momentum* tracks remain freely available to stream, share, and repurpose but with the restrictions indicated by an Attribution-NonCommercial-Share-Alike Creative Commons license.¹³ This means that anyone can download my work, and use it in derivative works, but not for commercial purposes. This applied also to any external contributions, and I always made sure that contributors were aware of the nature and restrictions of the Creative Commons license. In addition to this, I advertised that I would like to be informed of any external use of the music from the project.

Creative Commons, in their own words, is a “nonprofit organization that enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools.”¹⁴ The freely accessibly and easy to use licenses “provide a simple, standardized way to give the public permission to share and use your creative work — on conditions of your choice.”¹⁵

I choose the Attribution-NonCommercial-Share-Alike license for my recorded compositions, because I would like to know how and where my work is being used, utilised, or repurposed. I choose the non-commercial option because I feel that if someone is going to make a profit from the use of my work, they should really be paying me as well. People can still contact you and ask to use your work for free, but ideally they do so ask instead of just stealing it. There’s no real deterrent here apart from one of conscience, but Creative Commons at least encourages users to share and appropriate digital content with proper attribution.

Licenses like Creative Commons make works of art “open to transformation,

12 Enemies List Home Recordings, “Nahvalr - “Nahvalr” (Digital),” <http://enemies-list-home-recordings.myshopify.com/products/nahvalr-nahvalr-digital>.

13 “Creative Commons - Attribution-Noncommercial-Sharelike 4.0 International - Cc by-Nc-Sa 4.0”.

14 “About - Creative Commons,” <http://creativecommons.org/about>.

15 Ibid.

modification or reappropriation ... When governed by these new licenses, works become part of an ongoing process, they are ‘in progress’, part of a multi-layered process, an idea, originated by others.”¹⁶ Creating *Momentum* involved taking the audience along for the journey, and inviting feedback and engagement with my creative process. A deliberate transparency of process combined with free and easy access to the work itself promoted regular conversation, feedback and collaboration with my audience throughout the entire process. Although the formal part of the work itself is now finished for me, my hope is that it will continue to evolve in the public domain.

The open resource format of *Momentum* is similar to how the ABC’s Pool site used to operate. Pool was an open, online community of artists and musicians who would upload work to the site that they were happy to share and to have re-purposed by other Pool members. Subsequent works would be posted back to the site in an ongoing series of collaborations, sharing, and reworking of artistic material. Pool operated for five years, with more than 8,000 artists contributing more than 25,000 creative works.¹⁷

By opening up my project to external contributions I was able to learn new technical skills that I could then apply elsewhere in my work, stretching me and taking the project in new directions. The existing community of artists that Pool provided to springboard ideas and work off was really valuable in the development of my work at that time.

There are potential benefits to artists who are prepared to share process and let go of ego. Mansoux and de Valk, in their preface to *Floss + Art*, give the example of free and open source coding communities, where “artists frequently show each other bits of code, inspire each other, and most of all, teach each other.”¹⁸

The rise in recent years of crowdsourcing for everything from company start-ups to art projects and grassroots political campaigns has occurred alongside other developments in social networking and participatory culture. I was able to harness the power of the engaged audience I developed throughout 2012-13 to pre-sell a box set of 4 CDs from the *366* project. I easily raised \$1000 (\$200 more than my target)

16 Mansoux and de Valk, *Floss + Art*, 30 .

17 collective, “Pool,” <http://pool.abc.net.au>.

18 Mansoux and de Valk, *Floss + Art*, 11.

in a little over a week on the Indiegogo site.¹⁹ A lot of people who purchased the CDs were active members of my audience throughout the previous 2 years, and they were as excited as I was to see the online project make a foray into a physical product.

I have applied crowdsourcing strategies not only to financial support but ideas and contributions to my creative works. The next big project I am currently working on, titled *Precious*, involved collecting hundreds of old or unwanted keys to be used as found objects in a new recorded composition and installation work.

The reality of working with sound in the way I do in this digital age is that it has probably never been easier for people to steal my creative work. At the same time, the ease with which I can share and collaborate and on new projects can make the risks and pitfalls worthwhile. For this reason, I aim to be generous with my collaborators and with my audience, and not precious about sharing details of my creative process.

Being transparent about the ways in which I make music has really helped me to connect with my audience and with fellow creators. Additionally the online nature of all the *Momentum* collaborations allowed me to work with others on making music without having to physically get together in situations that geography may prevent or where personalities may get in the way of the work. This resulted in a process that was international and very much focused on the art itself.

This is, however, just one of the ways in which I work. Not all my music is given away for free, nor created in the public eye. For those projects that are, however, there are myriad benefits to doing so. I was able to harness the collective knowledge and creativity of my audience to feed back into the work and further develop my own practice. Bringing together my audience and other artists opened streams of dialogue leading to new collaborations and an engaged and participatory culture around my projects.

Creating *Momentum* was an experiment, in terms of collaboration, transparency of process, and exploring new and different modes of authorship. I didn't know who (if anyone) would contribute, what kinds of musical material I would be given to work with, what kind of feedback and following, if any, would develop as a result of my putting myself and the project out into the world and being open to

19 Nat Grant, "Help Nat Make Momentum Box Sets," <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/help-nat-make-momentum-box-sets/x/2795452>.

contributions, feedback, and suggestions.

Involving my audience in the process of creating *Momentum* was a big drive to continue to create and share my work. Showing where I was up to every day, getting feedback and encouragement to keep going, perhaps even inspiring others to do the same, and receiving so many contributions that turned my audience into collaborators and took the project in new and exciting directions – these were all vital elements in the success and, I believe, completion of an enormous creative undertaking. Working in this way gave my audience deeper insight into my art and my process, and provided me with inspiration to continue to work in this way in the future.

Related links:

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collective. “Pool.” <http://pool.abc.net.au>.

“Creative Commons - Attribution-Noncommercial-Sharealike 4.0 International - Cc by-Nc-Sa 4.0.” <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

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12 Lock grooves (LP, S/Sided, for inoperable record player)

A1.

static (entity), 86-87, 252n10

A2.

(Galloway 2014) A parallelism is a condition of twoness in which the two is ultimately overcome by the one. The two of the parallelism is really only a quasi-two. So obsessed with itself, so locked together, so bound by the parallel nature of its own coupling, the parallelism is monomaniacal about its own moment of being. The spiral grooves on a vinyl record are the perfect parallelism: never will they diverge or converge, the two sides of the groove lock arms, jostling the needle back and forth at the frequencies required for audible sound. All because the two sides of the groove, while two, are not distinct. They are merely parallel. The two sides of the groove are Laruellian ‘clones’ of each other. As clones they constitute a duality, a twoness, yet they are nevertheless bound together by a relationship of identity, a sameness.

A3.

The rar file “Sonic_Binding:_Prophylactic_ [Non] Music_and_Static_Preemption.”

cannot be opened because it is foreclosed to access.

A4.

(passive indecision) & ('noise-in-One') redirect here.

A5.

The 'prevent' means that which prevents the arrival of sonic events and is therefore essentially prophylactic. But it also means that which comes before the sonic event – which is to say structurally and synchronically prior. The prevent, in this sense, superimposes a logic onto the evental architecture itself, pointing backward toward a moment prior to the occurrence of sonic events themselves.

A6.

performed-without-performance, xxiii, xxvi-xxvii, xxxxxiii, 6, 8, 18, 20, 27, 46, 61, 63, 111, 124-25, 127, 160, 169, 172, 179, 193, 195-96, 233n28, 237n20

A7.

The rar file "Sonic_Binding:_Prophylactic_ [Non-]Music_and_Static_Preemption." cannot be opened because it is foreclosed to access.

A8.

static (entity), 86-87, 252n10

A9.

(passive indecision) & ('noise-in-One') redirect here.

A10.

(Galloway 2014) A parallelism is a condition of twoness in which the two is ultimately overcome by the one. The two of the parallelism is really only a quasi-two. So obsessed with itself, so locked together, so bound by the parallel nature of its own coupling, the parallelism is monomaniacal about its own moment of being. The spiral grooves on a vinyl record are the perfect

12 LOCK GROOVES (LP, S/SIDED, FOR INOPERABLE RECORD PLAYER)

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A11.

‘Taciturntablism’:
To repeat (under suspension)

A12.

The scene of possibility is activated by the engine of inoperability – understood not as inertia or sloth but a “generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted (like individual action or collective action understood as the sum of individual actions).” The inoperable is a refusal to work and a wager of praxis: a ‘musical’-thought or action that will never be realized.



THE TYRANNY OF THE PRESET

Fragments from a Manifesto for
the End User

“By any media necessary”¹

The Critical Arts Ensemble, *Digital Resistance*

*“The digital realm is an avant-garde to the extent that it is driven
by perpetual innovation and perpetual destruction”²*

Sean Cubitt, interviewed by Simon Mills, *Framed*

Technologies have a certain telos to them; *a defined mode of use*. Bourgeois-functionalism. This mode of use is not necessarily inherent or even strictly technological as such, but emergent and relational; a techno-social normative construct that defines how said technology is used and towards what ends. This is *the tyranny of the preset*.

The preset in this sense is both semiotic and techno-ontological; it is the convergence of software and hardware, of code and material substrate. It emerges from the intersection of the material relations of production (and consumption), with the social and ideological superstructure, as mediation and materiality co-produce each other.

1 Critical Arts Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media*, (New York: Autonomedia, 2001), 8

2 Sean Cubitt, interviewed by Simon Mills, *Framed*, <http://www.ada.net.nz/library/framed-sean-cubitt/>

Creative Misuse & Technological Abuse

Our core dis/organizing tactic here, is creative misuse.³ The re-appropriation of what is given. It is not just an aesthetic, technical, and artistic methodology but a politics of the everyday, a means of navigating and negotiating the increasingly dystopic terrain of silicone, steel, concrete and fiber-optics that we find ourselves entangled in.

In a society in which cycles of never ending production and consumption, bootstrapped by financial speculation, accelerate us towards catastrophe. And in which the subject or user, is increasingly alienated, fragmented, and disempowered, we must use all the tools that are at our disposal. As Deleuze said: “there is no need to fear or hope, the task is to look for new weapons.”⁴

In our age of capitalist realism we are interpolated as consumers, as end-users. Collectively we sift through the waste-dump of our consumer cult, where built-in obsolescence is the order of the day, and commodities become redundant upon point of purchase. On the crest of the wave of the futurity, as we speculate into the void, the promise of the “new” never arrives, it is always too late, obsolete as soon as it is made, straight from the production line to the dust-bin of history, only to be swept up again into other cycles of production and consumption: recycling and “retro” culture. Until every last bit of surplus value has been extracted. Our over-developed world is characterized not so much by knowledge, toward which the enlightenment once aspired, but rather by an excess of information; spam, waste, kibble. Your inbox overflows. Entropy abounds.

As subjects situated within this whirlwind of exchange, we have no choice but to negotiate the ever-shifting terrain. Whilst there is no pure exterior, there is also no determination in the last instance, and the ground is always shifting. Whilst commodities (informational or material) may have a pre-defined mode of use, and hegemonically ascribed sign-value, they can be reappropriated and reoriented; turned towards different ends as defined by the user.

3 This line of critical praxis has its roots in notions such as Henri Lefebvre's *The Critique of Everyday Life*, the *Détournement of the Situationist's* and Michel De Certeau's *Politics of Everyday Life*. In the domain of the explicitly technological, practices such as circuit (and data)bending, and hacking should also be seen as of central relevance here, as should the method of tactical media of the Critical Arts Ensemble.

4 Gilles Deleuze, *Postscript on Societies of Control*, (October 59, 1992), 4

This is not to rarify the ideology of peer-production that is central to the “flexible accumulation” so enshrined by our techno-overlords but rather a call to arms; towards experimentation with what is given. Whilst the apparatus of capture is wide under late era capitalism, it is not as flexible as its ideologues would proclaim. It still has its points of vulnerability and weakness, and may be subject to subversion and sabotage.

There is always an excess that alludes representation and thus appropriation via the circuits of value production of the techno-capitalist machine. There is always noise in the system

Fragments from a Manifesto for the End-User;

in bullet point form for those with digitally degraded attention spans

- Any technological form can re-appropriated, and employed creatively and experimentally; whether it is the home made, or the mass produced, the out-moded, or the “new”. It is a matter of relationship to and with a technology (or other commodity form), and its incorporation into creative praxis, rather than anything essential within the “object” per se.
- Accordingly notions of essence and authenticity are hindrances to an open-ended experimental methodology. There is nothing more or less authentic to a given technological form; the analog, or the digital etc. Different technologies allow different sets of possibilities and constraints. They suggest different aesthetics and compositional strategies and allow for different modes of thinking, perceiving, playing and creating; different modes of becoming.
- It is important to consider media technology on both a level of content and medium, as they are co-constitutive. In this sense technologies are as much social, semiotic and informational as they are strictly material and vice versa. Content is encoded or inscribed within a medium, which is in turn embedded within social, cultural, political and economic contexts. These various strata in turn dynamically feedback and co-constitute each other.
- In this sense technologies as such, are complex assemblages that are the emergent product a multiplicity of intersecting processes. The digital is as

much composed of minerals, and electrical energy, as much as it is data, or affective subjective and social materials.

- The electro-magnetic strata is about process and relationship, assemblages, and networks; patches, programs, and generative processes. Connecting one machine to another, and re-routing signal paths. It is not so much about the creation of signals or codes, but rather circulation and modulation within a system or network.
- The digital should be seen as an extension of the analog but at the same time a departure from it, in that whilst it is built on top of it, it is also formally representative of a fundamentally different order of abstraction. We have departed *from* the continuous to the discontinuous.
- The network may be one of the defining ideological metaphors of our age. Its use politically and economically serves to obscure power-relations and modes of exploitation. “The sharing economy” is not utopian or communitarian, it is merely a further development in the abstraction of the processes of labour and the accumulation of capital. In the same sense the very technological apparatus to which the metaphor refers may well offer potential means by which to subvert and combat the power relations that it endeavors to reinforce.
- The relationship between signal and noise is not essential or ontological; rather it is a matter of perspective; of semiotics and hermeneutics. The line between the two relational categories is porous and liminal. This is an aesthetic and psychological site that should be explored.
- When seeking to engage with technology on a level of critical praxis, one should be careful not to naively reproduce the hegemonic logic that governs its use. After all “aesthetics is politics as décor.”⁵ And we must scratch below the surface of the veneer. It should also be noted that “simple reversal is always the most direct and least effective”⁶ means of subversion. In such a way, whilst

5 Brian Holmes, *Drifting Through the Grid: Psychogeography and Imperial Infrastructure* (paper presented at RIXC Media Architecture, Riga, Latvia, 2003)

6 Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, “A Users Guide to Détournment,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb. (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets 2006), 17

THE TYRANNY OF THE PRESET

attempting to critique, the “simple reversal” arguably unconsciously reproduces and reinforces the hegemonic ideology that it wishes to subvert.



INSIDE BACK COVER
DO NOT PRINT



*Water trickling, I grip to the rain.
I can get through.
So much noise. Focus on the tittering.
The wind. The wind moves the chimes.
Conversations. Muffled.
Woven between a low hum.
The rain, focus on the rain.
Indigenous singing.
Gentle twinkling.
I am shuffling in my seat.
I cannot control what I hear.
Where do I listen, where do I look?
Dripping.
I'm overwhelmed.*

