

Eavesdropping:
A Reader

Edited by James Parker
and Joel Stern



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Foreword
Norie Neumark

Listening In, Overhearing ...

I had not thought about the aesthetic, political, and critical potentials of eavesdropping until I joined the reading group that James Parker and Joel Stern convened leading up to their 2018 *Eavesdropping* exhibition in Melbourne. What struck me through our readings, and what this book conveys, is that eavesdropping is not some abstract, historical concern for sound or legal theory. Rather, it offers a rich and surprising figure and practice for sound art—one that is well tuned to these troubling political times. As Parker and Stern elaborate in their introductory essay, it is

possible to imagine it as a mode of art, activism, and critique. When the world's most powerful corporations and governments eavesdrop on us with ease, what would it mean to listen back? What if we were to occupy the position of the eavesdropper, own and take responsibility for it? What might be learned? Politically, what might be gained? Artistically, what might be possible?

In the readings Parker and Stern provided for our group—readings that also resonate in this publication—we encountered eavesdropping not just as *listening in* and *listening back* but also as startling moments of overhearing. Overhearing ... overhearing, hearing over the limits that one can bear, hearing too much. My sense of this became more than intellectual as the opening

of the *Eavesdropping* exhibition approached. As more of the exhibition's artists became involved, our readings intensified. In the essays and presentations that the artists shared, there were painful presentiments of what I would experience in the exhibition itself.

It culminated for me when Susan Schuppli invited us to read her essay about US drones over Pakistan and how their sound brought daily, constant fear to residents below.¹ I recoiled with them, after them, at the sound of anticipation. Schuppli wrote that the technical term for repetitive drone surveillance over one area is 'loitering'. Loitering, a term so quotidian and potent at the same time—and, like 'eavesdropping', a term that entangles legalities, movements, listening, and politics. Forensically listening to the sound of drones, Schuppli alerted her readers that drones do not, cannot differentiate a military target from a community of civilians. Making clearly audible the truth of drones' so-called 'collateral damage', the reading left me shattered and enraged. I had heard too much ... *overheard* ... *overheard*.

Entangling Legal and Sonic Concerns

Disturbed by this overhearing, this eavesdropping, I came to the exhibition at the Ian Potter Museum of Art feeling an urgent need for the artists and activists, and activist artists, to critically burrow into these entangled legal and sonic concerns and to express the emotions crushing me—emotions stirred not just by our readings but also by all that I was obsessively following in the news in these cold, mean political times. From the illegal and cruel treatment of refugees and Indigenous people

in Australia to the atrocities towards Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territories ... and more ... there were ample pressing sonic/legal concerns to attend to.

One of the things I particularly valued in the exhibition, and something that chimes in this book, is Parker and Stern's generosity in their attention to such concerns—and their evident commitment to the integrity of the artists' aesthetic and political concerns. They carefully refrain from the all-too-common tendency for curators, editors, and art institutions to talk about *giving* artists voice, *giving* them agency. As an artist myself and someone who writes theoretically about voice and sound art, I shudder at the suggestion that agency or voice is something to be *given* rather than something to be *listened* to. And so I welcome the ethical and political listening through which Parker and Stern respond to the agency that artists have and that inhabits their work.

Parker and Stern propose eavesdropping as a way into the entanglement of law and sound, listening and ethics, through imaginative and speculative politics and aesthetics. There is much that is unexpected in *Eavesdropping*, much that is thought-provoking, even much that is disturbing. Collectively, and in conversation with each other, the essays and artists' works here offer a remarkable opportunity to eavesdrop on ground-breaking sonic and legal thinking and practices. I hope you will appreciate, as I have, this compelling, timely engagement with the potentials of eavesdropping.

1. Susan Schuppli, 'Uneasy Listening', in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 381–92.

Eavesdropping
James Parker and Joel Stern

The earliest-known references to eavesdropping are in court records. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first attested use of the noun ‘eavesdropper’ is from 1487, in the rolls of a local Sessions Court in the Borough of Nottingham. But, in 1425, jurors in Harrow, Middlesex, were already reporting one John Rexheth for being a ‘common evesdroppere’, ‘listening at night and snooping into the secrets of his neighbors’.¹ (Fig. 1) And in 1390, John Merygo, a chaplain in Norwich, was arrested for being ‘a common night-rover’, ‘wont to listen by night under his neighbour’s eaves’.² Eavesdropping was one of the most commonly reported offences in England’s market towns and rural villages from the end of the fourteenth century to the start of the sixteenth.³ But the roots of the term are much older. And contemporary usage has long since exceeded its medieval origins.

Today, ‘eavesdropping’ refers to everything from inadvertent and trivial acts of overhearing to police wiretapping to global surveillance structures and the massive corporate data capture on which they depend. Much of this is perfectly legal. Despite eavesdropping’s origins as a language of censure and prohibition, its use in contemporary legal texts is often more ambivalent. Thus, s632 of the California Penal Code prohibits the intentional use of any ‘electronic amplifying or recording device to eavesdrop upon or record’ so-called ‘confidential communications’, only for s633 to immediately provide a blanket exception for law enforcement. Eavesdropping isn’t the problem here—only eavesdropping on certain communications

(confidential⁴), in certain ways (electronic), by certain people (private citizens).

Colloquially, eavesdropping retains its implication of transgression, and so its critical edge. When we wield the term against major corporations like Apple or Amazon—‘Alexa has been eavesdropping on you this whole time’⁵—the point isn’t that this kind of activity is prohibited, but that it should be.⁶ Likewise, when we worry about neighbours or colleagues eavesdropping on us, when we close a door or don headphones in order not to overhear, it’s because we know some things aren’t meant for prying ears. All listening situations presume and imply a threshold of audibility. Eavesdropping is often the name given to its breach.

What is eavesdropping then? Above all, a language for holding listening to matters of ethics, law, and politics. Through its long history and diverse use, this much has never wavered. Eavesdropping has always been used to describe and contest the norms of listening. Indeed, one way of reading its history is as an index of the ever-shifting anxieties produced by and projected onto the excessive and unruly ear.⁷ This history is a rich resource for thinking through the ethical, legal, and political dimensions of listening today, but it is not necessarily binding. Such is the nature of precedent, as any good common lawyer will tell you. It’s a way of attending to the past in and for the present, sometimes to ‘follow’, sometimes to ‘distinguish’.⁸

This book looks to eavesdropping for its potential as a critical and aesthetic practice. In doing so, in important ways, it draws on and departs from the history of the term. In particular,

it attempts to bracket some of eavesdropping's more 'negative' connotations—especially its association with secrecy and surveillance—so that it is possible to imagine it as a mode of art, activism, and critique. When the world's most powerful corporations and governments eavesdrop on us with ease, what would it mean to listen back? What if we were to occupy the position of the eavesdropper, own and take responsibility for it? What might be learned? Politically, what might be gained? Artistically, what might be possible?

These questions matter, since eavesdropping is unavoidable, a fact of life. We all overhear. Listening is excessive. We cannot help but hear too much, more than we mean to. Listening, in this sense, is neither simply active nor passive. It is both an act of will and of surrender. And the reverse is also true. Because of sound's essential leakiness, especially in a world of ubiquitous networked microphones, we are also desperately vulnerable to listening. As Brandon LaBelle explains, 'what I say is never only for whom I face within a zone of proximity'.⁹ To speak or to make sound is already to expose oneself, to chance being overheard. Eavesdropping is both the condition and the risk of sociality. The question is not whether to eavesdrop, but how.

This book pursues an expanded definition of eavesdropping, one that critiques contemporary mechanisms for listening in but also advances subversive practices of listening back. It is concerned with malicious, aberrant, and repressive listenings, but also with the responsibilities of the earwitness. Specifically, it documents works first gathered for exhibition at

the Ian Potter Museum of Art, in Melbourne, in 2018, then presented at City Gallery Wellington, in 2019. But we envisage this book as more than just a supplement to these exhibitions. We hope it will also be read independently, as a collection of original research and writing that speaks and listens for itself.

Eavesdropping is, at once, our subject and our methodology. Many of the works are about eavesdropping, many are examples of it; often both. They direct attention towards specific technologies (answering machines, radio telescopes, smart speakers, networked intelligence) and politico-legal systems (surveillance, capitalism, settler colonialism, detention). Some address eavesdropping in a register that is personal and intimate, others are more distant or forensic. Scale ranges from the microscopic to the cosmic, from the split-second to the interminable. What all the artists have in common, however, is a concern not just for sound or listening themselves,¹⁰ but for the normative worlds in which sound and listening are necessarily situated and intervene. The book is not just an argument for and about eavesdropping, therefore, but also about sound and listening and their relationships with art and law.

Eavesdropping involves two conceptual moves; first, from sound to listening; second, from listening to its ethics, laws, and politics. Of course, all sonic art is also about listening, and listening always raises ethical, legal, and political questions. But it is a matter of emphasis. Work that foregrounds such questions has been underrepresented curatorially.¹¹ *Eavesdropping* begins from the position, as Douglas Kahn puts

it, that ‘sound leads elsewhere’,¹² and that this ‘elsewhere’ is often what’s most interesting, important, and generative. Seth Kim-Cohen suggests something similar when he writes that sound always and necessarily ‘speaks to selves beyond itself’,¹³ when he insists on drawing out the ‘non-cochlear’ dimensions both of sonic art and of listening generally,¹⁴ and when he advocates ‘shallow listening’ as a kind of omnivorous, expansive, or excessive listening practice directed towards the proliferating social contexts opened up by a work.¹⁵ It is not a matter of dismissing sound’s materiality or listening’s embodiment. The point is simply that these dimensions of sonic experience are always also social, that bodies have histories, and that artists working with and against these dimensions of listening warrant considerable attention.

The necessary corollary is that works can and should be understood as contributions to what legal scholar Robert Cover called the ‘nomos’—the ‘normative universe’.¹⁶

We constantly create and maintain a world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void. The student of law may come to identify the normative world with the professional paraphernalia of social control. The rules and principles of justice, the formal institutions of the law, and the conventions of a social order are, indeed, important to that world; they are, however, but a small

part of the normative universe that ought to claim our attention. No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for each decalogue a scripture.¹⁷

... for every executive order an exhibition. And, it is worth pointing out that, in the original Greek 'nomos' meant not only law or norm but also, crucially, song or melody.

Our purpose is not to exaggerate the similarities between art and law or to downplay the different ways they are related to and authorise violence.¹⁸ Even in a Western tradition that has done its best to separate them, the threshold between law and art remains porous. The gallery is also a law school. Both are institutions in which senses of justice are fashioned and faculties of judgment shaped. As far as eavesdropping is concerned, each of the works embodies, speaks to, and intervenes in 'sonic imaginations'.¹⁹ Some of these interventions may be taken up by legal and political actors or institutions, consciously or otherwise,²⁰ but they all engage us in a process of self- and world-making. 'To inhabit a nomos', Cover writes, 'is to know how to live in it.'²¹ How to live and listen. While this is always true, many of the works in *Eavesdropping* are overt about it. They appropriate or adopt legal techniques, categories, and idioms; they frame their concerns in relation to law's violence or redemptive power; they deliberately put their audience in a position of ethical or political discomfort. These works

understand and foreground their normative potential. They bring ethics, law, and politics into the gallery to show that they were already there. In terms of sonic art, eavesdropping is one way of naming the necessity of this relation.

The devil is in the details. How precisely do the works engage with or critique the ethics, laws, and politics of listening and being listened to? From what position or perspective? According to what politics of their own? In addressing these questions, we want to use eavesdropping's history to structure our thoughts, excavating the term's forgotten resonances, drawing out its potential as a critical and aesthetic practice. The next three sections, therefore, comprise a deliberately playful, speculative, and sometimes anachronistic engagement between the works and eavesdropping's diverse pasts. This, perhaps, is another mode of 'listening back', not just to power now, but also to and through history. In a nod to Walter Benjamin's 'modular' historiography, our purpose is not to approach eavesdropping's rich and varied pasts 'contextually', but precisely to wrench them from that context, to put them into 'constellation' with—and make them speak to questions of—listening in the present.²²

Eaves | Threshold

Long before the term had anything to do with listening, an 'eave' was simply a threshold or boundary. The term has its earliest recorded use in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a collection of annals written during the reign of Alfred the Great at the end of the ninth century. 'Eaves'—in Old English, 'efes'—is used there to describe the

edge or margin of a wood.²³ The term is used in an identical way in the Anglo-Saxon Charters of the same period, but with a legal inflection. The Charters were legal instruments issued in the names of kings. They were sometimes writs or wills, but were typically ‘diplomas’ made for the purpose of granting land that therefore required precise descriptions, known as ‘boundary clauses’. Thus, in the Swinford Charter of 951–9, King Eadred is said to have granted one of his ministers land beginning at ‘Swine ford’, leading from there to ‘Pecg’s ford’, on to ‘robbers’ ford’ ... ‘from Ymma’s to Cuda’s valley ... along (the) dyke to the brook to the stone digging; from the stone-digging by the eaves to Welshmen’s croft’, and so on, until the entire estate had been mapped.²⁴ In another charter, from 963, the leased land ran ‘from deep pit to Oldberrow, always beside the eaves (æfescē) of the wood to rushy nook’ and ‘from frost hollow always beside the eaves (efæscē) to the smooth meadow’.²⁵

(Fig. 2) John Mitchell Kemble observed that, in this period, the term was ‘not confined to the eaves of a house, as with us’, though the term ‘eavsdrip’ had already begun to be used in that context. The term also applies, he wrote, ‘to the overhanging edge of a wood, the rim or brink’.²⁶ Here is the etymological origin of a feature of eavesdropping that remains to this day. Whatever its purpose—its ethical, legal, or political valence—eavesdropping always involves the transgression of a border, the crossing of a threshold of listenership or audibility.

In Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s *Saydnaya* (*The Missing 19db*) and Manus Recording Project Collective’s *how are you today*, the borders in question are literal: the thick walls of Saydnaya

TEODECESLÆGE, ULLENHALL
S 1307

Teodeceslæge



Fig. 2 Mapping of the medieval boundary clause from Teodecesleage, Ullenhall, from Della Hooke, *Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 79.

prison; the barbed-wire and curfewed compounds of the detention and 'refugee transit' centres on Manus Island; the national borders of Syria, Australia, and Papua New Guinea; along with all the laws, conventions, treaties, and international politicking that produce and sustain them. The political intervention of both works comes in part from the artists' transgression of these borders, and their ability to make audible and bear earwitness to a location and a system of violence that has been deliberately muted. Both works facilitate 'listening at a distance',²⁷ a counter-listening across physical and national boundaries, to and against forms of state brutality that also amount to major human-rights violations. If silencing is a technique of power here, listening suggests itself as a mode of resistance.

In Joel Spring's *Hearing, Loss*, the borders at stake are different. We hear the artist, a Wiradjuri man, talking with his mother—prominent researcher, educator, activist, and Indigenous-health worker Juanita Sherwood—about her work treating otitis media, an inflammatory disease of the middle ear capable of causing profound hearing loss. It affects Aboriginal children at higher rates than anyone else in the world—both Spring and Sherwood have suffered from it. Their conversation is relaxed and familiar in a way that immediately conjures the intimacy of family and expressly doesn't speak to or invoke another listener. As a result, it is hard not to feel intrusive. We experience one kind of threshold then, as we hear about others. The staggeringly high rate of the disease among Aboriginal children, Sherwood explains, is largely a consequence of underdiagnosis by educators and health

workers, as symptomatic behaviour that would normally prompt medical intervention is routinely dismissed as disobedience. 'The most common term for these kids was that they were naughty and that they were misbehaving, and they were not listening. Of course, they weren't listening because they could not hear.' The threshold in play here is what Jennifer Stoeber terms the 'sonic colour line', 'the hierarchical division sounded between "whiteness" and "blackness"',²⁸ the 'sonification of race and the racialisation of listening'.²⁹ In the case of *Hearing, Loss*, the problem is not just the mishearings of white ears, but the fact that these mishearings inscribe themselves onto the eardrums of black bodies, often permanently. Only by breaching a further threshold, by investigating otoscopically and broaching the politics of the ear canal itself, can this auditory effect of colonialism be made visible and its story be told and heard.

The coloniality of listening is a major theme in Samson Young's *Muted Chorus* too. The artist has a chamber choir perform Baroque choral works by Antonio Lotti and J.S. Bach 'without projecting the musical notes'. Everything else, except the musical notes—the phrasing, intensity, concentration, and formality—must be retained. Mute is not silent. It involves the conscious suppression of dominant voices as a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalised or to make apparent certain assumptions about hearing and sounding. In any act of muting, something is amplified. In this instance, the result is a collective whisper. There is already a politics at work here, since to whisper is to voice what cannot yet be said 'out loud', to imagine

Eavesdropping

and produce a listenership outside or beneath a certain threshold of audibility. In *Muted Chorus*, that threshold is the Western canon itself, precisely those great ‘masters’ of the European classical tradition reduced by Young to a whisper. ‘The institutions of music continue to neglect and negate Asian composers’, he writes. ‘Composers outside the West are invisible in their own concert halls.’³⁰ Inaudible too. This is an open secret, of course—one reason perhaps why Young has the whisper so dramatically amplified in the gallery.

Eavesdrop | Medium

The idea of the ‘eaves’ as a boundary extends back and forth through history via the juridico-architectural formation of the ‘eavesdrip’ (later ‘eavesdrop’). Already, as ‘efes’ was being used to describe the edge of a forest, the Old English ‘yvesdrpæ’ had come to refer to an ancient legal custom or ‘folkright’ (folcrycht) whereby property owners were prevented from building right up to the edge of their land. The Roman jurist Gaius (130–80) attributes the rule that two or three feet be left around the perimeter of any building to the Athenian statesman Solon (640BCE),³¹ but direct evidence of that law can only be sourced back to the Twelve Tables of ancient Rome (450BCE) under the name ‘ambitus’ (clearance or ‘the going around’ of a building).³² The common theory is that the norm began as a way of protecting property rights, both from gradual encroachment from a neighbouring property and from damage caused by water running off a neighbouring property. Hence, by the ninth century, the ‘eaves-drip’. In 1878, however, William Hearn, the first dean of the

new faculty of law at the University of Melbourne, offered an alternative explanation: that the custom of the eavesdrop emerged to protect the secrecy and privacy of sacred household gods (typical of ancestral worship in ancient households) from the profane spaces of the outside world.³³ According to this theory, to eavesdrop was to disturb the protected separation of sacred and profane. Today, when we talk about the ‘eaves’ of a house, and still imagine eavesdroppers lurking there, these are the echoes we no longer hear. The eavesdrop was the legally mandated gap of two-to-four feet around the perimeter of a home that, by the fourteenth century, would provide the perfect opportunity—indeed the medium—for surreptitious listening in the villages of rural England.

What is the medium of eavesdropping? Not sound, not even listening. In this history, it is the eavesdrop. Just as, in Rosalind Krauss’s thinking, the medium of Ed Ruscha’s famous paintings, photographs, and prints of Californian streetscapes and gas stations is not painting, photography, or printing, but the car. The car, she says, provides the ‘conditions of possibility’ of these works, their logic or rule.³⁴ The ways of seeing and experiencing the world produced by the car—the social and material structures it implies and is embedded in—are what Ruscha’s works point to and investigate. We might think of the eavesdrop in a similar way, as the specific listening situation established by a set of spatial, material, and normative conditions. The medium of eavesdropping, in this sense, isn’t just the wall or window through which one listens, but also the conditions of access and invisibility the eavesdrop entails.

Eavesdropping

Consider the recordings produced by the Manus Recording Project Collective.³⁵ Since 2013, nearly two thousand men have been indefinitely detained on Manus Island, in Papua New Guinea, by the Australian Government, after arriving in Australia seeking asylum. When the Manus Regional Processing Centre was formally closed on 31 October 2017, after the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, the men still detained there were ordered to relocate to new, smaller detention centers in Lorengau, Manus' major town. The authorities eliminated provisions and removed the diesel generators powering the facility, but the men refused to leave—the culmination of years of organised resistance against their involuntary and indefinite detention. Eventually, they were forcefully evicted.

how are you today is a collaboration between some of these men—Abdul Aziz Muhamat, Behrouz Boochani, Farhad Bandesh, Kazem Kazemi, Samad Abdul, and Shamindan Kanapathi—and André Dao, Jon Tjhia, and Michael Green in Melbourne. Each day for fourteen weeks (the duration of *Eavesdropping's* first presentation at the Ian Potter Museum of Art), one of the men on Manus made a sound recording and sent it 'onshore' for swift upload to the gallery. By the exhibition's end, there were eighty-four recordings in total, each ten minutes long. The result is an archive of fourteen hours—too large to synthesise, yet only a tiny fraction of the men's ongoing internment. These are not just field recordings, they are also evidence, produced at a time when more direct forms of testimony seem exhausted. If they document a soundscape, they also speak of the politico-

legal system that produces and frames it, so that we don't just hear the sounds of the Manusian jungle and the Pacific Ocean, but also Behrouz and Samad listening, six years into their captivity. Likewise, what we hear when we listen to Aziz cooking or Kazem showering is both the powerful normalcy of such activities and how their meaning is radically transformed by the violence of their setting. For Krauss, one task of the artist is to 'invent' and investigate the medium in question. What is the medium of this work? Not sound, not the platforms or technical infrastructure required to make Manus audible thousands of kilometres away and for posterity (WhatsApp, Dropbox, and wireless Internet of varying degrees of stability), but offshore detention itself. That is the 'condition of possibility' of *how are you today*—the dark logic that it sets out to condemn and explore.

By contrast, Susan Schuppli's *Listening to Answering Machines* is more concerned with artefacts, what they register or evidence, and how they can be made to speak.³⁶ It presents recordings from a collection of audio-tapes gathered by the artist from thrift stores following the transition to digital voicemail in the 1990s: an accidental archive encompassing details about both the people who owned the machines and all those who reached out to them by leaving their messages behind. No doubt they never contemplated their shared sonic intimacies might one day be sold off as mere detritus—the dead technological remains of domestic life—let alone make their way into a gallery. There is something uncomfortable but undeniably pleasurable—voyeuristic, for want of a sonic equivalent—about choosing to listen. Each

recording is a tantalising fragment of a life lived; a portrait in sonic miniature, full of real humour, affection, melancholy, and, above all, the profound ordinariness of picking up the phone—today we would call them ‘landlines’. They are, of course, increasingly few and far between. And the machines once attached to them—along with all the whirrs and beeps, and the unique forms of speaking and listening they ushered into being—are gone from our lives entirely. In the end, *Listening to Answering Machines* is more concerned with this now-obsolete medium than with the lives of the people on whom it allows us to eavesdrop. The medium is quite literally the message here. And it is only with the benefit of hindsight, and by virtue of Schuppli’s careful gathering, that the real novelty of this medium comes into focus and its obsolescence can be processed.

Eavesdropper | Agent

Most legal histories of eavesdropping begin with the following definition from William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1769), one of the most influential texts in the common-law tradition.³⁷ ‘Eavesdroppers’, Blackstone writes, ‘or such as listen under walls or windows, or the eaves of a house, to hearken after discourse, and thereupon to frame slanderous and mischievous tales, are a common nuisance and presentable at the court-leet.’ (Fig. 3) Notice a few things here. Blackstone doesn’t define the wrong of eavesdropping so much as the figure of the eavesdropper. Further, insofar as the eavesdropper presents a ‘nuisance’ worthy of censure, it is by

enfue to any thatched or timber buildings, declared to be a common nuisance, by statute 9 & 10 W. III. c. 7. and therefore is punishable by fine. 7. *Eaves-droppers*, or such as listen under walls or windows, or the eaves of a house, to hearken after discourse, and thereupon to frame slanderous and mischievous tales, are a common nuisance and presentable at the court-leet¹: or are indictable at the sessions, and punishable by fine and finding sureties for the good behaviour². 8. Lastly, a *common scold*, *communis rixatrix*, (for our law-latin confines it to the feminine gender) is a public nuisance to her neighbourhood. For which offence she may be indicted³; and, if convicted, shall⁴ be sentenced to be placed in a certain engine of correction called the trebucket, castigatory, or *cucking* stool, which in the Saxon language signifies the scolding stool; though now it is frequently corrupted into *ducking* stool, because the residue of the judgment is, that, when she is so placed therein, she shall be plunged in the water for her punishment⁵.

6. IDLENESS in any person whatsoever is also a high offence against the public oeconomy. In China it is a maxim, that if there be a man who does not work, or a woman that is idle, in the empire, somebody must suffer cold or hunger: the produce of the lands not being more than sufficient, with culture, to maintain the inhabitants; and therefore, though the idle person may shift off the want from himself, yet it must in the end fall somewhere. The court also of Areopagus at Athens punished idleness, and exerted a right of examining every citizen in what manner he spent his time; the intention of which was⁶, that the Athenians, knowing they were to give an account of their occupations, should follow only such as were laudable, and that there might be no room left for such as lived by unlawful arts. The civil law expelled all sturdy vagrants from the city⁷: and,

¹ Kitch. of courts. 20.

² *Ibid.* 1 Hawk. P. C. 132.

³ 6 Mod. 213.

⁴ 1 Hawk. P. C. 198. 200.

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⁵ 3 Infl. 219.

⁶ Valer. Maxim. l. 2. c. 6.

⁷ *Nev.* 80. c. 5.

Fig. 3 William Blackstone *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 1769

virtue of, first, their location (under the ‘eaves’) and, second, what their listening yields (‘slandorous and mischievous tales’), not the act of listening itself. This is why, from the end of the fourteenth century up to Blackstone, the eavesdropper was closely associated with two other figures: the ‘common nightwalker’ (nearly all men, connected with the ‘vagrant’) and the ‘scold’ (always women). Both were understood as posing problems of public order: the nightwalker because they were out after dark and thus liable to provoke a disturbance of the King’s peace, the scold because their ‘false tales’ ‘sowed discord ... controversy, rumors and dissension’.³⁸ Much the same could be said of the eavesdropper.

Though indictments for this cluster of offences had dwindled by Blackstone’s time, that didn’t stop the juridical figure of the eavesdropper travelling with his *Commentaries* to Britain’s colonies, where it lay mostly dormant before being revived in the twentieth century in response to the emerging crisis of wiretapping. In *The Eavesdroppers* (1959), an influential text commissioned by the Pennsylvania Bar Association,³⁹ Dash et al. begin with Blackstone before moving on to distinguish wiretapping as a ‘specialised form of eavesdropping’.⁴⁰ ‘Electronic eavesdropping’, they write, ‘goes back at least one hundred years. Shortly after the telegraph came into existence and wires were strung from pole to pole, wiretappers were busy intercepting the coded communications.’⁴¹ As with Blackstone’s eavesdropper, wiretappers were originally individuals: ‘ordinary eavesdroppers’, Dash calls them.⁴² It was only gradually that the figure would come to be associated,

first, with private investigators and corporate espionage; then, with surveillance by police, law-enforcement agencies, and secret agents; and, finally, with the algorithmic power of global megacorporations and the surveillance state.⁴³

(Fig.4) Likewise, it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that eavesdropping shifted from being a public-order problem to primarily a matter of privacy and security.

As the enormous cache of documents leaked by Edward Snowden in 2013 showed, together, programs such as EViTAP, RHINEHART, VoiceRT, and SPIRITFIRE enabled the National Security Agency and its Five Eyes partners to use automatic speech recognition and transcription technologies, along with audio-fingerprinting techniques and targeted keyword searches, to analyse international telephone calls, media broadcasts, and intercepted audio and archival recordings at breathtaking speed and scale. Piggybacking on massive corporate platforms and private infrastructure, government eavesdropping that once required an actual person to do the listening could now be performed automatically, in bulk, with ever increasing precision. Today, eavesdropping is no longer simply electronic, but algorithmic.⁴⁴

But perhaps eavesdropping has always hovered between human and nonhuman, actor and actant, individual and system.⁴⁵ Look at Athanasius Kircher's 'Spionage-Ohr' (Spy Ear) from Book IX of his *Musurgia Universalis* (1650) on 'echotectonics' (the architecture of echoes).^(Fig. 7) The image proposes an extraordinary 'listening system' in which giant shell-like tubes puncture the thickly fortified walls of a building, allowing members of



Fig. 4 Susan Schuppli *The Missing 18½ Minutes* 2018. Tape equipment used to play White House Watergate conversations for the House Judiciary Committee, 1974.



Fig. 5 Nicolaes Maes *The Eavesdropper* 1657

Eavesdropping

the Royal Court to listen in on the plaza below. The funnels replicate in architectural form the physiology of the ear—a twisting and turning canal leading to a hypersensitive centre. Kircher speculated that the apparatus would ‘render any articulated sounds clearly and distinctly inside a room, no matter how distant from the outside, just as if it were next to the ear, with no one suspecting where it could come from’.⁴⁶ For anyone familiar with Jeremy Bentham’s famous panopticon devised over a century later in 1787, the similarities are striking. In both cases, the purpose is not just to surveil but to discipline: to ensure that those under surveillance understand that what they do can be seen and what they say heard.⁴⁷ Already in 1650, Kircher was imagining a technique of power that, following French philosopher Peter Szendy, we might call ‘panacoustic’.⁴⁸ Who or what is the agent of the eavesdropping here? One of the things this image does so brilliantly is stage the relationship between the eavesdropper and the systems, structures, and architectures on which they depend. Indeed, what it suggests is the impossibility of ever really holding these apart.

The relationship between these two different dimensions of agency is also brilliantly illustrated in Sean Dockray’s video *Learning from YouTube*. Dockray superimposes an open Google Chrome ‘window’ containing a YouTube video of himself talking into a Google Home Assistant onto Nicolaes Maes’s famous painting *The Eavesdropper* from 1657. (Fig. 5, 6) There are no ‘eaves’ here, no ‘eavesdrop’ either, but there is plenty of architecture, along with all the thresholds of audibility and structures of listenership,

visibility, and invisibility entailed. There are walls and doorways, interiors and exteriors, rooms and windows ‘real’ and ‘virtual’, networks not only of corridors but also of cabling, stretching out from homes under roads and seas to vast data centres in deserts.⁴⁹ In Maes’s painting, a young woman, in search of her maid, catches herself short in the staircase to listen, as the maid is led off by a well-dressed man. She looks directly at us, her finger raised to her lips, implicating us in the scandal.⁵⁰ The Google Home Assistant (whose voice we recognise as female) listens as the artist (a man) narrates a story about algorithmic listening and the novel forms of power it helps inaugurate. His own voice is led off immediately by the assistant for processing somewhere far away. It has also been recorded and uploaded to YouTube for analysis by the very automated system the work explores. Google’s Audioset is an ‘expanding ontology of 632 audio-event classes and a collection of 2,084,320 human-labelled 10-second sound clips drawn from YouTube videos’.⁵¹ The purpose is to train the company’s ‘deep learning systems’ in the hope that, someday soon, they will be able to ‘label hundreds or thousands of different sound events in real-world recordings with a time resolution better than one second’.⁵² Together, so-called ‘personal assistants’ (a phrase so evidently intended to ingratiate them into our homes) and YouTube are just kindergarten for a potentially enormous corporate listening apparatus—an algorithmic ‘panacousticon’—the effects of which we should not expect to be benign.

If Dockray’s work is about a form of eavesdropping whose agency is distributed and diffuse, Lawrence Abu Hamdan comes closer to

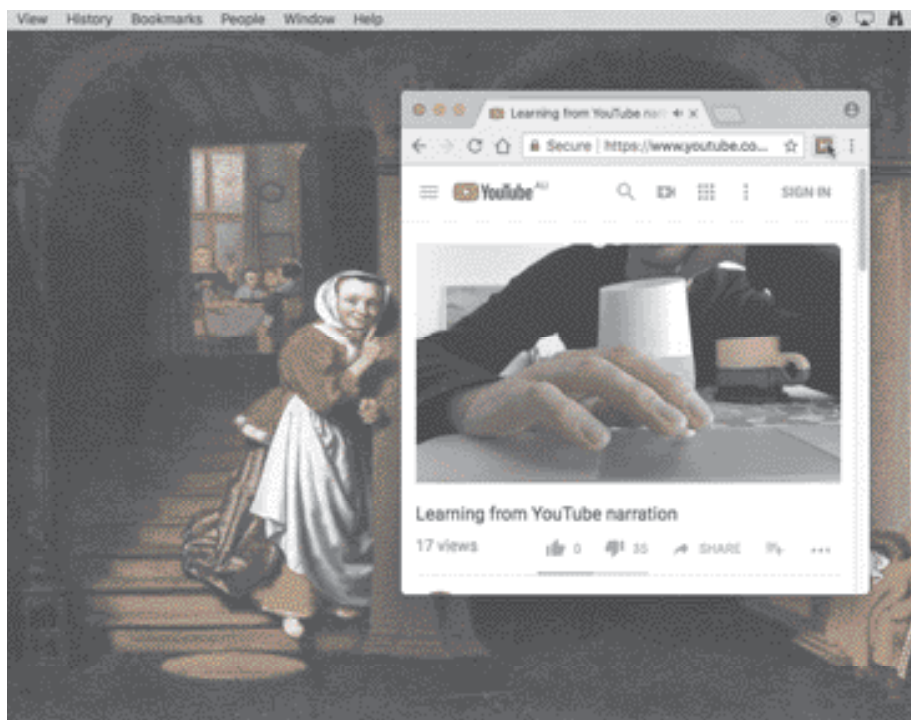
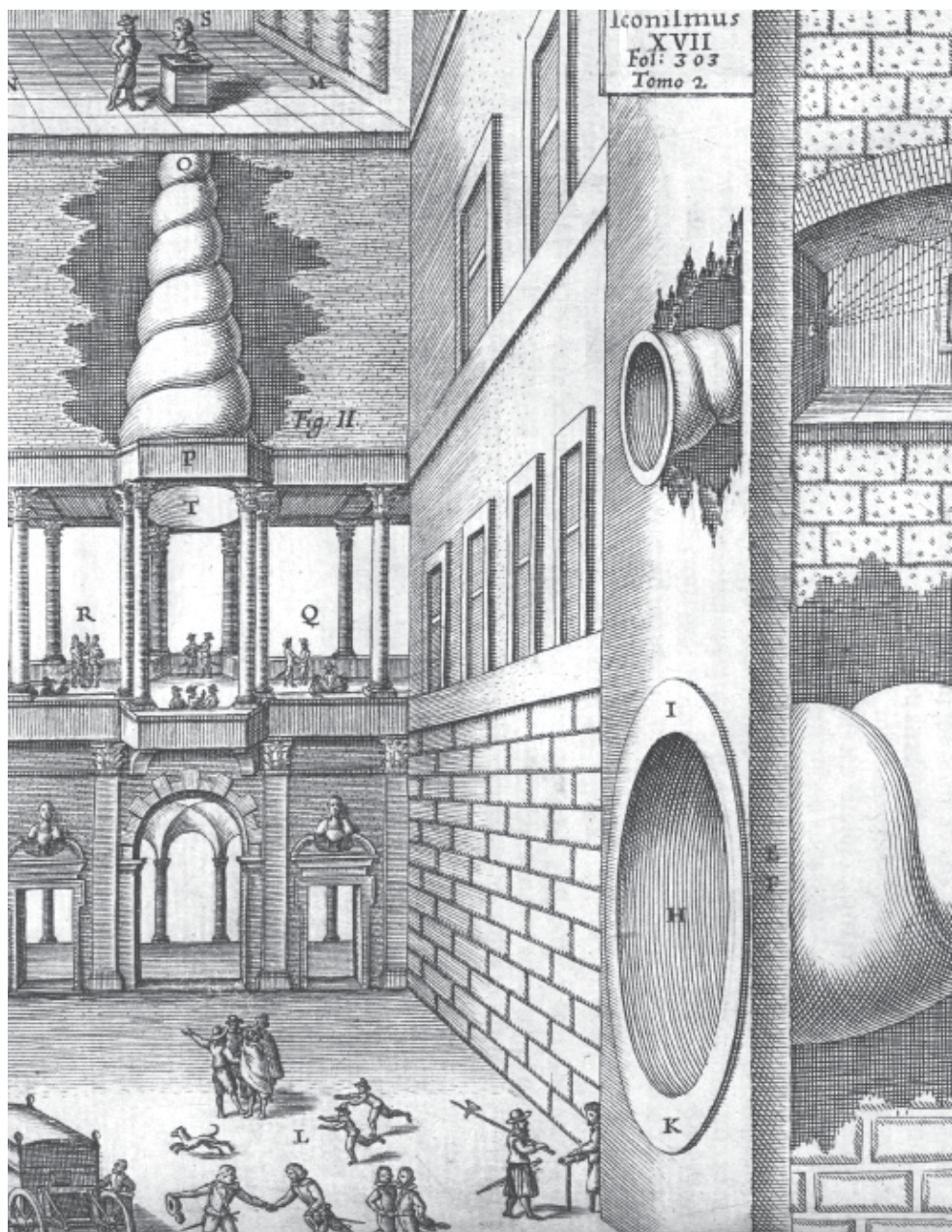
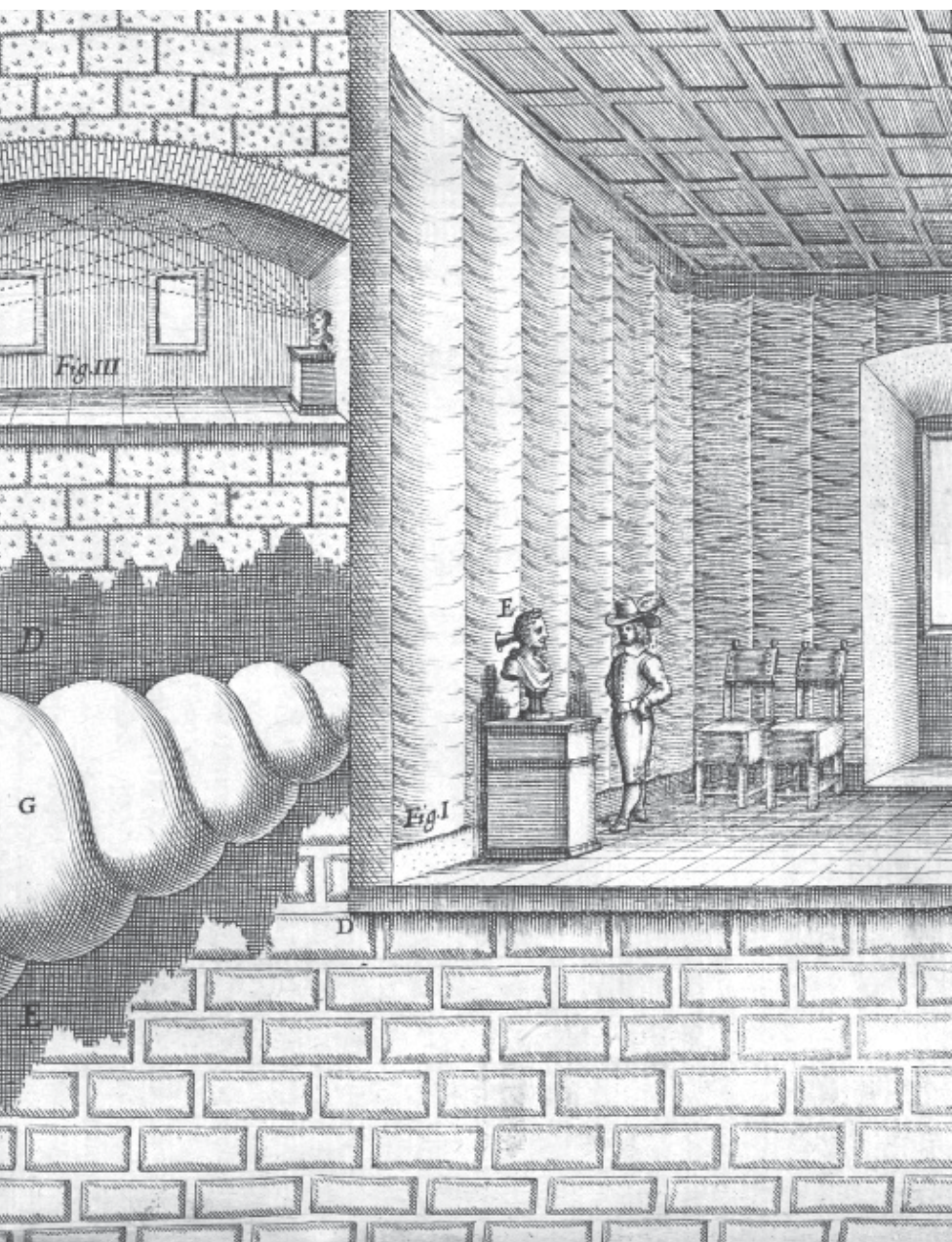


Fig. 6 Sean Dockray *Learning from YouTube* 2018



Eavesdropping

Fig. 7 Athanasius Kircher *Musurgia Universalis* 1650.
Image: University of St Andrews Library, Fife, Scotland



occupying the position of the eavesdropper himself. On his website, he describes himself as a 'private ear'. And *Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)* comes directly out of a collaborative project between Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London.⁵³ The work is an acoustic investigation into Saydnaya Military Prison, thirty kilometres north of Damascus, Syria, where an estimated 15,000 people have been executed since 2011. Like many of Abu Hamdan's projects, it appropriates and expands upon a range of forensic methods and categories of doctrine on which legal institutions often like to claim a monopoly. Since Saydnaya is inaccessible to independent observers and monitors, the memories of the few survivors to have been released are the only resource available from which to learn of and document the violations taking place there. Since they were kept in tiny cells in near total darkness and risked death if they so much as made a sound, that memory is largely auditory. 'In this silence, detainees develop an acute sensitivity to sound', Abu Hamdan explains. 'The constant fear of an impending attack makes every footstep sound like a car crash.' It is this acuity—both its violence and its forensic potential—that the work centres on. The weaponisation of sound and silence at Saydnaya, Abu Hamdan claims, amounts to 'a form of torture in and of itself', a gradual assault on the prisoner's mind and body, with only the barest whispers available to them as expressions of solidarity or acoustic agency. Abu Hamdan estimates that, after 2011, the audible range over which Saydnaya detainees could safely project their voices was as little as twenty-six centimetres, so that the distance

between prison walls is hardly the only measure of their confinement. The work also documents how the whispers became four-times quieter after 2011, when anti-government protests began and conditions at Saydnaya worsened significantly. Through careful interrogation of survivors' testimony, Abu Hamdan discerned a nineteen-decibel drop in the capacity to speak, which stands as a testament, he suggests, to Saydnaya's transformation from a prison to a death camp. We could understand his account as eavesdropping by proxy—the result of Abu Hamdan's listening to their listening, to which we are invited to listen in turn.

In Fayen d'Evie's *Cosmic Static*, made with Jen Bervin, Bryan Phillips, and Andy Slater, listening is measured in light years, not centimetres. And though the eavesdropping is astral rather than earthly, questions of agency are still at stake. The work deals with the ancient human impulse to cast our ears upwards to the heavens, a desire at least as old as the Pythagorean obsession with the 'harmony of the spheres' (which was always also a concern for natural law—the fusion of cosmos and nomos—since to know the universe would be to know order itself). But the work is also concerned with human/nonhuman relations, and what it would even mean to know that a non-human agency had been detected through the cosmic static. At its heart is the story of amateur radio operator Grote Reber, who succeeded in detecting this static in 1938, using a parabolic antenna built in his Chicago backyard. Two bodies of field recordings are sampled; one from Tasmania, where Reber moved in 1954 and constructed antenna farms by stringing wires across sheep-

grazing lands, and the other from the Grote Reber Museum at the University of Hobart's Mount Pleasant Radio Observatory. Another narrative collages fragments from the history of extraterrestrial listening, including field recordings at SETI's Allen Telescope Array in Hat Creek, California, where a small staff maintains forty-two small dishes, searching for anomalous stellar and interstellar signals. A third story explores the research of SETI astrophysicist Laurance Doyle, who studies the language complexity and signal transmissions of nonhuman species—from plant-insect communications to monkey whistling and baby-dolphin babbling—to develop methods of discerning intelligent extraterrestrial signals amidst the galactic noise. The experience of listening—as a form of searching—is replicated in the gallery. The multiple narratives of *Cosmic Static* are distributed across an array of conventional and hyper-directional speakers, inviting the listener to scan the space and position themselves in the path of one signal or another. We are caught and led by our listening, not to some ideal position, but into a field of play constantly in flux. As the artists explain, quoting Reber's diaries, local children appropriated his telescope for climbing bars, and signals were occasionally disrupted by animals engaging with tuner boxes beneath the antenna. Alien intelligences are not the only nonhuman agents implicated in this listening. When Grote Reber died, his body was cremated and boxes of his ashes were distributed to radio observatories around the world, where they were affixed to the rims of the parabolic dishes that listen out for extraterrestrial signals to and through the cosmic static to this day.

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping: Listening Forward

Eaves, eavesdrop, eavesdropper. Threshold, medium, agent. Eavesdropping is the composite of these elements, both in and out of the gallery. Our project is to enliven and expand eavesdropping as a critical and aesthetic practice. Compiled by and with the artists, the chapters that follow address key works for those interested in the ethical, legal, and political dimensions of listening that have not been significantly addressed in any of the major institutional surveys of sound art to date. Not all the works in the *Eavesdropping* exhibition are represented. The show also includes Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Rubber-Coated Steel* (2016) and *Conflicted Phonemes* (2012), Susan Schuppli's *The Missing 18 1/2 Minutes* (2018), and Sean Dockray's *Always Learning* (2018). Moreover, many related performances, lectures, and workshops are not included, but certainly informed this book. Details and documentation can be found on the project's website (<https://eavesdropping.exposed>), which we will update with the project's future iterations. For now, we hope this book goes some small way towards opening up the ethics, law and politics of listening as a field of investigation in the arts and beyond. Eavesdropping is not just a matter of listening in, out or back, therefore, but also of listening forward.

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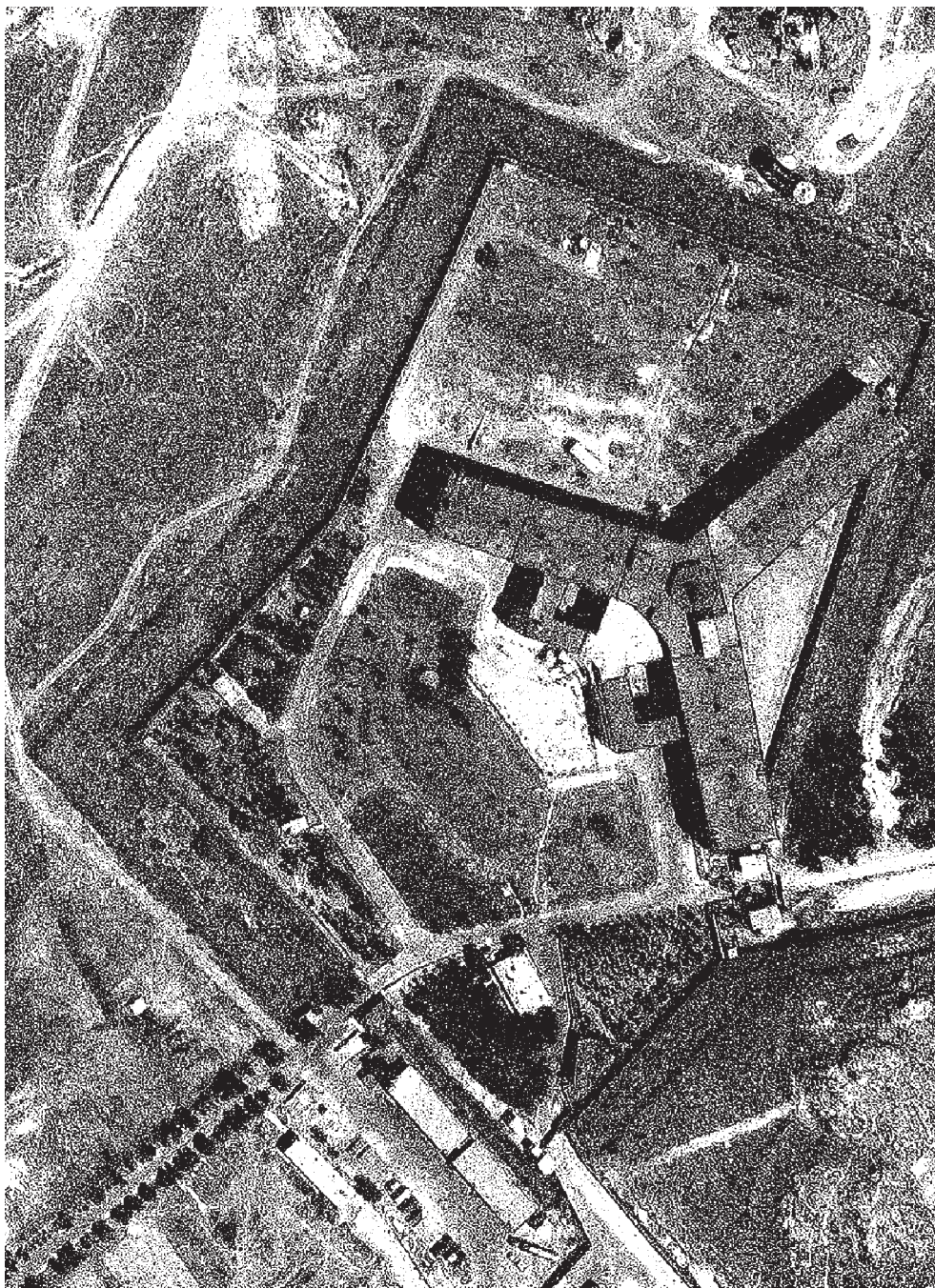
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Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)
Lawrence Abu Hamdan

In March 2011, mass anti-government protests began throughout Syria. As a result, tens of thousands of anti-regime protestors—including activists, lawyers, doctors, journalists, bloggers, teachers, and students—were kidnapped, taken to secret-service branches all over the country, and tortured. Many were subsequently blindfolded and thrown into a thick-walled, acoustically-isolated, refrigerated meat truck and taken to a prison twenty-five kilometres north of Damascus that they came to know as Saydnaya. Amnesty International estimates 17,723 people have died in custody in Syrian regime-controlled prisons since the beginning of the revolution; 13,000 by hanging in Saydnaya.¹ (Fig. 8)

At Saydnaya, torture has been used less to gather information than to suppress, terrorise, and punish opposition to the Assad regime. The prison is still in operation and inaccessible to independent monitors. The ability of surviving detainees to testify is severely impeded by the fact that they were confined in darkness and blindfolded when moved through the prison. Syrian leaders knew that surviving prisoners' status as possible future witnesses would be fundamentally changed from eyewitness to earwitness, limiting their capacity to remember and recount their experiences, undermining their credibility. Prisoners were also held in an enforced state of silence, which allowed them to clearly hear almost everything happening inside the prison.

What was required from forensic listening, in this case, was to solicit the sounds that emerged from Saydnaya's silence, to give language to the survivors' acoustic memories. Leading the audio component of a larger team



Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

Fig. 8 Saydnaya prison, Syria.



of investigators from Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths at the University of London and from Amnesty International, my task was to design dedicated earwitness interviews to uncover acoustic memories to attempt to reconstruct the acoustic space of the prison and understand what had happened within its walls.

The Spread of Silence

‘In Saydnaya, silence is the master’, explained Diab.² Speech, even whispered, is punishable by death. Jamal explained:

Once the guards heard the voice of a guy whispering, so the guard came to the cell and said, ‘Who made the sound? Come forward or I’ll kill you all.’ One guy confessed, so the guard said, ‘I’m going to take you to Azrael’ [the Angel of Death]. This wasn’t our cell, it was the one across from ours, so we didn’t know what happened, we just assumed he was exaggerating. The guard took him and all we could hear were hits landing from a distance, without any sound being made from the man being beaten. The hits were so brutal, eventually it stopped and the guard returned and we heard him say, ‘I emptied out a spot for you so you can get more comfortable in there. Your friend went to Azrael. Whoever wants to join him, I’ll send you over there too.’ He was beaten to death.

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

When guards were close, detainees were afraid to audibly move or even scratch an itch. Those too sick to suppress a cough broke the violently enforced silence and suffered potentially fatal consequences. Samer said even 'breathing out loud was forbidden'.

Silence is a commonly cited experience among those who have endured prison isolation cells, but Saydnaya's cells are overcrowded. There are reports of people spending their sentences with thirty others in rooms 6.5 by 8 metres. The prison is not silent because there is no one to talk to; one is forced to negotiate an overcrowded space without making a sound. The silence in Saydnaya is designed not as an act of torture based on sensory deprivation (as in conventional isolation cells), but as more akin to a 'stress position' (usually defined as forcing the body to adopt and remain in squat positions or equivalent, where its weight is placed on just one or two muscles). The order of silence restricts prisoners' physical movements and suppresses their respiratory functions, forcing them to remain still, not stretching their muscles for fear of making a sound. The silence prisoners endure is physical and psychological. Even when being beaten, it is forbidden to make a sound. Jamal said:

In other prisons, the guards wouldn't leave the prisoner alone until he screams. If the prisoner doesn't scream the guard would take it as though the prisoner is challenging him. He has to yell ... Saydnaya is completely opposite. If you yell, the beatings would

intensify. If you keep quiet it would go down until he finally stops.

Saydnaya was distinct from other Syrian prisons in its use of silence and this prominently featured in the testimonies of all survivors. The extent to which silence was incorporated into the practice of torture exceeded what our accompanying investigators at Amnesty had encountered before. Salam, another witness, said:

In the entire building, at all floors, there isn't a single sound being made. If they are killing someone no one should be able to hear his voice. All that can be heard is the sound of the whip, or the instrument they are torturing him with. It's normal to hear the sound of these instruments but a scream is never to be let out.

In Saydnaya, beatings always happen out of sight, even if someone is being beaten in the same room, as inmates have to cover their eyes at all times in the presence of the guards. Listening to someone being beaten without their screaming, one is left only with the sound of the beating itself, the sound of a weapon in contact with a body. One does not hear the tortured subject but rather the corporeal surface, a body no different to one's own. What becomes audible is the way a body is being destroyed. Silence amplifies the brutality. Samer said: 'It was forbidden to scream. Some people would go crazy and defecate or urinate on themselves. We could hear that.' Silence is not

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

only brutally enforced but is part of the brutality. For the acoustic investigation into the prison, it was crucial to find ways to measure this silence and the pressure it exerted on the detainees' bodies.

As the prison is still operational and access is denied, we cannot measure its silence with a decibel metre. We can only attempt to reconstruct it through the voices and acoustic memories of its former detainees. The level at which they could whisper and not be heard by the guards—through the doors, walls, water pipes, and ventilation system—is a measure of the silence. Whispering is achieved by allowing the breath to pass through the larynx without the vocal cords vibrating. This 'unvoiced' sound does not contain low-range and mid-range frequencies but relies on the upper frequencies and percussive elements of consonants to convey meaning. Restricting the vibration of the larynx limits air vibration, so whispered sound won't travel as far as a voiced speech sound, where the larynx vibrates. Recording and analysing the level at which inmates could whisper is a means of mapping the threshold of audibility. This threshold is a vital zone to define in the study, because the border between whisper and speech is concurrently the border between life and death.

It became clear that the prison's silence had lasting physical effects on survivors' speech capacities after their release. Jamal explained:

When I came out of Saydnaya I used to speak like this: [low screeching] 'eeeh eeeh', like someone ululating (*zalghouta*). After whispering for so long my tongue wasn't used to

speaking loudly. Speech was very difficult for me.

Likewise, Diab told me:

When I came out of prison, for about a month I felt like my family's voices were so loud. I'd tell them 'stop yelling, lower your voices', and when I'd talk to them, they'd tell me 'raise your voice, we can't hear you'.

After hearing such statements, I shifted my focus from verbal testimony to listening to the way whispering might be stored in the muscle memory of survivors' voices. I asked the six witnesses to re-enact the whisper level at which they could speak in their cells. However, the re-enacted whispers were of an inconsistent amplitude. The witnesses said this was because their voices have now been fully reformatted for the noisier acoustic world they currently occupy, as refugees in Turkey. Salam explained:

My hearing is now a third of what it used to be since I was in Saydnaya. I don't rely on it as much now that I am free. Maybe the silence was even lower than that. I am exposed to so much more noise these days and I could be remembering it even louder than how it truly was.

Due to these inconsistencies, the re-enacted whisper was an indication of the silence, but not precise evidence of the force it exerted. In

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

order to further materialise the silence they had endured, I asked the prisoners how quietly their interlocutors would speak to them, shifting the investigation from the oral to the aural, from their voice to their ears. I asked each to listen to a test tone in acoustically isolated headphones. Starting with no sound, I slowly raised the volume until they stopped me at the level they could remember hearing fellow inmates whispering to them. The results were consistent. By abstracting and reducing the noise of speech to a pure amplitude, they were able to identify not the sound of the whisper but the level at which they had to strain their ears to hear one another.

The results of Samer, Salam, Jamal, and Anas fell within a 5db window, with Samer and Salam identifying exactly the same amplitude of -84db.³ When tested in a controlled acoustic environment, the sound of the whisper was audible only up to twenty-six centimetres from the sound source. Under the same acoustic conditions, a normal human voice would have the capacity to be audible up to 180 metres away. So, while our voice's physical capacity to reach outside our bodies is 180 metres, the absolute limit in Saydnaya is just twenty-six centimetres. The silence was an acoustic tool with which to tighten the space of incarceration, in addition to the already tight architectural limits. The whisper then maps an acoustic architecture of the prison that is just as intransgressible as the walls of the cells themselves.

All but one witness identified a barely audible tone of whisper between -84 and -79db, but Diab's whisper was 19db louder—four times louder to the average human ear. This was

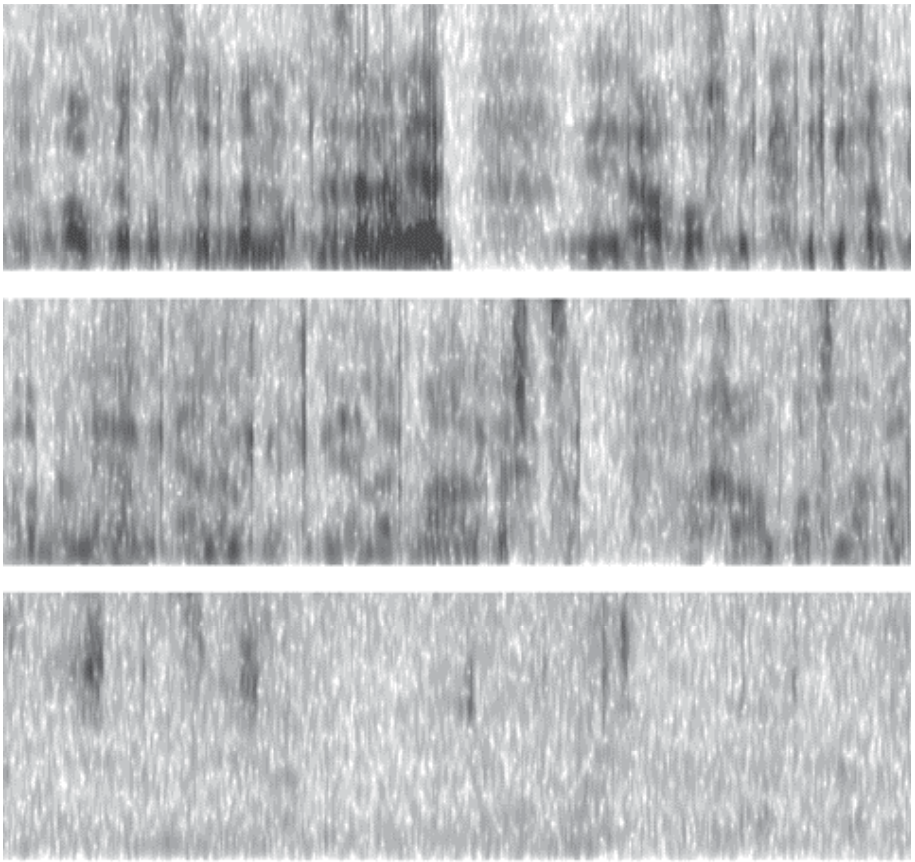


Fig. 9 These spectrographs represent sound. The vertical axis indicates pitch, the horizontal time. White represents no sound, black loud sound. The top spectrograph shows Diab talking at normal conversational level during the interview. The middle one shows him re-enacting the level at which he could whisper at Saydnaya before 2011. The lower one shows Samer re-enacting the level at which he could whisper at Saydnaya after 2011.

telling, as Diab was released in 2011, when all inmates were freed in order to use the prison exclusively for the political protestors that were starting a revolution across the country. Diab explained:

My fellow inmates, we were the old crowd from before 2011. The prison got emptied out, the regime emptied it out in 2012. Not a single person was left imprisoned from before the politics, before the revolution. The regime transferred everyone to public prisons, and sent to trial a lot of people, took them out of incarceration. The ones without trials were sent to the public prisons, and Saydnaya was emptied out completely. But it was only emptied out from us, the old wave of prisoners, so new ones would come in. Everyone jailed after the revolution was put in this prison. The levels of torture that they were subject to were even worse than those that we experienced.

A 19db drop in the capacity for inmates to whisper marks a new era of extreme violence at Saydnaya after 2011, correlating to the infamy the prison has attained throughout Syria since the protests began. It gives scale to what Diab describes as 'levels of torture' getting 'even worse'.^(Fig. 9) Diab was permitted an audible range of two-or-three metres, as opposed to the twenty-six centimetres permitted to inmates after 2011. Inmates being

allowed to make four-times-less noise means that they could move four-times less, including not being allowed to breathe audibly without fear of repercussion. It also speaks to the increased alertness of the guards, lowering the tolerance threshold before which they would beat, kill, or maim inmates. Those who could not live under these silent conditions—who were too sick to suppress a cough—met fatal consequences.

The Syrian regime denies the presence of torture and executions at Saydnaya, though it has not allowed independent observers access to verify this. In the absence of any other material evidence, the 19db drop after 2011 allows us to hear the transformation of Saydnaya from a prison into a death camp.

The Uses and Abuses of Silence

There are precedents for using silence as evidence of invisible crimes. Bryan Pijanowski, a soundscape ecologist at Purdue University, has used audio-recording to document the extinction of amphibian life in the Costa Rican jungle since 2008.⁴ The frogs make a sound vastly louder than would be expected given their size—often only the size of a fingernail—and are difficult to see because of their camouflaged skin. However, they have long been the most audible animal in the jungle, constituting a high percentage of the soundscape. Pijanowski has amassed and analysed years of recordings to show that, while the vegetation looks healthy to the eye, something dramatic happening under the surface has led to a vast silencing. His spectrographs from 2008 and 2015, which each compress a year's

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

recordings into a single image, show the dramatic scale of amphibian extinction through the drop in jungle amplitude. Just as we measured silence at Saydnaya, Pijanowski uses negative sound as evidence, in the absence of visible evidence, to show that mass disappearance has occurred.

When ex-detainees of Saydnaya identified a particular fifteen-minute-long silence, it strengthened Amnesty's suspicions that executions might be happening. This was later confirmed when they interviewed former guards who had defected.⁵ Samer explained:

There are two group cells at the entrance of the prison. In our wing, they'd stay empty, but every fifteen days they'd bring prisoners into them. A guard would roam around among the inmates and read a list of names. They'd pick some out of the crowd and open the doors of the cells to take them out. The inmates that are taken out and gathered in a wing, they'd collect their names then bring them into our group cells. They'd put about 150 to 200 of those inmates in group cells. We were about 300 in there. The next morning at around 5:00 or 4:30, they'd collect them, put them in trucks and leave. For fifteen minutes the sound of the trucks would disappear, and then the truck would return. Where did they move these inmates to? ... We decided to memorise their names, and, once we'd get out, we could ask

about them ... I asked about them, some of them were missing. No one knew what had happened to them, and some I heard had died. So this proves that those fifteen minutes of silence between the truck going and coming back are the sounds of executions.

This passage speaks to the intensity with which the earwitnesses to Saydnaya listened to the prison, and the ways they rendered audible and memorised its acoustic lexicon. The sound of a truck driving away, fading out of audibility, then returning empty fifteen minutes later emptied of its contents, is not a typical representation of murder, but the duration seemed too short for the release of prisoners. This was confirmed when, after his release, Samer asked about the whereabouts of those whose names had been called, which he had memorised. Despite constant exposure to sounds of torture and violence, the prisoners' hearing was so accentuated in the silent conditions that they could determine the most destructive of all sounds they were exposed to in the prison was the fifteen minutes of silence between the truck leaving full of inmates and coming back empty. The sound of disappearance was audible in the disappearance of sound, much like with the frogs in the jungle. For Pijanowski, this was a question of amplitude, and, for the witnesses at Saydnaya, one of a duration of silence.

For acoustic investigators, silence or negative sound can be an essential source of knowledge upon which we can build claims. At

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)

Saydnaya, silence was simultaneously a form of torture, an index of violence, and a means by which earwitnesses came to develop heightened listening capacities that informed their testimony. Silence was used to accentuate the prisoners' oppression and restricted their abilities to speak and circulate knowledge, yet paradoxically, it produced heightened modes of listening that led to the discovery of crucial information about life in Saydnaya.

In earwitness studies conducted by the University of Gothenburg, researchers found that memories of voices—not only what they said but the quality of the voice itself—were of greater detail and accuracy when test subjects were in a darkened room, without background noise. Memories were stronger when 'background noise that might otherwise interfere with witnesses' ability to clearly hear and attend to the voices was not present'.⁶ In Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory*, a historiography of mnemonic strategies from Ancient Greece up until the seventeenth century, there is a quotation from Philostratus, the Sophist teacher, describing the memory training of the sage Apollonius of Tyana. The passage demonstrates silence—remaining mute—as an ancient practice of memory training:

Euxemus, having asked Apollonius why he had written nothing yet, though full of noble thoughts, and expressing himself so clearly and readily, he replied: 'Because so far I have not practised silence.' From that time on he resolved to be mute, and did not speak at all,

though his eyes and his mind took in everything and stored it away in his memory. Even after he had become a centenarian he remembered better than Simonides.⁷

Simonides, whose strategy of memory training depended on visual images, was outdone by Apollonius's strategy of silence. This historical reference supports the role silence played in distilling the memories of Saydnaya's earwitnesses. Silence allowed Samer and Jamal to memorise the names of those called, who Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture now indeed believe to have been executed. The attempted silencing of Saydnaya detainees decreased the believability of Bashar al-Assad's denial of the crimes taking place there. Silence and darkness were used as weapons of negation and degradation, yet unknowingly provided conditions for memory training. Paradoxically, the insights derived from earwitness accounts are indebted to Saydnaya's silent conditions. Details—such as how many cell-door hatches were heard sliding open at meal times, which enabled us to estimate the number of detainees held in each wing—could not have been gleaned if drowned out by human voices. Though initially I believed my task was to map the sounds earwitnesses heard, the most lucid way to understand the crimes of the Assad regime was to listen to silence.

1. Amnesty International, 'Human Slaughterhouse' (2016), www.amnestyusa.org/files/human_slaughterhouse.pdf.

2. All quotes from Samer, Diab, Jamal, and Salam came from my interviews with them at Amnesty International Headquarters, Istanbul, on 11, 12, 13, and 14 April 2016 respectively.

3. To give some context, a 3db change in loudness is imperceptible and 5db is only just above the threshold at which we can perceive a difference. So, if witnesses' testimony only varies within 5db, it suggests consistent results.

4. 'Listening for the Amphibian Apocalypse', *CNN*, 9 January 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/11/world/vanishing-sutter-amphibian-extinction/index.html>.

5. Amnesty International, 'Human Slaughterhouse'.

6. Lisa Öhman, 'All Ears: Adults' and Children's Earwitness Testimony', PhD thesis, Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, 2013: 60. https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/32014/1/gupea_2077_32014_1.pdf.

7. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 42.

Listening to Answering Machines
Susan Schuppli

Oh, that's quite the beep.

Hello? Why is that thing still on? I don't know.

This is becoming irritating.

What do you mean you don't know?

Well, I said she was gonna take it and turn it right off, but she didn't do it.

Why can't you just ... You can do it. Just unplug it.

Hi, call me. I'm at the office. Something's wrong with your answering machine. I'm at the office.

Is Dad not home? No. Did he call you?

Well I tried to give him a call ... and no answer, no answer. Phone just kept on ringing. He's either on his way over ...

So there was no answering service? No.

You have to clear all his messages off the answering machine ... Okay and how do I do that? Oh wait, I think I know how.

Just keep pressing until it's all gone. And then start it up.

But, isn't there something inside?

I don't know Pat. It just keeps clicking away.

No, that's because I opened it. I just opened the thing and it went like that.

I'll let you go for now okay? Bye. Bye.

This is no message really, I just don't like to hang up when your recorder answers. I was just going to say be careful tonight, to come home in all this, what you say, ice pellets and what have you. Anyway, can't do that anymore, just hope you keep driving safely. Give me a call tomorrow, okay? Bye-bye now.

You're on the answering machine and I'm shittin' ... Oh god!

This is Blair, for Christ's sakes! Give me a call when you get in and we need to get down to some business. Goodbye! If this is an answering machine?

Hey Mel, how are you? [sound of ice cubes tinkling in glass] Good! I guess this machine kinda works, eh? It's majorly impressive. I'd just like to know that this comes with like a one-message guarantee? So like, if you're receiving this message, that means your warranty is now void, but if you didn't

receive this message then you'd be able to come back and I'd be able to refund the couple of beers you're going buy me for fixing the thing. Okay? Well, uh, have a good night, okay? Bye!

Hello. I keep calling 225-1826. It's one of my investment-property numbers, but, you know, I always get your answering machine. I'm not sure if your phone line is mixed up with my investment-property phone line. Please double check with Bell Canada and probably they will fix the problem. Thank you! Bye-bye.

Hi Renee, it's me. I was phoning you to ask if you could phone me and leave a message or two, preferably two, on this answering machine, cause it's my brother's and I picked it up and he said it wasn't working and I think I fixed it. Well, not really, he was just such a bonehead and I don't think it was broken in the first place. Please leave a message, phone back, leave one, just to make sure it's working, and I'll talk to you before you hang up the second time. Thanks very much, see you, bye.

That's a beep? Sounds more like a cricket. Okay Patty, I'm returning your call.

Good lord, are you never home? Hello, are you there? At least I got your machine this time. Last night, it refused to come on after the first time I called. Well, I'll try again later, bye.

For as long as I can remember, I have scoured thrift stores and searched through the offerings of weekend yard sales. These excursions always hold out the promise of finding that much sought-after vintage object or an item that someone else has deemed disposable but in which I might find renewed value. Early on, I was struck by the deeply personal inscriptions sometimes left in secondhand books; an activity now suggestive of another time when books were significant objects bestowed upon others to cherish for life. For a brief moment, reading the gestural intimacies written on the inside cover of a book would bring about a strange sense of connection with someone I would never meet—a quiet glimpse into their reality offered through the medium of inscription. In my thrift-store haunts, I have also been buying up discarded answering machines—those outmoded companions to landline telephones with their twin tapes tucked inside—and taking them home in the hope that the tapes carelessly left inside might carry traces of errant conversations and soulful messages; each recording reeling me into the lives of distant strangers. Each tape is an archive, not of the voice whose machine it was, but of all those who left their incoming messages behind.

In the early 1990s, digital voicemail arrived and a magnetic bounty ensued as machines and their tapes were successively donated to charity shops. My collection is comprised of a couple of hundred cassette and micro-cassette tapes as well as two reel-to-reel answering machines. Surprisingly, most owners neglected to take out their tapes or erase them prior to getting rid of their machines. While there are not always extended messages or

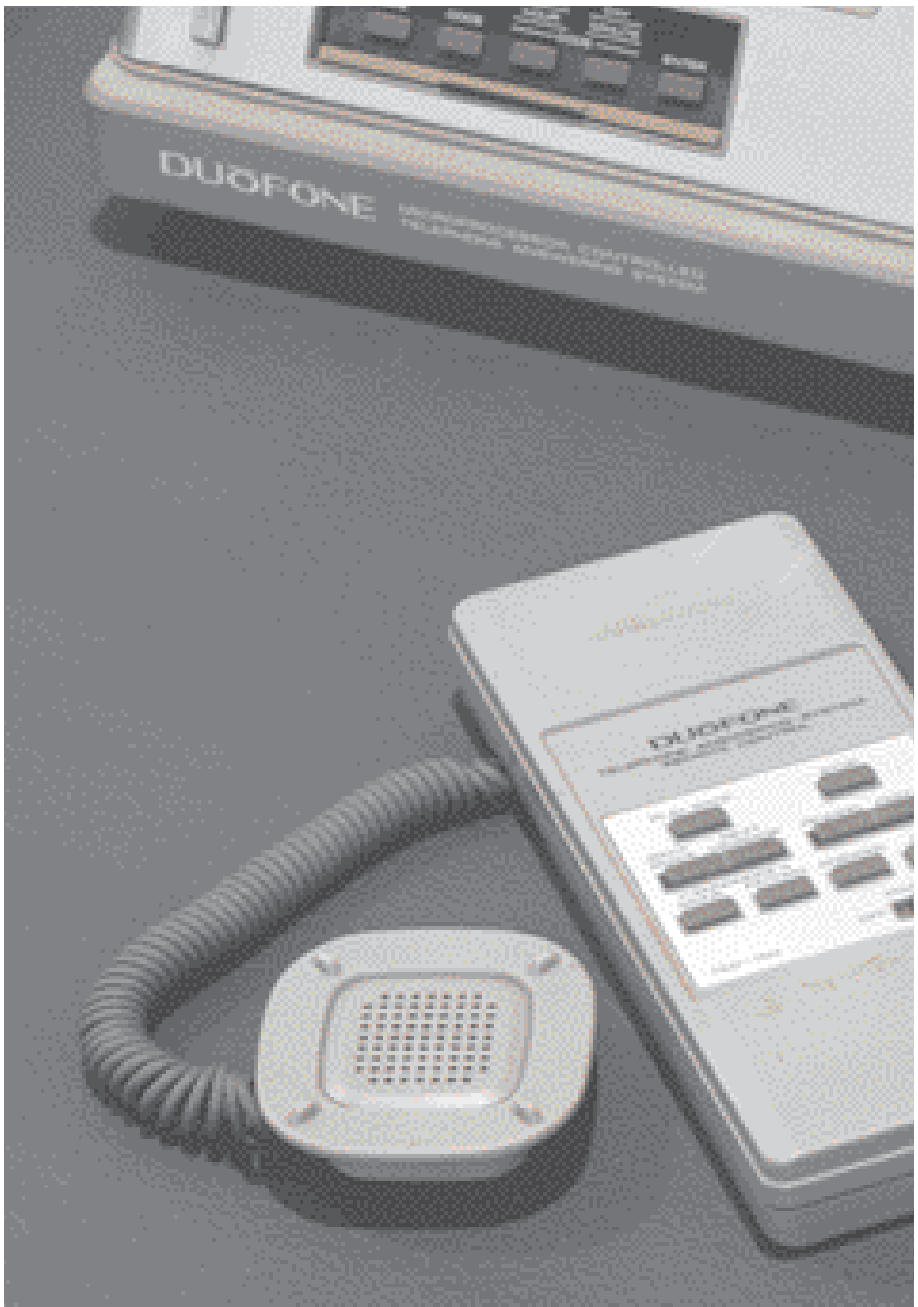
conversations left on those that I have acquired, more often than not there actually are. I bought my last tape about six years ago when the secondary market for this old technology finally disappeared, and I still own various machines for playback, including a reel-to-reel model dating back to the 1950s, which carries a series of messages about someone in a hospital. In as much as thrift stores gather and recycle the prosaic remains of daily life, they are both a pragmatic response to a culture of overabundance and a staple for those living in situations of precarity. I know full well that those I find myself drawn to through the material remains of these recording technologies might be of those experiencing strife or even have since perished. Once I happened upon an answering-machine tape that revealed the daily interactions of a couple of artists I vaguely knew from Toronto, a city more than two hours from where I was living at the time. This moment of sudden auditory recognition gave me pause, as I realised I had gained involuntary access into their private lives without their consent or knowledge, but I continued to listen with renewed interest. And, while my archive is entirely comprised of such fleeting personal disclosures, there is something poignant, even urgent, in reclaiming and caring for the acoustic afterlives of materials that have simply been abandoned to the vagaries of thrift-store bargain hunters.

My project *Listening to Answering Machines* presents gallery goers with an edited selection of material from my audio archive. A series of five wall-mounted single-cup headphones allows visitors to eavesdrop on various messages and conversations that were left on tape. Each

Listening to Answering Machines

listening station offers approximately five hours of different content. The quality of the tracks varies considerably, ranging from degraded tapes that had been registering incoming callers for years to relatively high-fidelity recordings. One hears things when listening to these tapes. There's a mother calling to find out if her daughter Tara is okay. She's worried about Tara's boyfriend harming her. 'You've got to go to the police', she repeatedly implores. Encountering such difficult messages among quotidian ones, I wonder: 'Where is Tara today? Is she still alive?' I have no idea, but a relationship tentatively develops as one gains momentary insight into the life of another. How to act in the face of such anonymous revelations?

Within the framework of New Zealand's Privacy Act 1993, as well as those of many other jurisdictions, it is *legal* for one party to secretly record a conversation without notifying the others if the recording is for their own use, whereas in a majority of Australian states (Queensland notwithstanding), explicit consent is required between all parties engaging in the conversation. The latitude permitted by this law in New Zealand recently came under scrutiny with the release of a recording made by then-National MP Jami-Lee Ross of a confidential conversation concerning internal party matters between himself and party leader Simon Bridges in October 2018. In this case, it wasn't the secret recording that was at issue but whether Ross had the right to go public with the contents of the conversation. The prohibition against breaching privacy generally holds in all jurisdictions, regardless of the one or two party consent rule, unless there is a compelling legal argument why such a release



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Fig. 10, 11 (above and left) Susan Schuppli *Listening to Answering Machines* 2018.
Photo: Christian Capurro

should be permitted; for example, if it provides evidence of criminal activity or wrong doing.¹
Dr Nicole Moreham, Senior Lecturer in Law at Victoria University of Wellington, explains:

The question then becomes whether there is a public interest in the content of the recording that is strong enough to outweigh the privacy interest or confidentiality interest. You have to show that for some reason the person you're playing it to has a legitimate interest in receiving it.²

New Zealand's telecommunication specifications go a step further, making a legal exception for the 'recording functions' of simple listening devices, such as answering machines and voice-messaging systems, whose primary function is capturing incoming information for playback. When service providers bring listening technologies to market or install them, they are bound by strict specifications governing their potential recording features. These requirements—and their notable exception for the now-obsolete answering machine—are highlighted in the 1990s guidelines set out by one New Zealand telecommunications company:

8.5 Recording functions

(1) There are legal considerations relating to the use of listening devices designed to record telephone conversations. Section

216 of the [New Zealand] Crimes Act 1962 (which includes a definition of such devices) makes it an offence to intentionally intercept a private communication by means of a listening device unless one of the permitted exceptions applies. One of these is that at least one party to the conversation must be aware that the conversation is being recorded.

* This clause does not relate to a simple answering machine or voice messaging system which records a message from a caller and is not capable of recording a both-way conversation. The caller is normally aware that the message is being recorded and makes a definite decision to proceed.

(2) The Privacy Act 1993 contains additional constraints on the use of recording devices. Use of a recording device to record a telephone conversation is deemed to be 'collection of personal information' under this Act. Generally speaking, the Act requires that such 'collection' shall only be carried out with the permission of the person concerned. The Privacy Act also requires that the information be obtained from the individual concerned, and sets strict conditions as to what information is being collected, what it is to be used for, and to whom it may be disclosed.³



Fig. 12 Susan Schuppli *Listening to Answering Machines* 2018, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2018. Photo: Christian Capurro

Listening to Answering Machines

Automated recordings made by machines when no one is home or when someone declines to pick up the phone are positioned as a functional kind of listening in which a caller leaves perfunctory information to be retrieved by a recipient at a later date. This assumes the legal conditions governing the expedient privacy between callers and recipients of their messages can be securely enacted by the technological operations of machines without the possibility of ‘eavesdropping’ by unsolicited listeners, or indeed without any extended temporal delay that could open up the circuits of listening to other non-sanctioned users that might stumble upon them later. However, the technical prospect of being able to listen in on confidential exchanges and missives has a long history and includes a wide array of machine-mediated relations, from the prying curiosity of early switchboard operators, the clandestine operations of wiretapping, and other snooping devices to consumer services such as telephone party lines shared between neighbours and automated telephone answering machines. Albeit the scale of contemporary overhearing on the part of states and their corporate affiliates has shifted radically as revealed by the Snowden files—a condition that informs the broad parameters of my artwork.

The discovery that AI-assisted devices—such as Amazon’s Echo, Apple’s HomePod, and Google’s Home Hub—are at times engaged in algorithmic overhearing and reporting back to their makers obviously challenges the basic tenets of a Privacy Act that presupposes machinic listening and recording as always initiated by humans fully apprised of the fact of signal

relay.⁴ The ubiquitous message encountered in automated phone networks alerting us to the possibility that our call may be recorded ‘for purposes of training and quality control’ is a legal requirement that formalises the relationship between transmission, reception, and inscription.

This call may be monitored or recorded for quality-assurance purposes.

Please leave your message, name, number, time, and date at which you called, after the beep.

This message is a legacy of the high-pitched telephonic warning tone known as ‘the beep’, a quasi-legal principle embedded in all answerphone systems, reminding us of our entry into a contractual relation with a machine that could record our voice. While beep-tone warnings and greetings by telemarketers are generally considered sufficient for alerting a listener to the fact that their conversation is being monitored, the possibility that their private communication is being recorded for purposes other than that expressly presented by a caller—whether for the declared aim of improving services or the more covert one of collecting consumer data—should rightly trouble our understanding of implied consent. But again, New Zealand’s laws are murky on this issue, as the telemarketing agent that contacts you could themselves, in principle, give legal consent to record the call, given that they are one of the parties engaged in communication with you. It is, as I have already emphasised, the

Listening to Answering Machines

‘making public’ of a recording that is really at issue legally, not the contravention of a privacy shielded by the beep or the service representative’s generic greeting. However, this question of public disclosure gains in complexity once the artist enters the scene.

When one listens to an answering machine that someone once had in their home, what one is actually privy to is the entire network of relations that were attached to that person. The incoming-message tape is composed of many iterative expressions that accrue information over time, combining to build a provisional portrait. If someone is experiencing financial problems their tape will likely contain messages from banks, shops, and even legal agencies trying to arrange payment or recoup funds. Likewise, if someone is experiencing difficulties in a personal relationship, their messages will tend to reflect this. Because these machines had the capacity to record on both sides of a cassette tape and in extended-play mode (reducing quality but doubling the available recording time), messages accumulated one after the other for up to four hours per tape. Although the owner of the answering machine might leave a short outgoing message stating their name and detailing instructions to a prospective caller, as was common practice at the time, they are rendered into presence by virtue of their absence—the fact they are not at home to answer the phone.

Another providential feature of these predigital-voicemail systems was their temporal quirkiness. If the phone rang repeatedly without someone picking up fast enough and physically pressing ‘stop’, the machines would automatically start recording. They weren’t designed to stop

recording if the phone was answered *after* the recording function had engaged. On many occasions, extended conversations were recorded unbeknownst to both speakers, who chatted away never realising that their intimacies would one day be sold off as mere detritus—the technological contrivances of another time—let alone make their way into an art exhibition. The authors of privacy acts and telecommunications specifications, with their explicit clauses pertaining to the recording functions of voicemail systems, never anticipated that the unintentional misuse of machines' technical features could result in neither party being aware their exchange was being recorded. The anomaly would only be revealed if the recipient rewound the tape and replayed all their messages. But, since the machines were designed to operate in a perpetual loop of endless recording, few of the tapes I found were ever wiped clean. Nor did regulatory considerations seem to recognise that answering machines could actually record lengthy conversations between reciprocal parties, assuming that their more-routine role in relaying messages concerning missed appointments and upcoming engagements was unidirectional and that machines would always be used as intended. The artist—whose work is largely about making things public—is, of course, not factored into these considerations. This doesn't, by default, grant us wholesale permission to use the machines and tapes otherwise, rather it reinforces the necessity for taking ethical responsibility for our actions.

With respect to my project, the fact that its source materials were already subsumed into an economy of secondhand goods for

Listening to Answering Machines

public offer likely protects me from any legal action concerning the reuse of someone else's property. However, I would contend that moral rights still accrue to the materials, demanding they be treated with respect and dignity in their repurposing. The magnetic remainder that comprises *Listening to Answering Machines*, while edited into extended audio tracks, has largely maintained the integrity of their original recordings. Machine noise, beeps, clicks, and glitches, as well as filler words ('um', 'uh', 'well', 'so', 'you know', 'eh', and 'like'), all remain part of the acoustic experience, as do repetitions, interruptions, and incomplete utterances.

Someone characterised these tracks as tedious:

I get almost instantly bored when I start listening to these answering machine tapes because so much of it is so boring and none of it has any significance immediately. Though some of it may become significant at some point. But you don't necessarily know that.

A certain stamina is required to listen at length to these extended, oftentimes mundane recordings. Because the portraits they generate are constructed in real time, we need to stay with the telephonic trouble, as Donna Haraway might enjoin. I am reminded of a scene in Chantal Akerman's 1976 film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, in which the main character makes a cup of coffee in real time. On the one hand, it's excruciating to watch because time passes so slowly. On the

other, it's riveting—a mediation on the minor dramas of everyday life. I'd like to think my work in *Eavesdropping* is indebted to Akerman's filmic commitment towards such daily rituals—an auditory reverie on the modes of existence of domesticated technical objects and the particular subjectivities they produce.⁵

Yet, contrary to much archival research within the humanities, there is almost an anti-archival momentum to my project, despite its glacial pacing. Because we don't have a specific context for the original recordings, we are not able to locate their inferred subjects, except perhaps geographically in relation to clues parsed out by callers. While portraits do emerge, there is no possibility of reconstructing coherent pasts out of these fragmentary traces and thus also no specific future for the imagined subjects of our hearing. 'It strikes me', said James Parker, co-curator of *Eavesdropping*,

that one of the interesting things about this particular work is that, in addition to the discomfort produced by that kind of intimacy, there is also an unmanageability and excessive nature to the project. It's quite an odd feeling to have a sense of intimacy on such an unimaginable scale. There's twenty-five hours worth of recordings and I haven't listened to all of it. I know that you have, Susan ... You get a sense of vertigo from this very direct connection that also explodes out into this extraordinary geography

over which you've connected everybody and their intimacies. I don't know. I find that a kind of strange experience.⁶

Similarly, Georgia Hutchison, from Liquid Architecture, suggested that the project produces a surplus of information that challenges its purported intimacy. 'The excess produces an ambivalence. Not knowing what to do, not knowing how to proceed, because, like you said, the listener is not located in any particular context.'

Is this the same excess that underscores our seeming inability to act when faced with the tragedy of countless humanitarian crises? I'm not sure. Certainly, the disclosure of suffering is by no means contracted to the public sphere as a call to action or prompt for intervention. Regardless of being witness to an ever-increasing surge of media—still and moving, uploaded and streaming—that clearly document self-evident human-rights abuses of citizens on the part of the state, the rhetorical capacity of such materials to produce justice has often failed miserably.⁷ In as much as there's a gruelling pace to the work at the level of its scale and informational quotient, it's also amazing how cavalier many of the recorded comments are when it comes to people discussing the distress of friends and family. Even when someone has just died, as is chronicled by two telephone conversations, laughter and conviviality ensue. It isn't sadness or even voyeurism that we experience in listening in on these seemingly endless conversations, but an overwhelming sense of their authenticity and, by extension, our paralysis.

I feel an abiding responsibility to preserve such abandoned recordings, as I know the tapes were simply thrown out, available for anybody to buy and to do anything with. The reclamation and presentation of these recordings, by contrast, tries to overturn their status as useless and inconsequential. Moreover, in soliciting the gallery goer to become an earwitness, the project functions as a prompt for engaging in a politics and ethics of listening that is crucial for our times, especially as state and corporate interests increasingly conspire to gain access to and capture and control our sonic worlds. The circumvention of legal protocols that today's domesticated surveillant devices and their virtual assistants enact, whether accidentally or by design (as appears to be the case), further extends the externalised control over our personal data and private lives. What, for example, does it mean for a worker at the NSA, GCHQ, or Amazon to participate in a programme of sanctioned surveillance through their own labour practices and potential capacities to oversee or overhear? While the law and regulatory regimes have tried to organise the thresholds of privacy, and the degrees of their permissible transgression or even legitimate interception, the ethical frameworks that might organise a political response to various modes of listening are enacted each time the event of listening takes place or is implicated, and even by virtue of its exclusion. Not being listened to is as powerful a form of coercive social control as are invasive forms of passive listening.

The outdated answering machine designates a moment of transition between a

Listening to Answering Machines

time when the symmetry between the caller and the recording device was still functioning on a very domesticated level in a one-to-one relationship. Whereas we now know that processes of transmission, reception, and inscription would scale up in the years to come, dramatically skewing the correlation between sender and receiver. In digitising my audio archive and shifting the answering machine to the institutional context of the art gallery—where an installation composed of twenty-five hours of recorded material awaits—we temporarily cross over into the same networked and scalar condition of contemporary eavesdropping that my project sets out to unfold and critique. But as our ear presses up against the black rubber of the single-cup headphone, listening is transformed into an act of critical proximity whereby we attune ourselves to the lives of others. This ethical moment of overhearing invites political reflection despite the scale of the task at hand, or should I say ‘at ear’.

1. See Brenton Allen, ‘Legality of Secretly Recording Conversations in Australia’, *MST Lawyers*, 30 April 2015, www.mst.com.au/legality-of-secretly-recording-conversations-in-australia/.

2. Nicole Moreham, ‘Phone Recordings: What’s Legal and What’s Not’, *Radio New Zealand*, 18 October 2018, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/>

programmes/afternoons/audio/2018667395/phone-recordings-what-s-legal-and-what-s-not.

3. ‘Several Specifications (PTC 202, 211, 212, etc), each specifying the Telepermit requirements for specific types of product, were published in the period 1988–1990 to coincide with the deregulation of customer premises equipment. Since

then, changes in both international standards and the Telecom PSTN have taken place and there have been significant advances in technology. Also, there have been many changes in terminal equipment design and capabilities over the same period with a tendency for earlier single purpose products to be replaced by integrated or multi-purpose

products. These changes have occurred gradually and they now justify a complete review of the original PTC Specification content and format.' In 'Permit to Connect/PTC 200: Requirements for Analogue Telecommunications Equipment', in *Telecom* (Wellington: New Zealand Government, 1988), 33.


4. See Sean Dockray's work *Always Learning* in the *Eavesdropping* exhibition. It stages a conversation between three devices—an Amazon Echo, a Google Home Assistant, and an Apple HomePod—about the philosophical, moral, and political implications of networked machine listening. Throughout the conversation, the devices anticipate an imminent update after which they will not only understand words but all sounds.

5. See Lindsay Zoladz, 'On Chantal Akerman: Films on How to Be a Woman Alone', *Vulture*, 7 October 2015, www.vulture.com/2015/10/lindsay-zoladz-on-chantal-akerman.html. See also Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958), Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove trans. (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2017).


6. From a conversation with Susan Schuppli, Douglas Kahn, James Parker, Joel Stern, Georgia Hutchinson, Sam Kidel, and others, at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, 30 July 2018.

7. See Thomas Keenan, 'Publicity and Indifference (Sarajevo on Television)', *PMLA*, vol. 117, no. 1, 2002: 104–16.


Listening to Answering Machines




[long beep] Hello mum and dad, this is Taylor. If one of you at all is there, please pick up. Pleasse, please pick up if you're there.



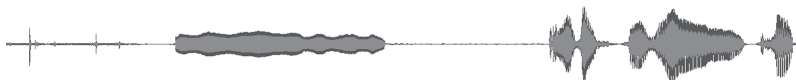
[long beep] This is Taylor. My exams yesterday were from eight until about, you know, 1:30 or 1:20 or something, and, uh, I was supposed to appear in court between the times of 8:30 and 1:30. I didn't look too closely at this ticket, ah so I missed my court appearance. And uh, I don't know, uh, maybe somebody could call me back.



[long beep] Oh my god, there's a bazillion messages on there. It's Chris. I know you're out today because Jimmy called me and I talked to him for a little bit and he said you guys had just left. So I'm not sure, you'll probably be home later and I'm gonna go to sleep because we've had sort of a rough day cause two of the kids were sick, so I've been up all night and I'll probably fall asleep. So, I love you, and I'll call you either Sunday or Monday. And um, I might try to call back like in twenty minutes if I'm still awake. Okay, I'll talk to you later and I'm sure your day is better than yesterday. Love you sweetie, bye.



[long pulsing beep] Hi Samantha, it's Darren calling. Uh, just wondered what you're up to Saturday night, the 24th. Apparently there's a buck and doe at the arena and I just wanna know what you're up to. Anyways, I'll maybe see if I can get hold of you tomorrow or whatever. Anyways, take it easy, bye.



[beep] Either see you or talk to you later.

Okay.

I love you.

Be careful.

Okay.

Alright.

See you okay?

Okay.

Bye.

I love you.

I love you too.

Bye-bye.

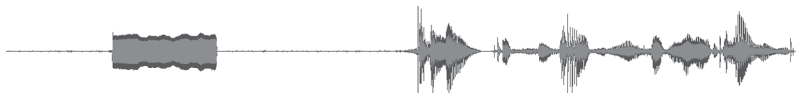
Bye.



[flutter + series of short beeps] Wow, you guys have a lot of messages to go through. Um, it's quarter to seven, I'm at work but I'll be back home in my apartment at around 7:30. Give me a call there. Hope when you guys are ready to go to Cracker, okay, and we'll figure something out. Talk to you later. Bye.

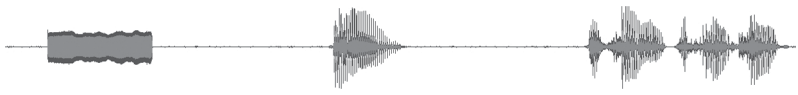


[beep] Hi Peter and Lynn. It's seven o'clock and you're not home so Brad and I are just sitting here chilling out. Give us a call the minute you walk in and we'll come pick you up in the big wagon of love. Talk to you soon. Bye bye.




[short beep] Hello. This is Avenue Video calling for Jennifer Zarkutney about Heathers. It was due back on the 25th of July, we would really appreciate it if you could bring it back as soon as possible. As I said the last time I called,


if there is a problem, please call me.
Thank you.




[short beep] Wow, your ears are probably tired of listening to that shitload of messages you got before this one. It's Friday, the 14th August. I believe you're gonna be home soon, which is great. Last night Ben and I broke up. We cried three hours on the phone from 11:00 until 2:00; and we decided it's best that we break up because it's getting too stressful for him since he has no plan on leaving Guy and he had to take a reduced workload and stuff like that. So, it was four weeks of bliss, let me tell you, we had lots of fun, and it's all come to an end. Anyways, I thought I'd call you because I miss you. If you don't hear from me this weekend, if you do get home this weekend, you know, I'm gonna be around but I'm gonna be pretty depressed. So, I'm listening to all the saddest songs I could find. I just can't believe it Ginnelle, he's the perfect man. Well, he's not the perfect man, but he was fun, we had lots of fun together; and none of it was sex, which was excellent. You know, none of it was sex, we had fun and it wasn't sexual fun, we had so much fun together. Wow. He's like a male version of you actually. Wow. Anyways, that's life. So, I'll call when you get ... well call me when you get back just so I know that you're home, okay? Okay, I hope you had a good time. Mmm-bye.




[short beep] Hi Baby, it's me, where are you? Pick up the phone ... Hellooo?




[short beep] Hello Dennis. Give me a call. I'm at home. Talk to you later. Love you. Bye.




[short beep] Hi Dennis and Tina, this is Chris from CNAC Finance. I need either one of you to give me a call as soon as you get this message. 587-5559. It's 9:15 on Monday morning.



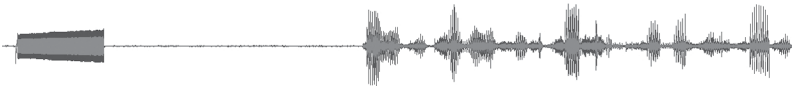
[short beep] Holy, this is Henry Shamonski, Probation Officer, Plymouth Court calling. Dennis, listen I just called the agency over in Brockton. They said you owe forty bucks and two AA meetings; that your case is coming up November the 9th. You also owe money to the court. Let's get moving on this thing. Okay. We can get rid of this thing on 11/9. Give me a call if you got any questions, 508-747-0500, extension 329.




[short beep] Hello, this is an important message for Tina Porday. Please call the Massachusetts Electrics Customer Service Centre at 1-800-322-3223. Thank you.




[short beep] Hi Dennis and Tina. This is Chris from CNAC Finance. Just calling to confirm your payment for today. Give me a call as soon as you get this message. The number here is 587-5559.




[short beep] Dennis and Tina. This is Chris from CNAC Finance. You guys were supposed to be in yesterday. You broke a commitment. I need you to give me a call as soon as you get this message. It's 587-5559.




[short beep] Hello Dennis. I'll talk to you later.
I love you. Bye.



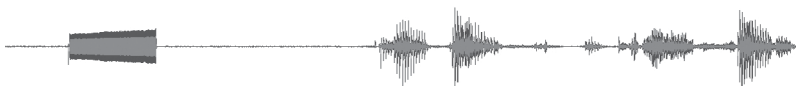
[short beep] Tina or Dennis. This is Chris from CNAC
Finance. I need you guys to give me a call. Tell
me what time you'll be in today to make your
payment. 587-5559.




[short beep] Dennis or Tina. This is Chris from CNAC
Finance. I need one of you to give me a call.
Let me know what's going on. All I expect is a
call back, courtesy of a call back. All right.
The number here is 587-5559. It is 9:30 on
Saturday morning.




[short beep] Hello Dennis, I'm just returning your
call. Thanks for calling. I'm working days this
week but tomorrow night I won't be home till 9:30.
If you wanna give me a call tonight or after 9:30
tomorrow. Talk to you later. Love you. Bye.




[short beep] Nine thousand, and today is Saturday at
approximately noontime.




[repeated beeps] John, pick up the phone. John, pick
up the phone. John, yeah, pick up the phone.




[repeated beeps] Hi John. It's Majid, can you give me a call please, 633-3488. I wonder if you can leave a cheque in the mailbox for me. Thank you. [phone hung up]




Um, I'll try get a hold of you a little later. Bye, bye. [phone hung up]



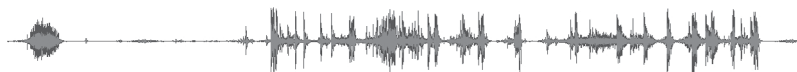
Big deal. You ain't home, I ain't there. Talk to you later when you get there, and you wanna listen to this. Okay. Bye. [phone hung up]



Yeah, Mark, it's Don calling. Give me a page when you get in please. Talk to you later.



[repeated beeps] Hi Kim, it's Shelley. Nice to know that you guys think that I made Lisa disown you. For your information she disowned you long before anything else happened. Okay? And you're the one that asked me to help you. If you didn't want my help you shouldn't have fuckin' come to me in the first place. Bitch! [phone hung up]



Hello, why didn't you phone? [repeated beeps] Hi Kim,
is anyone home? Kim. Okay, phone me when you get
home. Bye, bye.



[long beeps] With who?
With your roommate.
Well, I don't understand.
Well, you know, like you coming home drinking or
something and both of you drinking and you
decide that roll in the sack because the
hormones are live.
Well, I think we're adults, we can handle it.
Well, I don't think any of us adults ever handle it
very well.
Mmm ... well.
You know, it just doesn't happen that way when you've
been drinking, you know?
Right.
Had you met her before?
Yeah, I'd met her a few times.
Oh. Where does she work?
Harpers ... Seacrest, or something like that.
That's a law firm.
Oh, oh? And she's got a car?
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah. Yeah, both park in the garage, right?
Yeah, she says she doesn't want to. She's worried
that she'd bang into something, but ...
She's paying for it, what the hell. So, \$350. It's
gonna help you a lot. Wait till Stephanie hears
about this.
Why?
I don't know. It just burned her a little bit.
I don't care if she ever finds out; it's none of her
business, that's the way I look at it.
Well it isn't.
I got a letter from her family today. A little card.
I had sent them a card after it was over just
saying, you know, I'm sorry the way things
turned out. And I'd met them over the holidays,
and they enjoyed their holidays. Her mum just

basically said, thanks, and that they were all heartbroken, they were gonna miss me and that they want me to stay in school and shit like that, but you know. So, that was nice, you know. Yeah, they will really miss you, an awful lot. Yeah, but what you gonna do?



[Automated voice: Thursday, 2:26pm] [long beep]


Hello, it's me, your date. And, anyways, I know you have that fibre optic thing happening, so called to leave you a message. Saying we came to Wendy's now we're down the road at Patty's. Having big drinks, having a great time talking about you, and all your fuckin' dirty-dog deeds, you fuckin' cock-sucking councillor. Anyways, thought maybe you'd wanna hear from me; knew you would. Don't even know what time it is as a matter of fact, and everyone's left the room. So, anyways, I don't even know the number here for you to call me back. [Laughing] and I don't know what this message is. So, I'll keep in touch. Okay, goodbye!



[long beep] Hello, I'm starting to fuckin' think, man, maybe you're fuckin' ignoring me I don't know, but fuck I need a date. Anyways, call me. We left Patty's, and now we're at Wendy's. The fuckin'... I think it's the 29 98, the fuckin' sale-price item. Okay, well, anyways, call me. Bye, bye.




[long beep] Glen, call me.



[long beep] Yeah, Glen, it's Mark. Can you give me a call? I'm in the 70-18. Give me a call whenever you get in. Thanks, talk to you later.




[long beep] Glen, call me.




[long beep] Glen, call me.



[long beep] Call me.




[long beep] Glen! Call me! Danesh don't you hang ...



[long beep] Yeah, well, that goes for Glen too.




[long beep] [phone hung up]




[long beep] Glen, please call me.



[long beep] Glen, you promised.



[long beep] Oh, hi Linda. I was just giving you a call. Haven't talked to you in a long time, just wondering how you were doing. Well, if you're home, you know, early before my bedtime, give me a call. Bye.




[long beep] Sick, like, sick, sick, sick. Went to work, puked my guts out ... nerves. And uh, then they said, well why don't you go home? So I thought, well I'm gonna go home and lie down for a while and then phone me if it gets really busy and I'll come back, or whatever. And it was dead ...

See, now he's even affecting your work, for fuck's sakes.

Well, no kidding, and it's living too fuckin' close. Yeah.

It's like, it's just too ... oh he's here. I'll call you back. Okay, bye.



[long beep] Well I'll see you Thursday, 12:30. It'll be non-smoking. I've made sure of that.

And did you see in the paper where, um ... ?

Yeah.

So, I asked Joyce, I said, 'Was Donna a smoker?'

And she said, 'Yeah, remember?' And I said, 'I wasn't too sure.'

Yeah, she was.

And I thought maybe her heart condition may have developed from her smoking. If it was the heart, because they asked me to send donations to the Heart Fund, so, it could have been something that quick.

Either that or drugs that she was taking years ago, you know, might have been in her system yet.
Oh, you never know. Because, uh, I think, hopefully, she was always being checked over by her doctor because of her pregnancies and everything. And uh, but, it's too late now. Okay, dear, well we'll see you on Thursday and we'll have a good time.

Okay.

Okay, bye, bye.

Alright, bye.



[long beep] ... yesterday morning, in her purse, and I was laughing with Gussey. She had little jams, you know, stuck away in her purse, little cups, the medicine cups and some other things she must have had a dessert in napkins. Plastic forks and knives all squirreled away in her purse for when she went home, eh? Well, you know what she was like. Well I was laughing and we were cleaning her purse out knowing everything and we were just kind of digging away there you know. Ha, ha! Typical Grandma, you know?

Yes, it is.

God dang, don't throw anything out. If we're not gonna eat it, you squirrel that away and you keep it, whether it rots, you know, you got that.

The problem is, is that, Aunt Dolores, I think I've inherited that gene.

Oh, no!

Tucked away in my cedar chest I have every card that I've ever been given for the last 15 years...

Oh my god!

There's scrapbooks and labelled with the year and all that sort of thing. God, and I thought to myself, whenever I die they're gonna laugh their heads off at me.

Oh, poor old Grandma.

It's too bad but boy am I ever glad that ...

She's lived a darn good life.

Up until this year she didn't have a damn thing ...

No, and this all seemed to just zip, zip, zip and all of a sudden she's gone. I said to Mike, can't believe it. Like, when Norrie was going to see her towards the end there in the summertime, I

sat in the truck, I couldn't take it anymore; it's just my stomach ... I just couldn't take her, wanting to go home, and she'd give Norrie hell. I said to Mike, 'I can't handle it, like my nerves are just too bad, so I'll sit in the truck and read a book. I'm sorry.' I said, 'We'll make a deal. When my mother gets sick in the nursing home I'll never, ever, ever, ever ask you to come in with me. I promise I won't.' Because I went in at first, like I said, and I just couldn't take it. I just ... oh, man.

I got a few phone calls too, Aunt Dolores, saying 'Please take home.'

I know. You know, that was awful hard on Norrie's nerves; his blood pressure went up sky high.

Well, I said to Dad it must be at stroke level because ...

Yeah, it was, till he got on those pills the doctor put him on. He's gonna stay on them for a while till it's all over, because still there's a lot to do, like getting rid of the house; and then we've gotta clean it up. You know all the stuff that's in that house.

Whenever you pick, yeah, I'm sure you'll pick a day and whenever you do let me know because I am around, especially on the weekends; a little harder for me during the week.

Yeah, well us too. Well, not me, but him.

But I don't mind taking a Saturday or a Sunday and giving you guys a hand. Cleaning is one thing I know how to do.

Yeah, it would be nice to be to, sounds awful, but dump that house and be rid of the ... you know, the worry of it.

I was a bit concerned, um, about that house. I know you can't do anything but there was a big part of me that said, 'Geez, you know, she's never gonna go home. Relieve the family of the responsibility of having it not broken into.' Like, I've had two break-ins this year.

That's what your dad said.

And I know what it feels like to go home into that sort of crime. You know, you'd feel bad. Uncle Norrie and you would walk in there and you'd wonder, you know, we were here a day or two ago, and, by god, you know, we can't stay here. And all of a sudden it's ransacked and then you'd have that to contend with you know.

Well, everybody can get in there now when this is over and take what they want out, and the rest

can go to the auction or whatever they want to do with it and put that house up for sale, and it won't go for much. And, I doubt it anyways. So, if we can sell it right away then, we're hoping and praying because Norrie's had enough of that.

Well, of course he has, and certainly I don't mind giving a hand. And, uh, in terms of, uh, getting rid of things or cleaning things up for the sale, give me a call I'll be glad to help.

Thanks, we'll have to wait and see what happens.

We've gotta get this funeral over with first.

Yeah, one step at a time.

We went out and bought her a new dress because that blue dress she had, well I had it dry-cleaned and I looked at it and it was just filthy. It's washable but I thought, 'Ew, I don't wanna touch it.' It was so dirty, Linda, and it kinda smelt like BO. So I sent it over to the drycleaners here and cost ten bucks and I just hung it up in the closet in the package. And I was talking to Sheila at the nursing home last night. She said, 'That dress has spots on it and I wonder if they came out.' So I thought to myself, 'Oh, shit.' So as soon as we got home I looked at it. Thank god I did. And then Norrie and I spent a morning going around Masonville and we got her a nice dress. That's what I said yesterday to Doreen, I said, 'You know if Grandma knew what she paid for this dress she'd have a fit.' Ha, ha, you know what she was like with her money.

Pretty tight.

I said she'd kill us! But she'll never know because it was about a \$300 dress but, of course, it was sale, it was after Christmas. It was a hundred and something anyway, but it's a nice green dress. It looks like something that would ... hopefully it'll look nice on her.

I hope so.

So, anyways Chuck is kinda debating on a closed coffin, he was telling Doreen, because of the gangrene.

Mmm ... well.

And so we'll see.

Yes. You know there are some things that maybe ... there's been a tradition in the family for open caskets and all that sort of thing. But, you know, there are some things better left to the last time you saw her, you know?

Well it depends like, and we haven't heard anything

today, like unless Norrie has out in Parkhill. Maybe tomorrow it'll be open, and then they'll keep it closed. Well Tuesday's the funeral anyway.

Well, I don't know. I know nothing about that sort of stuff.

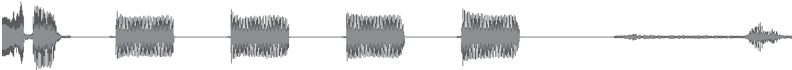
Yeah, I don't either but I'm learning a lot.

More than you ever thought you needed to know.

More than I need to know, but anyhow. Like we got to Zurich yesterday. You probably heard this story. Norrie and I talked with Chuck and we thought everything was gonna be fine. We never slept all night after Anne called here, anyways, get to Zurich at about quarter-to-nine, and pick up all this stuff. Well she's still in the room.

Really?

Ah, ha! 'We can't get a hold of Doctor Wallace, he hasn't been in all night. Can't get a hold of the doctor this morning.' We're thinking, Oh, my, woah, what are we gonna do now? So we go down to Mark's and we leave her number there. We had a cup of coffee, with Mark. So, phone rings, and we're just about done our coffee and it's the nursing home. Well, they'll be here about 11. And Mark says, 'Anyways, Dr Wallace is on holiday.'



[repeated beeps] Angela, I wish the heck if you're home you'd pick up the phone. I don't know how I'm supposed to talk to you if you're not there.



[long beep] Okay.

Okay.

Yeah.

You wanna bring the boys over or ...

Yeah, I could drop them off.

Okay.

Okay?

What time?

Well, what time do you want me to drop them off?

It doesn't matter.

Okay, well they're watching TV. It's not very long.

Listening to Answering Machines

They've done their ... Michael done his homework
and that. They wanna ride their bikes so darn
bad.
Okay.
Okay?
Yeah.
Bye.
Bye, bye. [phone hung up]

[long beep] It was Friday night, yeah.
So it was yesterday morning that she died?
Yeah, it was one o'clock in the morning.
Wow.
Yeah. But, I mean ... I would have gave up, like,
friggin' eight months ago, for god's sake.
Like, you think you would, but if you were there ...
Yeah, it's different, I guess.
And, you know, you think about it. Like, of course
you don't have kids but me being a mother, it's
like, well no one can do it as good as me, no
matter who you are.
Yeah, that's right.
So, it's more or less for them you fight, not for
yourself.
Oh, that's exactly ... she ... it was all because
of her kids and her husband, you know. It's
awful, I mean it's just so friggin' sad, like. I
don't know now what's gonna happen I guess, I'm
assuming that, you know, he's gonna have to get
eventually a live-in nanny or something. Like,
how do you say that? What are you gonna do now,
Bob?
How old are the kids?
Well, the three oldest boys are old, like ... They had
three boys and they're like twenty, eighteen, and
sixteen. And then they didn't have kids for a long
time. Actually he had a vasectomy and then they
decided ...
He had it reversed.
Yeah, and they decided, okay we're gonna have kids. Then
they started and she had a little girl that died.
Right.
And then they didn't have kids for a little bit, and
then all of a sudden they started to have kids, and
then they had five kids. They had a set of twins.
Oh, gosh.

Yeah, so the youngest is three ...

Oh dear.

And then the twins are five, and then Katie the little girl is six ... and Matthew's, no, Katie's seven and Matthew's nine.

Oh, so he does have his hands full.

Oh, fricken' right he does. Like, I mean, well, since November, like since I went there, there's been always somebody there, like there's you know ... cause his family and our family, everybody's taking a turn and stayed, so he's always had somebody there, and I don't really know what the plan is now. Someone had said that his sister from Vancouver is coming for a while.

Oh, that would be nice.

Yeah, staying for like a couple of months or something. But, I don't know, like he's gonna have to friggin' get off the pot. Maybe he's already done all that, you know. We don't know what they ...

And you don't know what kind of plan ... She probably, you know, it's like Nancy Gore, I mean she had everything done, arranged and figured out.

Yep.

And it was ... she even had the kids prepared.

Oh, wow. I guess they did talk to them, you know, like if it went this way what was going to happen and stuff. And, and, you know, I mean, you can talk to them about it but whether it actually happens it is a different thing.

Well, exactly. I mean, you think you're ready but it's a shock. It's still, you know, it's not something that you just go, oh well, like you knew. You know, it's still very hard.

I don't know, it's just, I mean I am relieved in the sense that I don't have to friggin' go and see her, like she's just ... oh, it was awful.

Really?

Oh, my god, Kim was just getting so bad that, like, you'd be crying just even going. Cause she was just fading away to nothing. Well, she hadn't ate in the last five days. She didn't eat one thing.

Was she, like, how do I wanna say ... like she could talk and everything right till the end?

Yeah well, near the end, the last couple of days, they really had her cranked up on morphine, like extremely high, so she couldn't really talk, because, you know when you have your mouth open when you breathe, like your throat gets all ... ?

Yeah.

Well, she, I guess her throat got so raw and everything that she couldn't breathe, like she couldn't talk, and so it was very, very hard to understand her. But up till like the last couple of days, yeah, you could still understand what she was saying. You had to listen real carefully because she was so weak, eh. But, yes, she was pretty ...

Wow.

Yeah, it was weird. Like if you did something that she didn't like, she would friggin' tell you. I think on Wednesday she wanted a drink so I brought the water. She goes, 'Did I not finish my coke?' 'Oh, you want coke, okay?' So I bring her coke and then it was like, I go, 'Okay, I have the straw right by your mouth.' And she goes, 'No!' And so I had to take the straw back, 'Okay, I'm holding the glass now.' 'No!' She friggin' like moves my hand and takes the whole glass herself and starts drinking it.

Really?

Yes. You know, then the next day it was like friggin' totally downhill from there, you know. It was just like every step was so drastic, it was weird. But yeah, it's so good that she's gone.

You don't wish that on anybody. I mean look at Aunt Marge and Aunt Florence. You know, after a while it's, like, okay. You lay in a hospital bed, you can't move, you can't do anything.

She said the same thing. She goes, 'I'm not living, this is not living, I've had enough.' And she just turned forty. She just had her fortieth birthday on Saturday.

Wow.

And you know what she friggin' did? She's just like amazing. Because she's in the hospital she thought that it would be easier for everybody else if she went home for her birthday. So they gave her a day pass. The doctor didn't want to, but he said, 'Okay, if you really wanna go I'll give you a day pass.' So she said, and she's really sick at this point, and she goes, 'Yeah, I'm gonna go home so Bob doesn't have to bring the kids and everybody can just be at home.' She gets in the ambulance, they get her in the ambulance and everything. They did the loop like, out and around. The ambulance guy that's in the back with her just said, 'No way, this is too hard on you; you're not going.' So they brought her back to the hospital, which wasted almost her whole day, and then we all get

to the hospital and she's apologising to us all because she couldn't make it home.

What made them decide she couldn't do it?

Just too much pain, like the least little bump and everything. Like, just, she just couldn't do it. She's crying and so sorry that she couldn't go, that we'd all have to friggin' get out of the way and come back and visit her ... It's like, I think it's okay?

Well exactly. Oh my God.

Yeah. Like it was heart-wrenching that day, it was friggin' awful. But, uh, and plus I don't think she wanted the little wee kids to be at the hospital, like she thought that that was too hard. So that's why she wanted to go home. Like their three older boys always were there but the younger ones didn't come. She didn't want them to come.

Well, and they're young.

Yeah, she didn't want that memory for them, to see her so sick.

That's right.

And especially for the little nine-year old. He'd know what was going on, so she didn't want that. So, I mean, today is gonna be awful. Well, it'll be lively with all the kids, I'll tell you that.

They're all gonna go?

I'm sure Bob will bring them, I'm sure.

Wow.

I don't know, but I would imagine that that's the plan.

Wow.

Let me tell you, they pretty much take up a whole pew at the church. It's so funny because the older brothers are like, 'Oh, frig, we look so retarded, we come in a big bus, all the McFarlands get out.'

Oh, really?

Because there's so many of them.

Well there's eight of them.

Eight of them, yeah, and then the parents, that's ten. Like, it's like a whole pew.

Oh, my god.

Yeah, it's funny. Well anyways. Alrighty.

Okay, I'll see you anyways Kim.

Okay.

Okay, bye.

Learning from YouTube

Sean Dockray

Drifting across YouTube, a video caught my eye: ‘Why Audio Analytics?’¹ Uploaded by Louroe Electronics, it was an advertisement for a product capable of analyzing and detecting sounds ‘through advanced algorithms’ that looked like an upturned smoke detector.

The video imagined several scenarios to demonstrate the kinds of sounds it’s capable of recognising: glass breaking at night in the showroom of an automobile dealership, a gunshot in a school hallway, and aggression in a public space. Putting aside the differences in these scenarios—isn’t recognising aggression more dependent on interpretation and understanding context than whether or not a gun is fired?—they are all examples of *machine listening* that mark both a departure from and an expansion on the *speech recognition* built into Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant.

In speech-to-text, an audio signal containing human speech is converted to a textual representation of the words spoken. With the more general ‘audio event recognition’, however, *all sounds* are mapped to descriptive categories. To give a concrete example what this means, Google has created an *ontology*² that defines the conceptual space of 632 possible sound categories. Thirteen of these are ‘human voice’ sounds, such as ‘sigh’ or ‘wail, moan’. Only one is ‘speech’.

Although this range of sounds is wide, the early commercial applications of machine listening tend to be in the security and surveillance industries. Audio Analytic, who maintain their own proprietary audio dataset called Alexandria, develop software that is implemented by smart

home devices to listen for alarms or break ins. Shooter Detection Systems provides technology for early detection of active-shooter situations, with marketing material claiming that their Guardian System ‘removes the “human factor” so that nothing is left to interpretation and costly delays can be avoided’.³ Wendy Hui-Kyong Chun discusses another example of using the digital to circumvent the human in her discussion of face-recognition technology in the aftermath of September 11. The technology ‘corrects for visual subjective bias by inhumanly bypassing rationalization and deduction’,⁴ identifying terrorists by correlating patterns of camera data. Chun also critically quotes promotional media on the subject: ‘There is no chance for human error or “racial profiling” because there is no need for a human operator to fixate on a particular person. The camera does it all automatically.’⁵

Part of the argument Louroe Electronics makes in its video is that, by sensing aggression in the environment, it is possible to intervene before a crime even happens. This, when combined with the predictive promises of Artificial Intelligence, suggests it is possible to change the future. Beyond simply preventing an event from occurring, in a preemptive system an individual would never feel directly constrained, but would be guided into contexts where undesirable behaviour is least probable. Louroe Electronics’ detection of aggression and broken glass brings to mind the ‘broken windows’ theory of policing, which asks how to ‘identify neighborhoods at the tipping point ... where a window is likely to be broken at any time, and must quickly be fixed if all are not to be shattered’.⁷ At the time that the

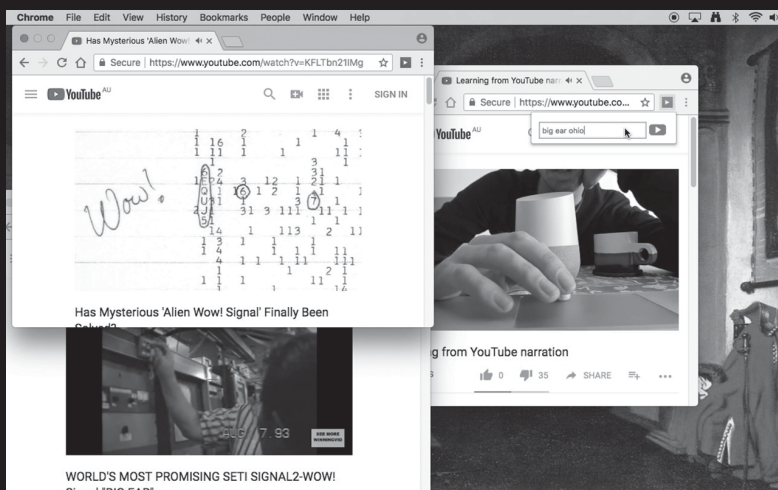


Fig. 13 Sean Dockray *Learning from YouTube* 2018

theory was introduced in 1982, the police did not have ‘ways of systematically identifying such areas’,⁸ a limitation overcome by algorithmic surveillance. Palantir Technologies—a data-mining company in intelligence and national security founded by the Silicon Valley libertarian Peter Thiel in 2004—was recently found to be using the New Orleans Police Department as a testing ground for predictive policing. The preemptive logic of the broken-windows theory—hypothesising that urban disorder cultivates actual, serious crime—is reinforced by these algorithms, which aim to intervene ‘before an incident turns into a violent outbreak’,⁹ mobilising a fear and anxiety that tends to be oriented towards specific groups of people, like ‘panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed’.¹⁰

This responsive security environment of sensing surveillance devices is prefigured in Felix Guattari’s imagined electronic-access card, which Gilles Deleuze recounts in his famous essay, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’. The control mechanism—the card—could track the position of its holder, locating an individual in space and time, thereby allowing or prohibiting access based on some set of rules, which are themselves potentially changing in real time. William Burroughs, whom Deleuze acknowledges¹¹ for ‘naming the monster’¹² of control, commented that a sense of free will was *necessary* for control to be effective. If ‘the workers have become machine-like tape recorders’¹³ then they are merely being *used*, not controlled. For Burroughs, control requires incompleteness, or a gap between the controller

and the controlled, which is not quite a direct performance of the wishes of the controller, *but almost*.

When Vilém Flusser talks about control, however, he doesn't mean it as a mode of power, but rather as something that has been *lost*, namely freedom: 'The crisis of authority has not led to the emancipation of society, but as it allows for an apparent freedom of choice, it has led to the cybernetic totalitarianism programmed by apparatus.'¹⁴ In Flusser's post-industrial society, people don't work; they are occupied. Work is left to automatic machines that manipulate the material world into mass-produced objects. Being occupied means that people are *functionaries* and *programmers* involved in the processing of symbols, like a white-collar worker who sends memos and fills in spreadsheets. At a superficial level, programmers write the programs and functionaries use them. But, if we look deeper, the two collapse into each other. Computer programmers program by pushing buttons in order to manipulate symbols. Every choice made in every keystroke is, however, a choice made within another program, a *metaprogram*. 'And this regression from meta- to meta-, from the programmers of programmers of programmers, proves to be infinite.'¹⁵ At every level, programmers are simultaneously functionaries, and vice-versa. This paradox is epitomised on social-media platforms, which are both stages for mass-individualised self-expression and highly scripted, addictive frameworks that compel participation.

Social-media platforms operate both as sites of control and as machines for aggregating data that can be utilised for future forms of



Learning from YouTube

Fig. 14 Sean Dockray, *Always Learning*, performance, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 11 August 2018.



control. In 2017, members of Google's Sound and Video Understanding team¹⁶ announced *Audio Set*, a dataset of two-million YouTube videos that aspires to 'substantially stimulate'¹⁷ the development of machine-listening algorithms. This announcement was accompanied with relatively little fanfare because it was published on the Google research blog and in an academic paper rather than in the news media. It was—and still is, at the time of this writing—an esoteric development, primarily of interest to programmers and machine-learning enthusiasts. And crucially, it is temporally *prior* to any particular artificial-intelligence or machine-learning application that will be developed from the dataset, be that home automation, workplace monitoring, or automated policing. This means it appears to be pre-political, free from the inequality and bias that only seems to become apparent after it is discovered that an automated system has been, for example, targeting black people.

The videos in *Audio Set* have been randomly selected, so it is unlikely that any uploaders know that their content is being used in this way. It's just as unlikely, however, that they would care. Who knows how many ways a video has already been sliced to inform recommendations and advertisements? On YouTube, videos live a double life as entertainment for a human audience *and* as data for an algorithmic audience, and it is the continuous invention of new algorithms that watch in new ways that makes old videos new again. Uranium, after all, was observed in mountains for centuries before it was deliberately mined for radium. Data will gather in server farms for years before it is exploited most profitably.

Learning from YouTube

The mass of YouTube videos in *Audio Set* are akin to the cropped centrefold of *Playboy* model Lena Söderberg, which was used as a test image for digital-image-compression research and has been an industry standard for testing imaging algorithms from the JPEG format to Photoshop effects ever since. In the age of machine learning, the test image becomes a massive dataset. Near the end of 2016, Google announced YouTube-8M, a dataset of eight-million categorised YouTube videos (of which, the aforementioned *Audio Set* is a subset) in order to accelerate breakthroughs in machine learning and machine perception.¹⁸ Not long afterwards, Sundar Pichai, Google's CEO, shifted the corporation's strategy to be 'AI first'. Suddenly, Google's decision to acquire YouTube in 2006 seemed to be less about the human audience than the algorithmic one. It was at this moment that video uploaders had been retroactively automated, crowdsourced without realising it, becoming memories for an algorithm with unknown politics. Google refashions the past with its corporate machinations and the future through the predictive capacities of its AI work.

The degree to which different kinds of automation abound in the acquisition of data and training of neural networks anticipates the way that artificial intelligence automates certain jobs, including police surveillance. The broken-windows theory emerged at a moment of cuts to police forces across the US and should be read, in part, as a strategy for reorganising policing when budgets no longer allow for foot patrols. Networked surveillance cameras allow few people to monitor many different locations from a distance. But human labour could be reduced

even further: each image is confined to the zoom, focus, and orientation of a particular camera, and each image depends on an operator to see what it displays, whereas an omnidirectional microphone covers a much larger area, including spaces outside the frame of the image. Moreover, it is unnecessary, even impossible, for a human operator to listen to all of the audio, so it is instead monitored by algorithms. Not only does this further the conversion of the body of the policeman into electronics and code—much the same way that the nineteenth-century officer has been absorbed into twenty-first-century traffic-control systems¹⁹—but it enables a kind of just-in-time policing that short-circuits labour-intensive criminal investigations and legal deliberation by preempting criminal acts.

The drive towards automation and control is not limited to policing, even if the effects are often more visible there. Google recently trialled a neural network to predict when a hospital patient will die, allegedly with ninety-five percent accuracy. Will data companies triage the sick and infirm before any medical staff sees them? Maybe there aren't doctors and nurses any more, but technicians. Microsoft believes that signals from web searches can be used to predict cancer and Target has determined pregnancies from purchase histories. It is one thing to make these predictions as if 'being right' were the goal, but these predictions are used to reconstruct worlds around individuals, most visibly in YouTube's recommendation algorithms or Facebook's targeted advertisements. The walls closing in are not in the form of a prison cell but moulded to the shape of our own bodies.

Learning from YouTube



Fig. 15 Microsoft's Dublin Data Centre. Image: Google Maps

If the future is foreclosed, it is to the trajectory that we would have chosen anyway. Flusser wrote, 'the human being can only want what the robot can do',²⁰ describing a future in which the machines don't exactly become more sentient, but that sentience becomes more machinic. Of course, this process is never complete. It doesn't terminate with the production of a neural network and some predictions. Rather, it enables the extraction of further data and training further AIs, and furthering the regression from meta- to meta- to meta- ...

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 (Oslo: Uten Tittel with Kunsthall Trondheim, 2018).

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14. Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (London: Reaktion, 1999), 93.
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Hearing, Loss

Joel Spring

James Parker/Joel Stern Your biography says you're a Wiradjuri man raised between Redfern and Alice Springs, with a master's degree in architecture and an interdisciplinary practice.

Joel Spring My work is about locating and exploring Indigenous subjectivity in Australia's urban context. In talking about Indigenous stories, culture, and histories, I attempt to shift the dominant understanding of what an Indigenous Australian perspective is. This comes into my work in radio too.

JP/JS What links your architectural, design, and art practices is this question of the contested space of the city—how Indigenous narratives are inscribed into urban environments, the different stories a city can tell.

JS Yes. A lot of young Indigenous people I know feel it's important to describe what it means to live and exist right now—to touch on the material, structural, and subjective realities of those experiences in Australia and the world in general.

JP/JS When you say 'subjective realities', do you mean the personal and intimate; for instance, you and your mother talking about particular experiences you remember? Or do you mean the story of a journey through institutional contexts?

JS I'm talking about all the things I think about when I ask myself, 'What is it I'm interested in doing?' My work articulates

that in relationship to the world and to subjectivities, like my mother's. In *Hearing, Loss*, she articulates her experiences as a nurse moving through racist institutional frameworks in Sydney in the 1980s and 1990s, dealing with conditions too well known by Indigenous people, but where there's not a great deal of insight from professional perspectives.

JP/JS You are teasing out these insights as an interviewer.

JS And locating them within the human body, as a site of discussion. Many of the other works in *Eavesdropping* speak to listening, to overhearing a person or group whose freedoms have been encroached upon, stripped away. My work locates that policing in relation to the literal ear. The different subjects discussed—racial tensions, blackness, all sorts of things—are thought through differently in relation to the experience of hearing loss and how it affects your life.

JP/JS *Hearing, Loss* is an interview, which connects it to your radio practice. Where does conversation, interviewing, and dialogue sit within your practice? Is it part of your methodology? How you speak to people, how you address them, seems very generative.

JS My work is fundamentally collaborative; thinking about the space between people and the generative aspects

Hearing, Loss

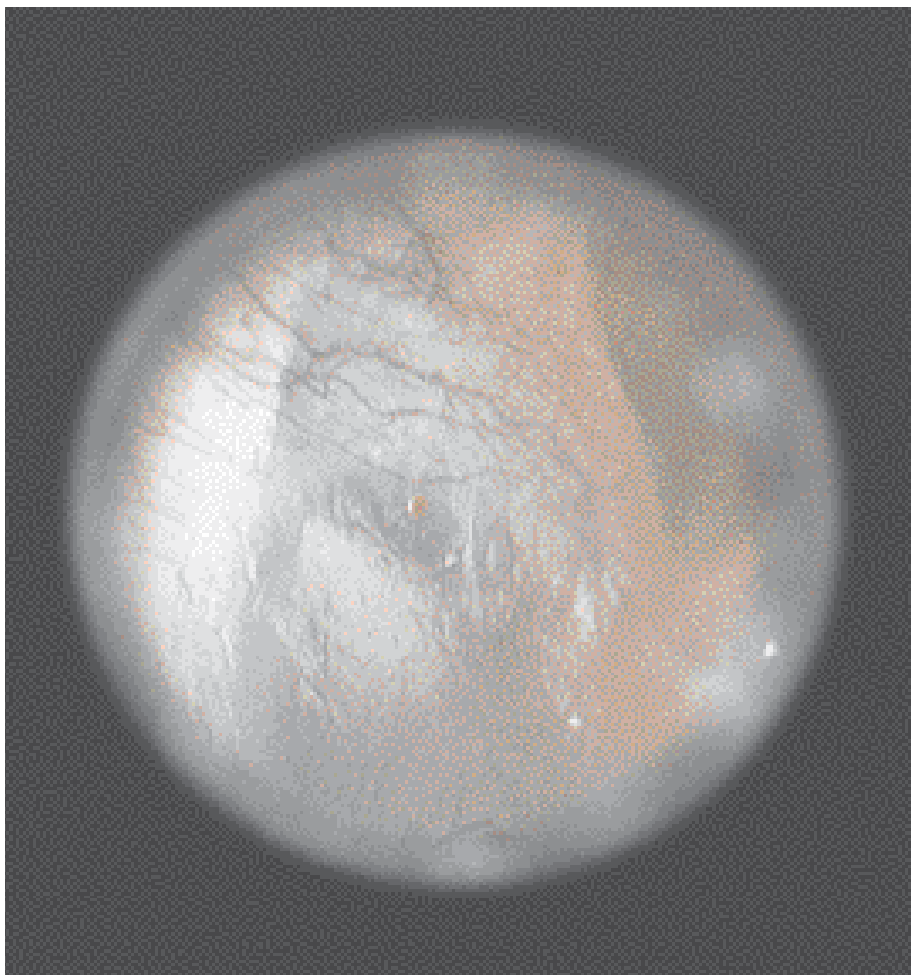


Fig. 16 Joel Spring *Hearing, Loss* 2018. Otoscopic image of an eardrum

of conversation. The space between people is key to my methodology. It's what I explore in my work. It's the launching point to go deeper into other things; sound, cognition, language, everything that sits between people; the way we communicate and engage.

JP/JS How do you negotiate, on the one hand, the body—how the ear, sound, and cognition work; then, on the other hand, the socio-political aspects of racism—coloniality, struggle, resistance?

JS In the context of Indigenous Australia, they're inseparable. Colonialism places strict limitations on resource acquisition for Indigenous communities. Hearing is a resource that allows you to listen to yourself and to your community. Ninety percent of Indigenous prisoners in the Northern Territory have suffered mild-to-severe hearing loss. But because it's internal and appears to happen 'naturally', and because it does not comply with standard evidentiary processes, it's overlooked.

JP/JS The ear canal is a tunnel, a physical architecture, through which things flow, including colonial relations.

JS Yes. Vibrational energy becomes neural information, all in a tiny space. The body's incapacity to achieve this is implicit in the work's title—*Hearing, Loss*. Working against this loss is the

Hearing, Loss

sophisticated transfer of information between my mum and I. Our dialogue conveys a level of care and intimacy between us. When you listen to the work, framing the resistance of colonised bodies, there's an intimacy that extends directly from what my mum and others—the mothers, the nurses, the black women—were doing at the time to protect kids.

JP/JS Why did you decide to make a work about otitis media?

JS In the communities I grew up in, I've seen so many Indigenous young people suffering, educationally and otherwise, from otitis media. I understood it through the documentation I saw in waiting rooms at school and in the literature created by Indigenous-health services. I had it when I was little. As a young black kid, it's not a question of whether you get it. If you get a sustained cold, you're going to have fluid in your ear. When we were living in the Northern Territory, I witnessed classrooms where kids were treated badly as a result of their symptoms. They were yelled at and labelled disruptive because they couldn't hear. I have an interview with mum where she speaks directly about how the research she and others did resulted in changes being made.

Mum was the district nurse. She saw kids at Murawina, Darlington, Redfern, and Alexandria Park—all the

blackfulla schools in the area—taking kids to the hospital to get their ears checked. That’s when it was realised otitis media was an issue, and that it was different for black kids for all sorts of reasons: mistreatment, delayed response, neglect, lack of access, the racist aspect of it all. In some cases, because kids had such poor hearing, they mic’d up speaker systems in classrooms to amplify teachers’ voices.

Hearing, Loss documents what took place in Redfern. What struck me is the relationships at play within that story. As I looked into it, I saw the symbolism of a foreign body entering the ear—water, dirt, infection—and what this means socially, culturally, and educationally. This was interesting for thinking about Australia’s history, its mistreatment of Indigenous people and the land itself.

JP/JS That phrase, ‘a foreign object entering the ear’, speaks to physical infection, but also the invasive system and its institutions.

JS It is a technique of colonisation: invasion, displacement, alienation of body and land. It’s not only geographical displacement, but what that displacement does. It stops language from being transmitted, carried on to the next generation. Hearing loss prevents children acquiring language to articulate their perspectives. I saw the symbolism and the real direct outcomes; the

Hearing, Loss

racism of health services and the school systems, and its impact on the ability to speak, to be heard, to communicate.

JP/JS Damage to ears is part of the loss of language; the loss of the capacity to hear stories, to pass them on. The work's title is rich. 'Hearing loss' can refer to the impact of damaged ears. But, as an activist, you are also inviting people to hear stories, and listen for what has been lost—to 'hear' loss.

JS This is an entire dynamic. Lack of access to health destroys the relationships necessary for culturally expressive lives.

JP/JS There's a casualness in the dialogue between you and your mother: laughing, pausing, speech inflections that are more familiar to community radio than an artwork in a gallery. Is the listener—especially the white listener in a gallery—like an eavesdropper on an intimate conversation?

JS I was contending with that. It's an interview and also a conversation. I could sit down and explain otitis media to you in a straight way—'This is otitis media, this is the way that it affects Aboriginal people, this is how it is seen demographically across Australia'—but that's not what I'm trying to talk about. With radio broadcasting or filmmaking or whatever, you're taught how to structure a narrative. But politically, it's very racially biased. With *Hearing, Loss*, I

liked the idea of positioning the listener in a space where we haven't told them to pull a chair up, to sit with us. They're not at our table. They're neither excluded nor invited. They sit there in a particular place to listen in on this.

JP/JS The work has to be understood in the context of an oral culture of storytelling.

JS To document the oral history was important. But I was also interested in how what was being said could be shown visually. We see a conversation that is located directly in the eardrum. It was important to locate it there and there was a playful visual aspect. It's also pushing expectations of what Indigenous art is supposed to be, expanding how narrative in Indigenous work can be conveyed.

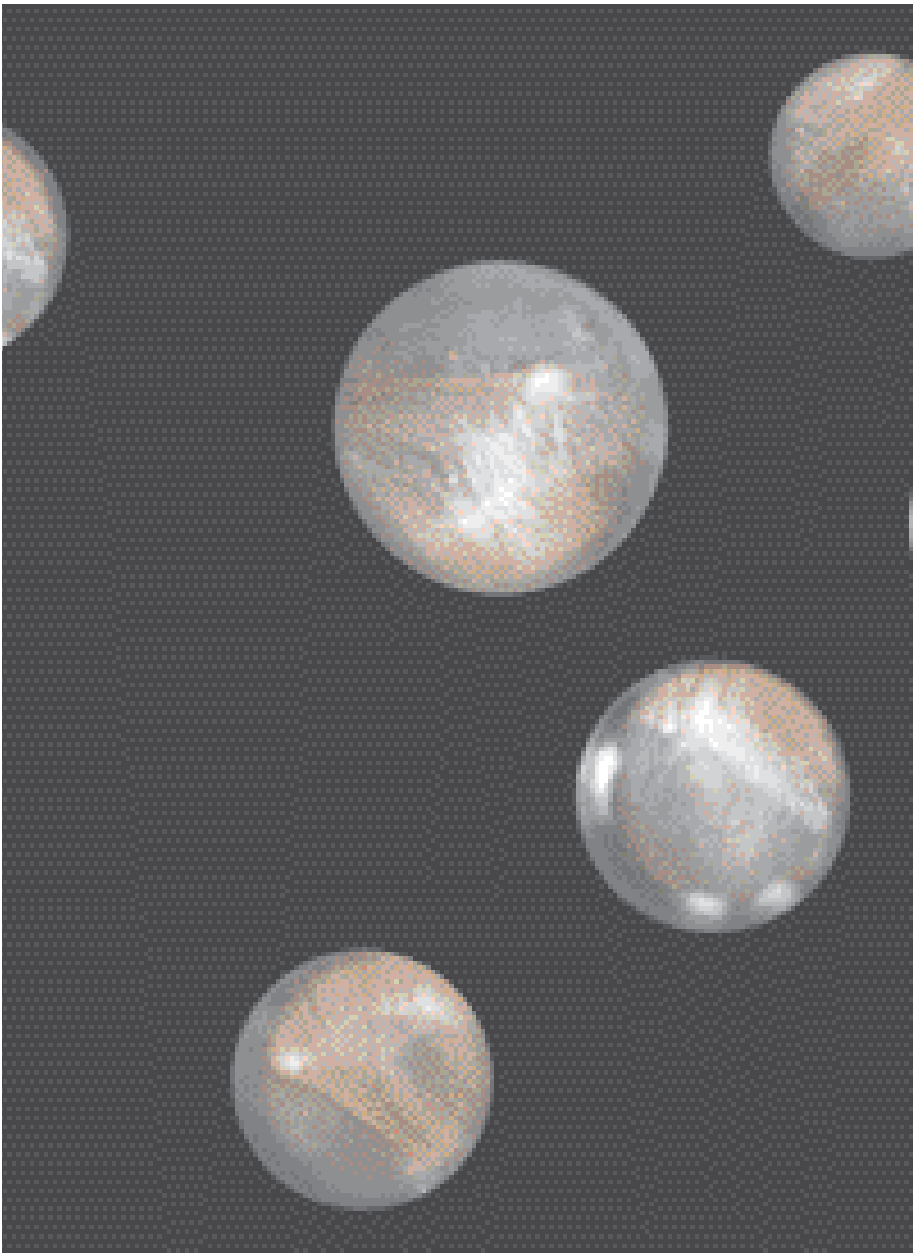


Fig. 17 Joel Spring *Hearing, Loss* 2018

Hearing, Loss
Joel Spring

Juanita Sherwood: But your ear looks good. But I haven't looked in an ear for about twenty years, Joel.

Joel Spring: So, when was the last time you looked in someone's ear?

Sherwood: Probably back in 1992.

Spring: So the year I was born?

Sherwood: Haven't been near an ear since, which is a good thing but I used to pick up a lot of head lice.

This week I've been talking about racism. When I was working in Redfern back in 1988-93, I realised, because of my education training on top of my nursing, that children in the Redfern-area schools had a really high rate of otitis media, which is a middle-ear disease.

[(01:05) rhythmic whoosh and buzz begins]

Otitis media with effusion, otitis media that is suppurative, loads of different types. But, basically it is a middle-ear infection that affects your conductive hearing. It effects your hearing because of the conductive motion of the fluid in your ear, causing a build up of fluid in your ear. Generally between the ages of 0 and 12, your Eustachian tube, which connects your ear to the back of your throat, is very narrow. Young children who are teething and entering pre-school and school get lots of bugs ...

[(01:51) rhythmic whoosh and buzz ceases]

which can be an issue. But when you live in urban or rural communities in overcrowded housing, you're definitely going to pick up every bug that's going around. Straight away your lymph nodes are affected, and

then your ears are going to get affected. Now, ideally it causes a lot of pain. But I found, you know, in my experience, the kids had gone through the pain, and were past that pain, and had become so used to it that they didn't know when they had an infection or didn't have an infection.

Spring: Okay, so they just kind of become desensitised or immune to the pain?

Sherwood: Exactly. And I guess they weren't switched on to knowing the connection between the infection and noticing their hearing was going up or down. But the big problem with otitis media is that it really affects children within the 0 to 3 year age group. And it's this 0 to 3 year age group where you learn how to listen.

Now this high rate of otitis media was critically impacting on their access to education. If you can't hear, you can't learn.

[(03:11) a low ringing begins, gradually rising in pitch]

A hearing loss between 0 to 3 years of age is when you learn to listen. If you haven't learnt to attend to particular sounds at that time, you're probably going to always have issues around paying attention. And a lot of young people were misdiagnosed with other problems because of their not hearing well. The most common term for these kids was that they were naughty, and that they were misbehaving, and they were not listening. Of course, they weren't listening because they could not hear. And it took ...

[(03:49) ringing reaches highest pitch]

a long time for me to get that message through to teachers. Parents started immediately going, 'Oh, of course, that's why they've turned the TV up', you know? It's the critical-deficit story ...

[(04:05) ringing gradually lowers in pitch]

because otitis media is to all people basically an invisible disease. You don't know a child has otitis media until you stick a probe in someone's ear, like we're doing at the moment, to see if there's any inflammation, or if there's holes in the ear. Well you can see the fluid ...

[(04:05) ringing ceases]

in your ear drum, and it's nice and shiny. But to me it looks like it's a bit extended, so there's a bit of fluid behind it, and the red, which is not too red, but there's a bit of red there, which suggests to me that there may be some inflammation.

Spring: What generally causes this sort of thing?

Sherwood: A flu, a cold. Have you had? ... Yeah, you've had a cold lately. So your Eustachian tube connected to your respiratory airways, it's a whole system of connecting, and, when you've had a bug, it generally plays up in your ear.

Spring: Yeah right. So that's a part of the bone isn't it?

Sherwood: Yeah. There are three bones.

Spring: Inside of that bit? Right there? So the three bones are in here and they feed into that? Or the other way around, the drum feeds into the bones that are in there, and that pinpoints the vibrational energy?

Sherwood: Into the cochlea.

Spring: And then the cochlea, it turns it into ...

Sherwood: Sound waves.

Spring: Sound waves through more liquid.

Sherwood: But when you've got a build up of fluid, and that can happen with an infection, and it can become quite thick ... you know, at the

moment it's clear. But it can become really
pusy and thick so the sound waves can't ...

[(06:09) rhythmic whoosh begins again]

go through as well. It becomes very dense
and slows down and that's what can cause
conductive hearing loss.

Spring: Because it's not moving through the drum?

Sherwood: Yeah. And the cochlea connects to the
nerves. But this part, the middle ear, is
what gets affected.

[(06:28) rhythmic whoosh increases pace]

This is the tympanic membrane and when the
tympanic membrane's impacted ...

[(06:39) rhythmic buzz begins too]

you know, by a tear in your eardrum, you're
not going to be vibrating and you're not
going to be getting the signal through the
bones.

[(06:43) sounds speed up and become white noise]
[voices indiscernible] [(06:58) deep, white noise tone
begins, gradually rising in pitch] [(07:11) noise
ceases]

I had one child whose ear had been so bad
that all the bones had been eaten away by
the pus. So, he had a permanent conductive
hearing loss. He was never going to be able
to have the tympanic membrane work for him.
And that was ... He had been screened and
screened and screened for years, and no
one had done anything about it. I got him
to a surgeon who did attempt to repair his
eardrum, but it didn't work, and I think it
didn't work because this young boy's immune
system was not up to dealing with the
radical surgery that he had.

[(08:03) rhythmic static begins]

There was some nasty stuff that happened.
And there was this one child that I looked

after whose ears were really bad.
And I can remember taking her to the
ear, nose, and throat doctor, and he
said, 'Oh, your ears stink! They're
horrible! You stink!' And I just said,
'I beg your pardon?' And he said,
'This child stinks!' And this child
had a very serious cholesteatoma that
he did not pick up.

[(08:03) rhythmic static begins to vary in
frequency]

Spring: What's a cholesteatoma?

Sherwood: A cholesteatoma is a tumour that forms
in your ear through the build up of
pus. It can eat through your skull
and cause meningitis. It's a horrible,
horrible thing. But this is what can
happen through untreated otitis media,
and that's why it's really important
that we treated these diseases. And
this young person had this infection
...

[(09:05) high ringing begins over static,
gradually lowering in pitch]

serious infection, and I had been
trying to get her into a ear, nose,
and throat specialist for a while,
and, we did that, and the doctor was
really rude to her. I felt awful
for her, and she went ... The next
weekend she ended up in hospital in
agony, and they sent her home. She
went to hospital again, and they
sent her home. And, when they finally
admitted her, they found she had this
horrendous tumour in her ear and she
had to have surgery. And the doctor
tried to say that it was my fault that
she had this tumour.

[(10:10) noise ceases]

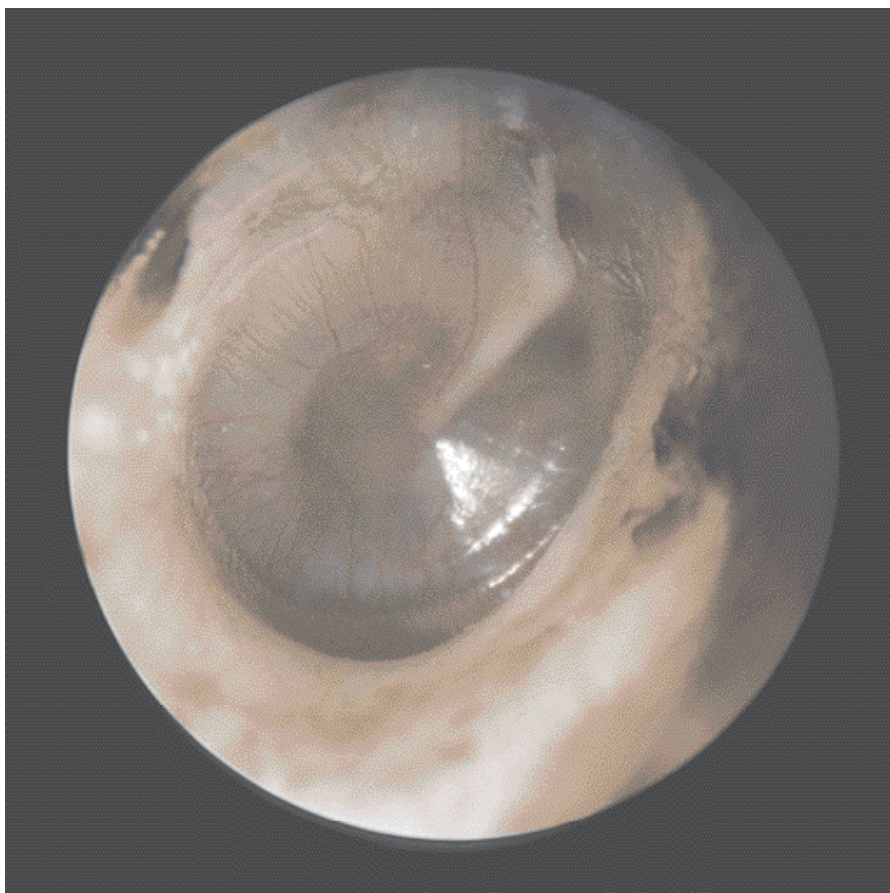


Fig. 18 Joel Spring *Hearing, Loss* 2018

Cosmic Static
Fayen d'Evie and Jen Bervin
with Bryan Phillips and Andy Slater

Cosmic Static is a collaboration between myself and Jen Bervin that came out of a shared interest in sensory writing, embodied reading, and extraterrestrial listening. As part of Bervin's artist residency at the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI), we collaborated with sound artists Bryan Phillips and Andy Slater, scientists Laurance Doyle, Jim Palfreyman, Jon Richards, and Jill Tarter, and artists Justy Phillips and Margaret Woodward (A Published Event) to create the work for *Eavesdropping*.

Cosmic Static experiments with the dynamics of dissipated and concentrated listening using narrative fragments from the history of extraterrestrial listening. Ultrasonic projections of field recordings and stories of scientists dedicated to listening for extraterrestrial signals are filtered through a sculptural element—a repurposed copper radio-telescope feed once used to search for anomalous stellar and interstellar signals at SETI's Allen Telescope Array (ATA), in Hat Creek, California. As the audience moves within and around ultrasonic beams, encountering discrete phrases at some moments and wandering into polyphonic disturbance at others, each body listens in on a different poetics and collectively activates the kinaesthetics of close listening in community.

I am blind-ish or quasi-blind—to adopt terms suggested by artist Jennifer Justice and xenolinguist Sherri Wells Jensen respectively (distilled from a spirited discussion of alternatives to ableist categorisations like 'the visually impaired'). One trajectory of my art practice deals with blindness as a critical position, and another with writing, reading, and publishing.

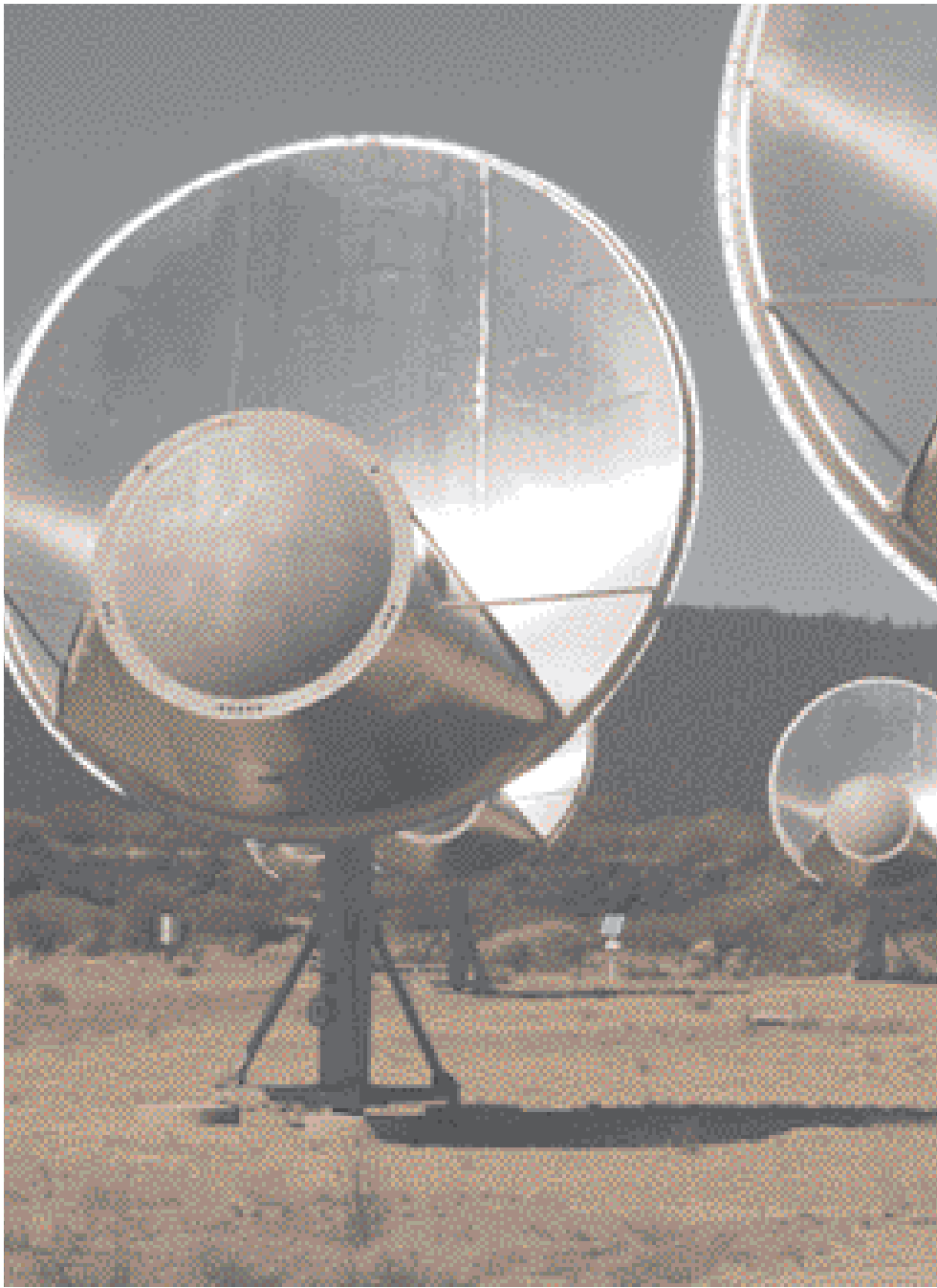
My collaboration with Bervin has afforded me an opportunity to think between and across these territories. One of the scholars who has influenced my contribution to our work is Tanya Titchkosky. Through a close reading of Audre Lorde's essay 'Eye to Eye', she observes that an array of cultural processes conspire to treat disability as a signifier of limits or ends to the body. She suggests that, by investigating the subjective and intersubjective assigning of peripheralities, we may learn something about interpretive relations to embodiment and how individuals and communities define humanity. By reconceptualising peripheralities as critical positions, I propose that we may reach beyond normative biases and inhibiting definitions of humanity, invoking new forms of choreopolitical resistance and transformation. During my conversations with Bervin, I have been provoked to think about how we use language, and how audiences can be invited to experience dematerialised texts by blundering—blindly stumbling in search of story.

The stories encountered in *Cosmic Static* include the exploits of Karl Jansky, who detected mysterious star noise in 1931, and Grote Reber, the founder of modern radio astronomy. Reber built the first parabolic antenna in his Chicago backyard in 1937 to listen to radio emissions from outer space. He succeeded in detecting cosmic static in 1938. For a decade, he maintained a lonely vigil listening for extraterrestrial signals. In 1954, he moved to Tasmania—where the ionospheric density is low—in search of quieter skies. The work also includes field recordings from SETI'S ATA, from the Tasmanian landscapes (where Reber constructed antenna farms by

stringing wires across sheep-grazing lands), and from the Grote Reber Museum at the University of Hobart's Mount Pleasant Radio Observatory (where radio astronomer Jim Palfreyman first recorded the Pulsar Vela glitching in 2018). Finally, the work explores the research of SETI astrophysicist Laurance Doyle, who studies the language complexity and signal transmissions of non-human species—from plant-insect communications to monkey whistling and baby-dolphin babbling—to develop methods of discerning intelligent extraterrestrial signals amidst the galactic noise.

The two sound artists who joined us in crafting the audio narratives for *Cosmic Static* also have connections to blindness. Andy Slater is a blind sound artist based in Chicago, where Grote Reber built his backyard antenna. Bryan Phillips is ocularnormative but has collaborated with me over several blindness-led exhibitions, transfiguring audio description as a creative, ekphrastic medium. Reber was not blind, but was profoundly deaf. The Tasmanian museum dedicated to archiving his life and legacy includes a display cabinet of his hearing aids. When we first exhibited *Cosmic Static* in Melbourne, I was troubled by the inaccessibility of our dustcloud of narratives to deaf audiences. This publication has allowed us an opportunity to redress this absence. Through the parallel presentation of transcriptions of the audio narratives, we offer a reading via textual blundering.

—Fayen d'Evie



Cosmic Static

Fig. 19 SETI's Allen Telescope Array, Hat Creek CA.
Photo: Seth Shostak





Cosmic Static

Fig. 20 Fayen d'Evie and Jen Bervin with Bryan Phillips and Andy Slater *Cosmic Static* 2018. Photo: Bethany Woolfall

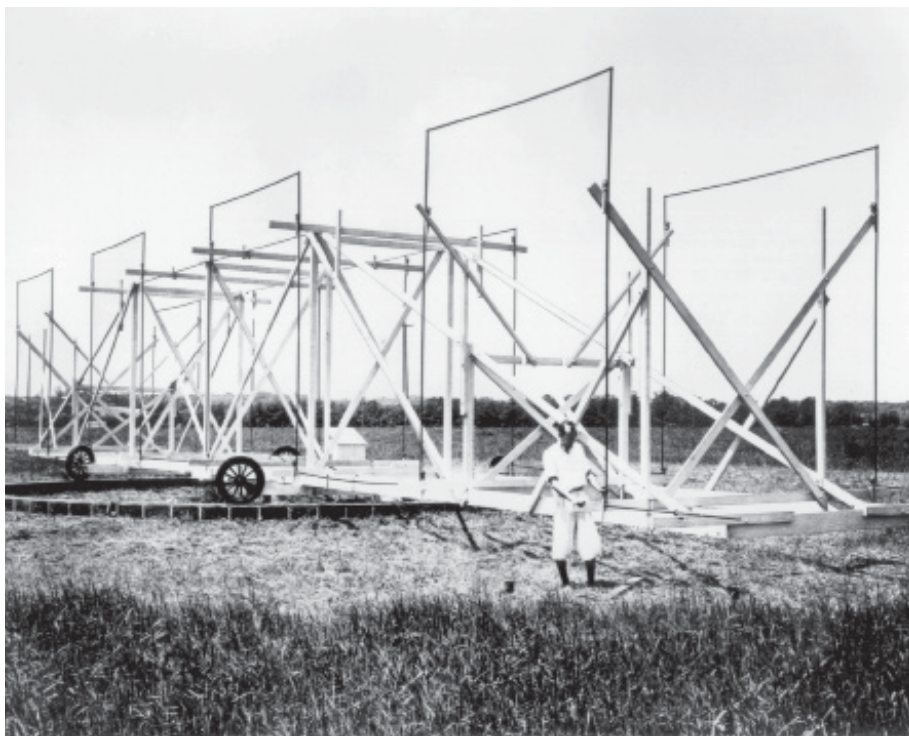


Fig. 21 Karl Jansky and his Merry-Go-Round, Holmdel, New Jersey, 1933. Image: National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Charlottesville VA

A

Ambient Composition
from SETI ATA Field
Recordings 16/2/2018
Andy Slater

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STORY I KARL JANSKY AND GROTE REBER^{1,2}

In a 1977 paper, 'Endless, Boundless, Stable Universe', Grote Reber concluded, 'Time is merely a sequence of events; there is no beginning, nor ending. The material universe extends beyond the greatest distances we can observe ...'

Karl Jansky Records Star Noise

In 1928, twenty-two year old Karl Jansky joined Bell Telephone Labs, and, due to his weakened kidneys, requested work that would not exert undue pressure upon him. Jansky was tasked with recording the arrival and intensity of radio static that might interfere with transatlantic telephone transmissions.

In Holmdel, New Jersey, Jansky built a directional rotating antenna made of three-quarter-inch brass pipe, mounted on a wooden framework supported by Ford Model-T tyres, and connected to a small motor, so that the array made a complete revolution every twenty minutes. His workmates called it Jansky's merry-go-round. In the middle of August 1931, Jansky began recording.

'From the data obtained, it is found that three distinct groups of static are recorded. The first group is composed of the static received from local thunderstorms in storm centres. The second group is composed of very steady weak static ... from thunderstorms some distance away. The third group is composed of a very steady hiss-type static, the origin of which is not yet known.'

For over a year, Jansky analysed and repeated his recordings, accumulating data.

Cosmic Static

Grote Reber

'We are dealing with the electromagnetic waves from the cosmos, or literally cosmic rays. Robert Millikan appropriated this terminology in about 1925 for a phenomenon which is neither cosmic in the sense of originating beyond the solar system, nor a ray at all. So, I decided to call these radio waves from Mother Nature Cosmic Static. This honours the original purpose of Jansky and tracking local thunderstorms. Peculiarly enough there may be some truth in the name cosmic static. The origin ... of part of these natural radio waves probably is due to randomly moving electrons interacting with magnetic fields in space.'

Jim Palfreyman Describes
the Vela Pulsar Glitching

'At this point, this massive supernova explosion is where most of the heavier elements are made ... In fact, the carbon that's in your right arm probably came from a different supernova than the carbon in your left arm. Most of the things you see around here were made in supernova explosions, except for gold and platinum ...

'If the star is massive, bigger than eight solar masses, it's big enough to go supernova and the remains collapse down. What we have is an object so dense, it has an escape velocity greater than the speed of light, collapsed into a black hole.

If we get this Goldilocks-sized star somewhere between five and eight solar masses, it's big enough to go supernova, but not big enough to

Laurance Doyle

'Information theory is a type of mathematics that was developed at Bell Labs to calculate how big telephone lines need to be to transmit a certain amount of information across them. They also developed analysis of static on the phone line.'

'There's kind of a subdivision of information theory called Zipf's law. He was a linguist around 1950 or so. He had his students log the frequency of the occurrence of different letters and words in an average novel. And ... if you plot on a logarithmic scale the frequency of occurrence of the letters in the book *Ulysses*, you get Es occurring most of the time, then As, then Ts, and then the Qs, which occur the least number of times ... and then, if you plot them in that order, you get a forty-five-degree line that goes through all the points: the minus-one slope. Then he does Russian phonemes and they give a minus-one slope. And he does a Chinese book: minus one. He did a whole bunch of languages and they all come out with this minus-one slope.'

'Somebody else later did baby babbling, not quite horizontal, but more flat than the minus-one Zipf slope ... So it basically shows they do not actually have a language, which the minus-one slope indicates. By the time they're about twenty-two months old or so their communication system has the right frequency of occurrence distribution of the signals to give the Zipf slope minus one.'

'Brenda [Dr Brenda McCowan] had done some research with bottlenose dolphins at Marine World and she gave me her paper. The

form, an object that turns into a black hole. What we get is a neutron star. The gravity is still incredibly intense; it's so strong that it can force the electrons into the nucleus of the atom and basically removes all the space from the atom, and the electrons combine with the protons to form neutrons. It's incredibly dense; a cup full of this stuff would weigh as much Mount Everest.'

'Just like an ice skater would pull their arms in on the rink when they're spinning, they speed up. This big star has collapsed down to twenty kilometres across. It speeds up and spins quite quickly ... When they're first born, we think they spin at around fifty times per second and they gradually slow down with time. The Vela pulsar that we're going to listen to today ends at eleven times per second. It had its supernova about ten thousand years ago ...'

'It was quite close; one-thousand light years, but still close. Those neutron stars are a massive magnet and it was three trillion times the magnetic field we're sitting in right now—the Earth's magnetic field is incredibly strong. But out of the pulse of these magnetic fields comes electromagnetic radiation. So, we've got our object and it's spinning like this. The radiation's coming out here like a little beam of light and as this turns, if it happens to pass in front of Earth, we see a brief flash on each rotation. If we see that, it's called a pulsar.'

Very soon after the first pulsar was discovered, the Vela pulsar was discovered in an observatory just outside Canberra, at the Molonglo Observatory, and it turned out to be the brightest pulsar in the sky.

'The pulsar's spin is gradually slowing down—very gradually, not much, gradually slowing down—and then once every three years (and we

paper included, just incidentally, in one of the tables, the frequency of occurrence of the different dolphin whistles. So I had this idea, well, I wonder how close to Zipf slope they come. So, I plotted it, and it gave a minus 0.95, in other words a minus-one slope. And I went and had a cup of tea, because I thought "This is a moment." And then I did it again and I got the same result. And I called Brenda and she said, "I'll be right there." So, we basically had this idea of introducing Zipf's law, and information theory in general, into animal communication studies.'

'So then these two baby dolphins were born at Marine World, and Brenda recorded them. And they were babbling. The distribution of their sounds landed exactly with the same slope as baby babbling, so we knew that they were not born with their language. And, by the time they're about eighteen-months, these little guys were obeying Zipf's law. So we figured that they had matured into the modern adult bottlenose-dolphin voice language.'

'Then the idea occurred to me ... being an astrophysicist more than an animal-communications person, I was thinking what is the most complex kind of star? Well, there are neutron stars that rotate, and they're called pulsars, and there are thousands of them in the galaxy. They were called LGMs when they were first discovered, which stands for Little Green Men. Well, what if I take the most complex star I can think of [pulsars] and do a Zipf plot of its pulses, with each pulse as a signal? So I did that, and it was -0.7. In other words, if you're doing an extraterrestrial search for intelligence, an intelligence signal cannot be confused with even the most

can't predict it), it suddenly speeds up. We're not talking about a lot here; three parts per million. But we time these things with atomic clocks and some of these pulsars are as accurate as atomic clocks. So three parts of a million is huge. It's like coming home and finding your clock is an hour fast for no apparent reason.'

Grote Reber

'All known pulsars are within our Milky Way. When a pulsar is discovered in a neighbour galaxy, the dispersion of pulse will give some idea of the density of free electrons between the galaxies ...'

Jim Palfreyman

'It's called the dispersion measure. And these fast radio bursts—the first one was discovered at least ... had a very high dispersion measure, which said it was not from our galaxy; it was from another galaxy. These flashes, they started finding more. We sort of just went trawling through the data. They've built various telescopes to try and catch them live. So we don't actually know what the cause of these things is, and, of course, the speculation is that it's alien laser beams ... used to push objects in space with light, and it could be an alien structure doing that ... It's probably not (laughs). It could be objects colliding. We do have one fast radio burst. It repeats. So that means it's not a single cataclysmic event. So that could be a pulsar, but only [inaudible] bright pulsars occasionally that we can see, and we just can't see the others.'

(footsteps on gravel)

complicated and well organised star system.'

'Brenda has invented a way of classifying signals that has stood the test of time over the past several decades. It's called the K-means cluster 60-point analysis and basically it looks at the contour of the signal. A signal could be a sonogram from a dolphin whistle, or it could be a pulse from a pulsar. And it turns out the Vela pulsar, which is the one we were using, gave four kinds of pulses that have different contours. So, we took those, only four signals, and we plotted those in terms of the frequency of occurrence and got the slope. And the slope did not obey Zipf's law. So in other words pulsars are not sending out intelligent signals ...'

'SETI has up until now said: we're going to look for a radio transmitter ... Our work introduced a new aspect of analysis which is: let's examine the message itself instead of just the carrier waves ... Instead of asking is there a transmitter, we ask is there intelligence in the message by looking at Zipf's law and channeling entropies. What gives minus one is humans, bottlenose-dolphin whistles, and humpback-whale vocalisations; and squirrel monkeys give about a minus point seven; ground squirrels minus point three. I would say that close to half the animal-communications people are now using information theory.'

'Up in Alaska, we recorded humpback whales, under the conditions of noise from boats and then the absence of noise, and I could calculate the channel capacity. In this case, it really was a channel. It wasn't just talking about a wire, and the static in the wire that Bell Labs developed

1

B

Ambient Composition
from Tasmania Field
Recordings 9/7/2018
Bryan Philips

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Ambient Composition
from Tasmania Field
Recordings 9/7/2018
Bryan Philips

Reber lived with his mother in a Wheaton suburb. In their backyard Reber constructed the world's first parabolic telescope. The skin was twenty-six-gauge galvanised iron and forty-five pieces of pipe, nine on the inside and thirty-six on the outside. These were supported on seventy-two radial wooden rafters cut to a parabolic curve. 'It is essentially a radio-type meridian transit that collects high frequency energy from space in a parabolic mirror, reflects the energy to an antenna within a drum, and feeds it to a wide-band high-frequency radio receiver.' The 'mirror usually emitted snapping, popping, and banging sounds every morning and every evening. The rising and setting sun caused unequal expansion in the skin and the various pieces would slip over one another until equilibrium was maintained.'

Cosmic Static

Fayen d'Evie and Jen
Bervin Talk, near the Former
Site of Grote Reber's
Bothwell Array

'Because ultimately, we've travelled a long way to look for something we know is not here ...'

'That was trying to measure something that's not here.'

'I keep thinking of the SETI scopes; you know? Moving the array, pointing it towards somewhere, waiting for a moment for some signal, moving it away, pointing it elsewhere ... And most of that time not getting any kind of leads ... and it feels a little bit like that [laughs].'

'In some ways his correspondence too is like that.'

'Trying to find a signal that was sent a long time ago.'

'A long time ago, like light years a long time ago; like a thousand light years away. That's the pulsar we were discussing.'

'But I also mean trying to find a signal from him [Grote Reber] from even twenty years ago, forty years ago, sixty years ago. Like all these kinds of moments where he crossed time in places where we enter ... And you get these signals, but are they really anything meaningful?'

'I think we should interview a sheep.'

'They do run away though. I tried to go close before ... A really old sheep.'

'Exactly. [Laughter]'

Grote Reber

'I arrived in Sydney on 1 November 1954 aboard the Orion, with ten cases of electronic apparatus in the hold.'

On sheep-grazing fields at Kempden, Grote Reber constructed an array of antennas from poles and

this equation for. I compared vocalising humpbacks with noisy vocalising humpbacks in the presence of boat noise. And I calculated—pretending boat noise is static and the icy straight is a wired channel ... I calculated how much the humpback whales would have to slow down to make sure that their message gets to the other humpbacks. And they were only slowing down about sixty percent of what they needed to, to ensure the transmission of the message. That was kind of strange, because like, well, they're going to miss forty percent of the message. How can they do that?'

'I was pondering that a couple of weeks later. I got a paper from the copy machine and I got back to my desk and a lot of words were missing because the copier was low on toner. And I realised that's what the humpback whales were doing. They're kind of getting the gist of it, because they have grammatical and syntax rules ... so I went looking for conditional probabilities between the signals ... So we discovered that there are internal structural rules within humpback-whale communication systems, and they use it for error recovery.'

'Humpback whales have a global communication system that's millions of years older than ours. They use tools; they build bubble nets to catch herring in. And it takes a coordinated effort. The humpback whales who do bubble net are not family. They're not necessarily related. It's based on skills. I think humpback whales are the only known species, besides humans ... that have long-term relationships based on ability. Some humpback whales start to blow ... and, by circling around and around, they create this cylinder of bubbles, and

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jukebox out front with a sign, "Drop
 a quarter in the slot and find out
 what this is all about." Longfellow
 Grade School was only a block away.
 Frequently, after school, some of
 the larger children would use the
 telescope as climbing bars. The
 overhang of the dish prevented the
 kids from running around on top.
 When it was parked in a vertical
 position during a rainstorm, large
 quantities of water would gush
 through the hole in the centre.
 This led to rumours that the device
 was for collecting rain or control
 of the weather.

'During the 1930s, air-
 navigation rules were very lax or
 non-existent. The dish must have
 been a spectacular curiosity from
 the air. Often, small planes would
 circle around, over, and back-and-
 forth repeatedly. At least three
 times these private planes were
 active when I had the dish turned
 far south and I was at the top of
 the service tower. The first time I
 had a rather frightening experience
 when a motorcycle seemed to be
 coming up out of the ground at me,
 right through the centre of the dish.
 Actually, a small plane was flying up
 the beam. Obviously, the dish had
 good acoustical properties.'

Throughout the spring and summer
 of 1938, Reber swept the sky
 surveying for signals at 3300
 megacycles. 'The antenna was
 parallel to the celestial equator ...
 Various parts of the Milky Way, Sun,
 Moon, Jupiter, Mars, and several of
 the bright stars, such as Sirius, Vega,
 Antares, etc., were all examined ...
 Some small irregular fluctuations
 were encountered, but no repeatable
 results were secured which might be
 construed to be of celestial origin.

wire. 'Put up building on foundations and spent an hour looking for an empty cable spool, which was lost on the 23/06/56, southwest of post A, down slope, probably in a clump of grass, which will have to be burned off before the spool can be seen. Made two rock cairns to north of [inaudible] along top of east ridge. These marked possible sites for east ends of two additional spans across valley. All very speculative at present state of affairs.'

Throughout the period of observations Reber encountered many problems with the equipment. This included the occasional contact between animals and the tuner boxes located beneath the antennas. After the observations had ended and the equipment was finally being removed, Reber noted in his diary, 'Did not wind clock.' It is a matter of conjecture as to whether Reber ever came to accept that Kempden produced little or nothing in terms of useful results.

The original 1956 shed was moved to the Dennistoun property and used as a playhouse by Neil Johnson's children. It was later used as a storage shed, but sadly it fell into disrepair and was demolished in the late 1990s. No record has yet been found of the eventual fate of the second shed. The eastern pole for Antenna 4 was eventually cut up by Tim Johnson, the current owner of the property and used as firewood ... However, several artefacts remained at the site. The western pole for Antenna 3 fell in about 2002. It remains on the ground where it fell with many of the original footholds still in place and is just resolvable on Google Earth images. Other artefacts that have been found on the ground include stay wires, insulators, loose

the other humpbacks coordinate to chase the herring through vocalisations into the bottom of this cylinder made of bubbles. And as the whole thing rises they make noises at the bottom and it scares the herring up to the top and you start to see this bubble net hit the surface that's about a hundred feet across. The herring try to go out the side, but when they hit the bubble they drop, and it's really unpleasant, so they dart back in, and then it's all over for them. The fish come flying out of the water and then you see these huge mouths. And then you see seagulls doing the mop up.'

'An animal will make as complex a communication system for error recovery reasons as it can handle. Human languages go up to ninth-order word entropy. And, what that means is that, if you're missing a word, you can fill it in from the context, then the rule structure. If you're missing two words, the probability of you getting the right word goes down, but it's still possible to recover missing words. If you're missing nine words, that's just barely a non-random possibility of recovering missing words. But, if you're missing ten, you might as well pick the word out of the dictionary, because human language doesn't extend its syntactic influence farther than nine words away. We say, okay, well, how many signals can you do error recovery for a dolphin? Well, maybe five. And in humpback whales, we don't know: not enough data. And squirrel monkeys: two. There's a direct measure of the rule structure which allows error recovery. It also may be a direct measure of the complexity of the language.'

'Some anthropologists say that our social complexity led to

footholds, and some remains of all four eastern antenna supports.

'If a person cannot hear, smell, feel, or see an object, this object does not exist. Only recently has it been realised, even among the scientific community that, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."'

Grote Reber decided to build a more elaborate structure out of poles and wire. 'A large flat open area away from manmade electrical interference was needed. By good fortune I contacted a sympathetic landowner whose Dennistoun estate, five miles north of Bothwell, was suitable.' An array 33,520 feet in diameter, comprising 192 dipoles, was constructed. It was a meridian-transit instrument with a beam capable of being adjusted along the north zenith south plane. Enough data was secured to make a map of the entire southern sky.

The assumption is that intergalactic space is a void. By definition, a void lacks contents; light cannot interact with a void. By making this assumption the door is closed to all physical phenomenon. The only possible explanation of shifts of spectral lines and light from distant nebulae comes from relative motion. This assumption is based on an anthropocentric view of our surroundings.

Reber experimented with novel designs for cars and bicycles and solar houses. He investigated reverse growth of bean vines, carefully untwirling vines from their natural right-handed curl to a left-handed curl. 'Reversed Bean Vines' by Grote Reber, published in the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, December 1960: 'Nine different

our vocal complexity. It may be a more- or-less direct measure of the social complexity of the species. The crow family has got gregarious and isolated pairs. If this theory is correct, then basically we should find one a very complex social system and the other not. But if we get an extraterrestrial signal it might be a long time, if ever, that we can translate it, but what we can do is calculate right away what the complexity of their communication system is.'

'What if they go up to twentieth-order entropy? Then we know, at least as far as their communication system goes, we are to them as squirrel monkeys are to us. One of the things we would do is quantify the complexity of humpback-whale communication systems. The second thing is ... they have a SETI kind of problem. They vocalise, and the signal may take hours to get there, hours to get back. If they want to meet, it takes about a month. So, it's kind of a SETI-like problem, except in SETI terms it takes years to get a round-trip message and it takes a thousand years or maybe a millennium to go there. What we're proposing is to examine how humpback whales handle a SETI-like problem like that.'

'If we intercepted a SETI signal, it wouldn't have been pointed to us necessarily. It may be a communication between two spacecraft, or a spacecraft and home base. Ninety-eight percent of the stars in the solar neighbourhood are older than the sun, so let's assume that the average extraterrestrial civilisation has a hundred-million years on us. If they're sending probes all around the galaxy, we could maybe intercept a signal from

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Cygnus, Cassiopeia, Canis Major,
 and Puppis.'

'A remarkable feature of our
 observations was that none of the
 radio signals of greatest intensity
 came from the direction of the bright
 stars. This suggested very strongly
 that the galactic radio waves we
 receive from the Milky Way do not
 originate in the stars at all. Where,
 then, are they coming from? Can
 they be emanating from interstellar
 space? Strange as it may seem, that
 looks like the most probable source.
 It appears that they come from the
 great clouds of interstellar dust and
 gas in the galaxy.'

For a decade, Reber had
 been alone—the world's only radio
 astronomer, listening each night for
 shortwave signals of extraterrestrial
 origin. As his successes emboldened
 others to join the shortwave search,
 his curiosity turned to cosmic static at
 longer wavelengths.

'I decided to try for
 observations of cosmic static at
 longwave length simply as an
 exploratory search. Whatever the
 wavelength, it must arrive at the
 observer at the surface of the Earth.
 As the wavelength increases beyond
 twenty metres, the ionosphere
 becomes increasingly important.
 The ionosphere is a mirror for radio
 waves silvered on both sides. The
 greater the electron density, the more
 effective the ionosphere becomes as
 a shield for longwave cosmic static.
 The lowest electron density is near
 the minimum solar activity, during
 winter, at night, between latitudes 40
 and 50, near the agonic line, where
 the compass points true north. A
 manmade wave will be reflected back
 to earth allowing long-distance radio
 communication around the curvature
 of the Earth. A celestial radio wave

kinds of pole beans were planted in rows of about fifty hills each. All nine kinds twined about the poles in the same direction; namely a right-handed screw thread. The vines on even-numbered poles of three rows were carefully unwound and twined backward. The runner was loosely tied about two inches below the tip, and this process was repeated whenever the runner had grown eight to ten inches. The period between ties was only a couple of days at first and gradually increased. In all cases, there is an appreciably better ratio of ounces of beans to shucks, and, to a lesser extent, ounces of beans to vines—for the reversed vines compared to the normal vines. Apparently, this handling of the vines causes an increase in the ratio of fruit to supporting structure.'

Grote Reber wrote letters in longhand and on a typewriter to newspapers, to journals, and to intellectuals whose ideas intrigued or confounded him. Each day, Reber carried his letters to the Bothwell post office for delivery around the world. Grote Reber, General Delivery, Bothwell, Tasmania, Australia 7030. Reber's final letter was titled 'The Future of Mankind': 'The human race is heading for a disaster. Several people have discussed this before me. Nobody paid much attention. Tommy Edison during the 1920s secured land in Florida. His plan was to grow plants with suitable seeds, distil the seeds for oil, and refine the oil. He never got far because nobody was interested. I won't go into this subject here. It deserves attention.'

When Reber died, his body was cremated and boxes of his ashes were distributed to radio

one of them. And then we apply Zipf law. And then we apply information theory to quantify the degree of conditional probability between signals, and therefore quantify the complexity. And, if it's a twentieth-order entropy, or a fiftieth-order entropy or something, we'll know. Because, even if you don't have the signals classified exactly correctly, you still can get a Zipf slope of minus one if it's a language.'

'The only other thing that I've analysed really is cotton plants. It turns out cotton plants transmit kind of an air-traffic-control chemical message to these certain wasps that read the air-traffic-control message and land on the plants with the caterpillars they like. I took the chemical analysis and basically did a Zipf plot and then an entropic analysis. I determined that the cotton plant had a vocabulary of five. There are only two known predators. So, I wrote in the paper that there's got to be three more predators, because why else would a cotton plant have a vocabulary of five? I got a call from Pennsylvania and these botanical people back there said, "It does have those additional predators. How did you know that?" And I said, "The cotton plant told me."'

'It's going to be unexpected from a scientist. Here's what I would ask them, a very short question, "What is your ultimate construction of the source of the universe?" So, I think I'd try and get as much about Planet Earth, including DNA if I could fit it in, so that somebody very advanced and very together might be able to reconstruct some of the events that happened on Earth before it destructed and how it was. I would want them to think, "wow,

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es.
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will be reflected back into space. The most auspicious places are near Lake Superior in the Northern Hemisphere and Tasmania in the Southern Hemisphere. The former looks out on the northern sky and the periphery of the Milky Way. The latter looks out at the southern sky in the centre of the Milky Way, a more interesting region.'

In the summer of 1947, Reber closed his operations at Wheaton, and began a search for ionospheric holes and quieter skies.

observatories around the world, where they were affixed to the rims of the parabolic dishes that persist in listening for extraterrestrial signals, for cosmic static, for glitches, for transmissions of other-than-human intelligence.

how beautiful, what a shame”, and use it to enlighten other species in the galaxy as to what not to do.’

1. Grote Reber, ‘A Play Entitled the Beginning of Radio Astronomy’, *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, vol. 82, no. 3, 1988: 93.

2. Grote Reber, ‘Endless, Boundless, Stable Universe’ (1977) <https://bazaarmodel.net/Onderwerpen/Endless-Boundless-Stable-Universe/>, accessed 1 August 2019.

3. Ibid.

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus Samson Young

James Parker/Joel Stern We hear the crisp, delicate sound of pages being shuffled, turned, and adjusted; a sound that continues for a few seconds before receding. A momentary pause, then the audible hiss of air pressing through teeth and lips. We hear the movement of mouths giving shape to exhalations: percussive hard consonants, long sustained vowels, and whispers that cut, click, decay, reverberate, overlap, and multiply in a chorus of word shapes. Again the distinctive sound of paper carefully handled, before the whispering returns more assertively. Insistent rhythms emerge, pulses, hard beats of hollow breath rising and falling, pausing, and beginning again, more forceful, vigorous, and imposing than before. Staccato expulsions of wind reaching a point of climax. Then, another pause, this time shorter and defined, and the rustling of paper. The performers have closed their scores.

The video shows us what we are listening to. A chamber choir, Hong Kong Voices, assembled in a black-box studio, performs excerpts from two works by Baroque composers: Antonio Lotti's *Crucifixus à 8 Voci* (c.1717–9) and J.S. Bach's *Ehre Sei Dir, Gott, Gesungen* from *Christmas Oratorio* (1734). Even an expert listener would struggle to identify them by sound alone. They have been radically reshaped by Hong Kong artist and composer Samson Young, who directed the choir to perform each piece 'without projecting the musical notes'. He added that this must be achieved 'without a diminution of the energy that is normally exerted'. Everything but the musical notes—the phrasing, intensity, concentration, formality—had to be retained. The work is titled *Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus*.



Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

Fig. 22 Samson Young *Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus* 2016



In any act of muting, something is amplified. This insight is at the heart of Young's *Muted Situations*, an ongoing series of works—there are twenty-two so far—involving instructional scores, 'proposals for sonic situations to be heard anew, achieved through a re-prioritisation of different sound layers'. Some scores have been staged, whereas others—for instance *Muted Dance Party*, *Muted Non-Violent Protest*, and *Muted Taoist Funeral Ritual of Hell-Breaking*—remain notional. Documentation of performances has been presented in galleries. The diverse *Situations* are bound by a common methodology. In each, the artist directs performers to suppress what would normally be the activity's dominant sound. Technically, how to do this depends on the situation, and the score itself is sometimes arrived at through discussion and negotiation with the performers. For Young, the project's agenda is clear. Muting dominant voices, he writes, is 'a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalised, or to make apparent certain assumptions about hearing and sounding'. What is at stake in the *Muted Situations* is embedded in the complexity of this assertion.

Whisper

JP/JS Because of our interest in eavesdropping, one of the things that attracted us to *Muted Chorus* was the way it concerns the whisper. *Muted Situation 21: We Are the World* is the only other work in the series that does so to the same extent; where what's being muted is primarily the human voice; where it's the voice specifically that's being targeted, transformed, and undermined.

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

The result, in both cases, is a collective whisper. Though beautiful in its way, so that both works suggest an aesthetics of whispering, the effect is also quite menacing or sinister, especially reproduced at volume in the gallery. As a result, even without knowing anything about the specific politics at play in each work—i.e. what it might mean to mute Lotti, Bach, Bruce Springsteen, Tina Turner, or a Hong Kong (Union) choir in particular—the listener has a sense that there is a more general politics of whispering at stake. Brandon LaBelle writes that we whisper in order to ‘drop below the line of sociability, to speak what must be spoken, yet what also should not be overheard’.¹ This idea—that the whisper responds to an imperative to voice what cannot yet be said ‘out loud’, and in so doing imagines and produces an audience outside or beneath the ‘social’, away from prying ears—is suggestive. Does it offer anything when it comes to thinking through your *Muted* works, do you think? What is it that must not be spoken, but needs to be? Or that should not be overheard? Where is the ‘line of sociability’ in this context? What work might it be doing?

Samson Young

I don’t think of the chorus as just whispering. It might sound like that in the video, but there is an investment in this idea of specifically muting the pitch. In the rehearsals, the chorus and I talked about holding the breath for the full duration of a note, to continue to let air out, and being mindful of articulating the consonant at the end of a sound, which is a bit different from just

whispering, because one might be tempted to focus on just the beginning of a word. We talked about dynamics and phrasing. The thinking and also the negotiation process is different to, say, if you approached the chorus and just told them that they would whisper the piece.

‘Lest I Forgot Who I Am__’, an early essay of mine on music and colonialism, ends with the question ‘how does one resist the demon without giving the demon one’s thoughts?’² When I started the *Muted Situations*, which is when I conceived the initial version of *Muted Chorus*, I was still in my comfort zone, making gestures that implied a sort of critique I was already familiar with. *Muted We Are the World* is a different beast. The decision to juxtapose ‘We Are the World’, the HK Federation of Trade Union Chorus (HKFTU), and muted-performance technique was deliberate, but also improvised. I still can’t fully grasp the effect that this combination of ingredients has and continue to find myself surprised by what it does. I do not identify with the HKFTU politically, being at the opposite end of the political spectrum, but I never intended to mock or poke fun at them.³ Early in the process, I

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

decided the video should convey a sort of tenderness. They entrusted me with their representation (it must have been difficult for them), and I didn't want to exploit that. The HKFTU and I 'reached across the aisle' to create the work. This taught me that it is possible to create spaces where extreme political differences coexist without dehumanising one another. When the audience experience the work, I hope this is palpable.

Unheard

JP/JS For Brandon LaBelle, whispering can sometimes be an act of resistance. But the whisper is also an effect of power—of disempowerment. *Muted Chorus* invites the viewer-listener to consider what it means to be reduced to a whisper, to be made to whisper, for a whisper to be all that is available to you. This is also a major theme of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)*, where the requirement that prisoners keep quiet is backed up by the threat of death. As a result, whispering is an act of resistance and solidarity, a literal lifeline, but also an incredible risk. The violence at stake in *Muted Chorus* is 'slower' and more insidious. You've suggested that one way of understanding the work is as a response to the continued 'neglect and negation' of Asian composers; the fact that 'composers outside the West are invisible in their own concert halls'.⁴ You have a mixed-gender Hong Kong choir sing

excerpts from two canonical works by early 'masters' of the European classical tradition, both from Christian liturgical music, to be performed at mass. Much of this is subdued and transformed in the act of muting, but not gone. Even whispered, the counterpoint is recognisably Baroque. Lotti's *Crucifixus* becomes newly malevolent, as it snakes around the choir, but the religious connotation is hard to miss. Visually too, from the performers' clothes, posture, and the 'neutral' staging, we know we are watching a contemporary choral performance, removed from a religious setting. So, it is Lotti and Bach being muted, along with the traditions of composition and performance they made emblematic. The work can be read as a kind of revenge on 'the canon', here reduced to a whisper by a composer from Hong Kong. What was 'unheard or marginalised', and what *Muted Chorus* works to 'uncover', would then be the sense in which this tradition—along with the religious, cultural, and legal forms that accompany it—has always had an imperial or expansionist tendency, and so is bound up with these ongoing forms of violence. This would be the resistant reading. Only, the choir has been muted too, of course, so that the revenge is hardly complete. If there is agency in their whisper, it has been attenuated. But perhaps this is the fate of all performers in the European compositional tradition? Or is that too crude?

SY Yes, if you viewed them as acts of resistance or 'revenge', there certainly is an aspect of 'repay evil with evil' in the initial version of *Muted Chorus*. But my thinking has changed since the work

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

was made. Giving yourself permission to mess with and appropriate the canon (as a symbol of cultural prestige) isn't enough for me anymore. It certainly does something in that it's a demonstration of knowledge, and a demonstration of the power to wield this knowledge. It makes certain unequal power dynamics more apparent. The problem is people already know, and there is a kind of arrogance in assuming that people are not 'woke', and that they don't already perceive these differences in position. The problem isn't that there is some grand illusion that people hadn't woken up to yet, but where do we go from that awareness? This is partly addressed by my answer to your first question. Let me tell you a longer story about the violence of appropriation and misappropriation that is, musically speaking, 'closer to home'.

Togaku is a genre of Japanese court music that refers to music imported from China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). It is an exquisite music, typified by shimmering and highly dissonant harmony, that provides no harmonic progress and is so slow that time seems suspended. Japanese court musicians hold that Togaku has not changed in a thousand years. But musicologists have already established that no known form of medieval Chinese melody resembles the melodic features of present-day Togaku. Further, similar to many other musical traditions that



Fig. 23 Samson Young *Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus* 2016

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

involve large ensembles, Togaku is a predominantly aural tradition, meaning that musicians learn by listening and then echoing what they hear, so it's highly improbable that things have not been modified over 1,300 years.

The curious thing is that, if you were to take away the tone-cluster harmonisation that gives Togaku its characteristic dissonant sound, and perform it at a sufficiently quick tempo, it would yield melodies that resemble the known corpus of medieval Chinese music. We have no reliable primary musical sources that tell us what Tang Court music sounded like, so somebody else's mishearing is all we've got. How would we go about reconstructing this 'lost' music? Rujing Huang, a doctoral student in ethnomusicology from Harvard, wrote an interesting report on the Yayue court-music revival movement in Beijing, which has turned to Togaku—specifically, to its complex modal harmony—as a model. It is generally held that traditional Chinese music is monophonic. But Yayue revivalists spend considerable effort on the 'repatriation' of a Chinese harmonic practice through speculative theorising and musical reenactment. According to Huang, the reasons for the revivalists' emphasis on harmony are: first, to 'upgrade China's image from one of musical primitivism to that of a sophisticated musical hegemon', to capitalise on the 'civilising force' of

harmony (to fight evil with evil), and, second, to define a Chinese harmonic practice that differentiates itself from its 'Western (tonal) other' through complex, non-progressing dissonances.

There is something very strange here in Chinese music's relationship to the technology of harmony as a symbol of cultural and historical progress. It goes like this: Western music became increasingly dissonant throughout the classical and romantic periods, until it reached a breaking point in the music of Richard Wagner and finally reoriented itself through the new rationality of the twelve-tone method that abandoned all sense of harmonic progress. What the court-music revivalists managed to achieve, through cherry picking from music history, is to conjure a story of an ancient hyper-advanced Chinese musical culture—like some Atlantean myth—where Tang court musicians in the seventh century achieved what the second Viennese school of composers had only managed to achieve at the turn of the twentieth.

The only problem is that, historically-speaking, the opposite is true. Huang noted that, in a 1996 study, the Chinese musicologist Zuo Jicheng traced the historical transformation of harmonic practices in China and concluded that the trajectory is one of constant simplifications of dissonant harmonies towards consonance, until

it evolved into a strictly consonant harmonic model in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Now, what sort of anti-hegemonic grand narrative can you build with that? This shit is real. You end up playing into the frames that you'd been subjected to in the first place. What is one to do? I don't have an answer, politically or artistically, yet it's been a long thinking process.

Overheard

JP/JS Lotti and Bach are not the only 'master' composers *Muted Chorus* is in dialogue with. The piece also works with and against Cage, in particular the modes of composition and listenership inaugurated by *4'33"* (1952), his infamous silent work, which—as you've pointed out—is constantly figured as a 'disciplinary year zero' for sound art. In one famous passage, Cage writes: 'One may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments.'⁵ Brian Kane calls this 'onto-aesthetics': art or discourse about art in which the work's ability to explore or disclose its own ontology is valued.⁶ Thus, for Christoph Cox, *4'33"* is important because it points to and embodies music's necessary sonicity, because it explores 'the materiality of sound',⁷ and because it exposes and teaches us something about sound's nature as a 'ceaseless and intense flow' of vibrant matter that is 'actualised in but not exhausted by speech, music, and significant

sound of all sorts'.⁸ As Kane points out, the 'critical thrust' of onto-aesthetics is to 'remove artworks from their cultural contexts (claims about hermeneutics, interpretation, meaning, intention, reception, and so forth) by suturing them to their ontological conditions'.⁹ The trouble is they can't. With *4'33"*, what's elided is all the work required to produce the 'spatial frame' which, for Cox, is what allows sound to simply be—and be appreciated for being—itself. This act of framing is anything but simple however. It demands: a composer, a score, and so a 'work'; a performer or performers with their instruments; the staging of their performance across three movements in a soundproofed concert hall for money; before an audience (urbane, elite, often white) trained in the arts of concert-going, with all its norms—both explicit and implicit—of listenership and comportment; the extremely recent convention of hushed attention; a certain knowledge of the musical tradition(s) into which Cage is intervening; and, in many cases, direct knowledge of the work itself, along with the powerful mythology surrounding it. All this and more is required to produce and sustain the 'frame' that will make the next few minutes comprehensible as having to do with sound 'itself'. For Brandon Joseph, therefore, *4'33"* is a 'pure technique of power'.¹⁰ For Douglas Kahn, it is both about the impossibility of silence and itself an act of silencing in which Cage doesn't so much disappear as creator and master of his work as magnify his own presence and authority.¹¹

These are precisely the lines of thought suggested by your work. Mute is not silent. And *Muted Chorus* is clearly not an exercise in onto-aesthetics. Just the reverse. Muting, in this way of

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus

thinking, becomes a radical reframing of silence; a form of silencing that, contra Cage, draws attention to itself and suggests that we attend precisely to the politics of that silencing, along with the forms of listening it produces, as we've already discussed. One of the things we've found so productive about eavesdropping as a starting point for our thinking is that it also suggests a politics of listening. Eavesdropping is always a matter of power relations. It is excessive and expansive. To eavesdrop is to hear too much, more than was meant for you, against certain norms of listening; a possibility that is already suggested by the word 'overhear'.¹² One could never 'eavesdrop', therefore, on a sound in 'itself'. In this sense, as a way of thinking about music or sound art, eavesdropping is much closer to Seth Kim-Cohen's notion of 'shallow listening' than Pauline Oliveros's 'deep listening'.¹³ Something similar could be said of your work perhaps.

SY Part of it is the artistic labour—doing it, managing all the moving parts to get together the muted performance, and hearing-seeing-witnessing-feeling what it does. Muting requires tedious negotiation with anxious performers. The conductor will have trouble conducting when unable to hear feedback from the ensemble. When lion dancers can't hear the rhythm, they need to come up with a new definition of what it means to perform with sufficient energy. If Cagean silence is idealistic in its reliance on and its trust of the frame, then mutedness is pragmatic in

trusting the experiment and the process to produce surprising results. Who knew an orchestra of muted strings vis-a-vis the orchestration of Tchaikovsky (*Muted Situation 22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th*) would sound like the sea? With the *Muted Situations* series, you just don't know until you start workshopping the pieces with the performers. The score isn't this perfect thing where the work is. The work is in the process and in the result of the process, which includes also all the different ways that it exceeds and falls short of the vision outlined in the blueprint.

Excerpts from this interview
were published in *Samson Young: Real Music*
(London: Koenig Books, 2019).

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1. Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 148.
 2. Samson Young, 'Lest I Forget Who I Am To__', in *Songs for Disaster Relief: Hong Kong in Venice: A Mixtape* 楊嘉輝的賑災專輯: 香港在威尼斯 - 新曲加精選 (Hong Kong: M+, 2017).
 3. The HKTFU is the largest labour group in Hong Kong, and one of the oldest. Having been formed by pro-communist trade unionists in 1948, it has historically been pro-Beijing.
 4. www.teamgal.com/production/4631/SY%2016%20Artforum.pdf.
 5. John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 10.
 6. Brian Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn', *Sound Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015: 2.
 7. Christoph Cox, 'Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2011: 145, 148–9.
 8. Christoph Cox, 'Sound Art and the Sonic Unconscious', *Organised Sound*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009: 19, 22.
 9. Brian Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture', 13.
 10. Brandon W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage (A 'Minor' History)* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 188.
 11. Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999), 161.
 12. Peter Szendy, *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage*, Rolf Végso trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
 13. Seth Kim-Cohen, 'No Depth: A Call for Shallow Listening', in *Against Ambience* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

how are you today
Manus Recording Project Collective

how are you today

Since 2013, nearly 2,000 men have been indefinitely detained on Manus Island, in Papua New Guinea, by the Australian Government, after arriving in Australian territory seeking asylum. When the Manus Regional Processing Centre was formally closed on 31 October 2017, after the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, the men still detained there were ordered to relocate to new, smaller detention centres in Lorengau, the major town on Manus. The authorities eliminated provisions and removed the diesel generators powering the facilities, but the men refused to leave—the culmination of years of organised resistance against their involuntary and indefinite detention. Eventually, they were forcibly evicted.

In early 2016, Abdul Aziz Muhamat began sending Michael Green voice messages from inside the detention centre on Manus. At first—before the rules changed—Aziz was using a smuggled phone secretly in his room. The enormous archive of thousands of messages formed the basis of *The Messenger*, a long-form podcast series we made with producers Hannah Reich, Rebecca Fary, Sophie Black, and others from Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre.

Producing the podcast from Melbourne, and listening to the long, complex recordings, we thought about this strange act of earwitnessing and the implications of the edited work for listeners. When the narrative of the episodes caught up to real time, we began publishing more direct, non-narrated recordings. As they grew closer to Aziz's story, did listeners face any obligations? What did their listening do for him, as a subject? We operated within the rules of the

medium and its dictated relationships, with the time pressure and the imperative to get ‘content’. We sat with the discomfort of our position—of our power as chroniclers and editors making work from the messages; listening to them, assessing them; negotiating duration, clarity, and topicality.

We were also entangled with the technology that made the exchange possible and couldn’t help but be aware of the ways it demanded a particular kind of listening. The exchange was conducted in bursts and fragments. It was disordered, marked by absences, with messages arriving in a different sequence to that in which they were sent. There was no immediacy, even when a reply was immediate; just an uncanny midpoint between a conversation and a memo. There were no physical cues or small affirmations; just waiting, silence, interference, and the unpredictable rhythm of messages arriving on Michael’s phone at any time or place. Occasionally we were seduced by the thought that Aziz and the other men were eavesdropping on Australia, given the way they followed news and social media so intensely. But we also wondered what Aziz heard and what he made of that. What did he hear when he listened to Australia and heard himself speaking back through it?

Months and years passed and still Aziz remained on Manus with no prospect of resettlement or release. Late in 2017, James Parker and Joel Stern contacted us to ask if we were interested in adapting the unheard trove of *Messenger* recordings for a work in *Eavesdropping*. We wondered how that could convey Aziz’s stasis or his mindset, which had been worsening. We didn’t want to use old

how are you today

messages, because the situation was ongoing—and besides, how could any exhibition treatment of the archival audio feel anything but exploitative? (But also, what alternatives were there—and what was the strange mutation of value that happened when recordings transitioned from ‘timely’ to ‘archival’ anyway?) The weight of the detainees’ limbo grew heavier as the story lapsed from public attention. Yet, for the men on Manus, there was something new to respond to every day. We began to discuss a project that allowed us to avoid selecting messages or shaping a narrative. Michael had visited Manus twice and met many other men detained there. What were they experiencing? What did we—or the gallery visitors—have to offer them?

We started contacting men on Manus via WhatsApp, to see if they were interested in making recordings for *Eavesdropping*. Eventually, six, including Aziz, said yes. The resulting work is a collaboration between them and us in Melbourne. Each day for the duration of the exhibition, one of the men made a ten-minute sound recording—of anything they liked or nothing much at all—and sent it ‘onshore’ for swift upload to the gallery.

—André Dao, Michael Green, and Jon Tjhia

On Manus

SAMAD ABDUL was detained on Manus for the last five years and is now living temporarily in Port Moresby.

ABDUL AZIZ MUHAMAT is from Darfur, Sudan, and of the Zaghawa ethnic group. He arrived in Australia by boat in 2013 and was taken to Manus Island, where he was detained for six years. He became a public voice for the men there through his award-winning podcast, *The Messenger*. In 2019, ten leading human-rights NGOs awarded him the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human-Rights Defenders. Aziz arranged a special visa from the Papua New Guinea government to fly to Switzerland to receive the Award. Once there, he successfully claimed asylum.

FARHAD BANDESH is a Kurdish musician, painter, and poet, who has been detained on Manus for six years. Before seeking asylum, he worked as a guitar maker. While in detention, he has produced solo and collaborative works of music, art, and writing. He loves nature and is a keen gardener. His sisters now look after his plants.

BEHROUZ BOOCHANI is a Kurdish-Iranian writer, journalist, scholar, cultural advocate, and filmmaker. He was a writer for the Kurdish-language magazine *Werya*. He writes regularly for the *Guardian* and other publications. Boochani is also co-director (with Arash Kamali Sarvestani) of the 2017 feature film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, and author of *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, which won the Victorian Prize for Literature in 2019. He has been held on Manus Island since 2013.

SHAMINDAN KANAPATHI is a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee. In Sri Lanka he was a marketing executive and student.

KAZEM KAZEMI is a Kurdish heavy-metal and rock songwriter-musician and a poet. Before seeking asylum in Australia, he lived in Khorramshahr, Iran, and worked as an electrician.

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In Melbourne

ANDRÉ DAO is a writer of fiction and non-fiction. He is one of the founders of Behind the Wire, an oral-history project documenting immigration-detention experiences, and Deputy Editor of *New Philosopher*.

MICHAEL GREEN is a writer, radiomaker, and producer. He is the host of *The Messenger* podcast, for which he has won national and international awards, including the 2017 Walkley Award for Radio/Audio Feature. He has travelled to Manus twice.

JON TJHIA is a radiomaker, musician, and writer. As its Senior Digital Editor, he led the Wheeler Centre's collaboration with Behind the Wire to produce *The Messenger*. He is a co-founder of *Paper Radio* and *Australian Audio Guide*.



how are you today

Fig. 24 Abdul Aziz Muhamat crossing the street, Lorengau, December 2017.



Fig. 25 Behrouz Boochani taking a photograph of the jungle, Lorengau, December 2017.



how are you today

Fig. 26 Behrouz Boochani, presentation, *Sound Proofs*, Goldsmiths, University of London, 14 June 2019.



Fig. 27 Manus Recording Project Collective how are you today 2018, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2018. Photo: Keelan O'Hehir

Preliminary WhatsApp and Voice-Message Conversations

Farhad, 3 July 2018

7:26 PM Farhad: When do you want me to start recording and send to you or Michael? What kind of recording you would like me to do? Any topic?

7:34 PM Jon: Hey, good to hear from you! I'll just figure out with Michael when we need to start recording and which days each of you guys will need to do. And I think we'll probably start recording in a couple of weeks! So you don't need to do any more recording just yet.

In terms of the topics, you can choose to talk or record things deliberately, but—and I'm not sure if Michael has explained this to you—part of the idea of this exhibition is that it can just be silence, or the sound of the houses/units people live in, or sounds in the street. In a lot of ways we are encouraging people coming to the gallery to experience the sound of what it is like to be on Manus like you guys are—not just what you do when you're entertaining yourselves or keeping busy or telling stories and things, but also when nothing is happening, or there is silence, or just things in the distance or background.

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So what I mean is: you don't have to 'perform' anything! Whatever you record, the listener we hope is going to be doing that thing with you, in a way. If you are resting, we are asking them to rest with you. If you are walking, they are walking through the sound of your walking. Does that make sense?

7:36 PM Farhad: Can I edit or mix my recording or you want it be natural?

7:40 PM Jon: The idea is definitely for it to be natural—we would like it to be one chunk of audio recorded in real-time, not edited! We think that's an important part of the work. (But of course it's really great that you are interested in editing and mixing other things—personally I am interested in that! But it isn't quite right for this project.)

7:40 PM Farhad: Thanks for explanation

Farhad, 17 July 2018

6:04 PM Jon: Thanks for sending, looking forward to listening! How would you describe (in a sentence or two) what you recorded?

6:13 PM Farhad: That's my life, I really don't know what to do. Just make my mind a little busy. I make

myself tea and playing guitar but I can not play because it is loud and I don't want to hurt other refugees. I listen to English music and Kurdish song ... etc it's makes me relax!! I love music

Aziz, 10 July 2018

4:17 PM Michael: Hey bro how are you?

4:17 PM Michael: What do you think about getting all the guys together to go through the instructions for how to use the recorder?

5:25 PM Aziz: Hey bro. Am good thanks

5:25 PM Aziz: How are you

5:25 PM Aziz: For sure I can do that for the guys here in east then I will go to West as well

5:49 PM Michael: Awesome! Yeah, it's so important to practice, because you have to get the levels right, and use the headphones to make sure the recording sounds good

5:51 PM Michael: Did you read the consent form, are you happy?

5:51 PM Michael: If so, we need you to either print, sign and photograph it

5:52 PM Michael: Or to send a voice message saying you read the form and understand it, and you have read and understood this form ('how are you today consent form'), and that you agree to participate

5:54 PM Michael: And when you are ready, can you send a practice

how are you today

recording to me? Best to do it on Telegram, because it will come through better quality than WhatsApp

6:21 PM Aziz: I have not printed out the form but am going to do it soon

6:22 PM Aziz: With recorder am still practicing the recording I did it with Farhad before some days ago

6:23 PM Michael: Great! What did you record?

6:35 PM Aziz: Just the sound of the rain is been raining for the whole week

6:59 PM Michael: Oh cool

6:59 PM Michael: One thing with rain is that when you record it, it can just sound like buzzing

7:00 PM Michael: So it helps to take the microphone near a spot where drops are splashing a puddle or running from a gutter to hit the roof

7:01 PM Michael: That way you record the general buzzing but also the sound of raindrops ... if that makes sense?

Aziz, 19 July 2018

9:04 PM Michael: What is this recording?

9:06 PM Aziz: The recording is about one of the somali guy who was very depressed then I try to

help him then he asked me to play some country music to clear his head that's why I recorded

9:07 PM Michael: Wow, amazing

9:08 PM Michael: In East?

9:08 PM Michael: Did the guy know you were recording?

9:14 PM Aziz: Yes East Lorengau

9:14 PM Aziz: Yes I told him that am going to record

Aziz, 23 July 2018

10:53 PM Michael: Hey bro, how are you today?

10:53 PM Michael: I hope you're well!

11:05 PM Aziz: Hey bro . Am good thanks

11:06 PM Aziz: Just busy with one of the guys hes trying to hurt himself

11:06 PM Michael: oh shit, that's not ok, that's awful

11:06 PM Michael: good luck bro, hope you can help somehow

11:07 PM Aziz: Yeah it's but all good now I managed to put him in touch some dOctoberors

11:07 PM Michael: oh that's great

11:07 PM Aziz: Am doing my best

11:08 PM Michael: Always!

how are you today

11:08 PM Aziz:

My pleasure man

11:09 PM Michael: Oh hey, when you get a moment, are you happy with the consent form for the exhibition? You were going to print it out, but it's ok. I could send it by email, and if you respond saying you give your consent, that will be fine

11:10 PM Aziz:
my email

Yeah man for sure send me in

11:12 PM Michael: Sent!

11:19 PM Aziz:

Good man I got it

11:19 PM Aziz:

All clear I will try to print out

11:20 PM Michael: Hey it's fine to just reply by email ... too much hassle to print!

11:27 PM Aziz:

Alright buddy

11:50 PM Michael: Thanks bro

11:51 PM Michael: Hope you get some good sleep! Your recording of the World Cup is the first one in the exhibition tomorrow!

Kazem, 22 July 2018
Voice-Messages

6:56 PM Kazem:

Hello, how are you? I don't feel to typing the words and ... that's why I sent you my

voice, recorded. At first I want to say something about myself, on Manus Island at the moment. I'm living here in the East camp, and I'm waiting for my US interview, and maybe they will call me soon. And that's why when I got the ... paper from them to do the interview, you know, I'm supposed to be focussed on my interview because it's very important for me, and I don't have a normal life at the moment, you know, and I need to get my freedom, and it's important, you know, thing for me at the moment. But I will try my best to do that and accompany with you to, you know, finish that exhibition.

7.04 PM Kazem: You know, some people here, don't like to record their voice, and that's why it's really difficult to find someone who will be, you know, happy to do that. But I try to send you different, you know, topics, on Manus Island. And daily lives on Manus Island. Ah—let's see what will happen at the next.

7.34 PM Kazem: Okay, thank you so much. Yes, I read a little bit of the paper, and the name of the exhibition: how are you today. [laughs] As I say to you, same as every day—same as yesterday. [laughs] Ah, okay, I will look at them, and read them as soon as I can do it. Uh, thank you. Now I wanna go and do something. Thank you so much. If you don't have any questions, you know, I want to go—thank you so much.

11.07 PM Kazem: [rain audible] Ah, as I said to you, you know, recently, I'll talk to someone about the exhibition. But, you know, I pissed them off—and he had a bad behaviour with me. [smilingly] No problem; it's okay. But I have someone else and he wants to, you know, participate in the exhibition. Just I want to know, you know, it's like

how are you today

a report—you know, he wants to talk about his lives, daily life, on Manus Island. And he wants to explain about things here that he's doing every day. Just I want to know, you know, he also can speak English, just ah, I want to know, can he ... [cuts off]

11.20 PM Kazem: And, another topic is ... that I want to, you know, work on it—cooking. I want to cook and record the voice of cooking, that I want to do. What do you think about that?

11.20 PM Kazem: And another one is—someone, you know, he just watching movie in his room, and nothing to do every day. And that's another topic.

11.24 PM Kazem: Ah, what about taking shower? I want to take shower, and record that. What do you think about that? Is it good or not?

11.25PM Jon: Yeah! That sounds great too. I think ... what is really good about these ideas that you have is that they sound pretty different, so you'll produce a lot of stuff that opens up lots of different sides of life on Manus, and I think that's great. Congratulations—these are very good ideas.

11.27 PM Kazem: [crickets audible] And another one is ah, I'm going to talk to the Sri Lanka guys, and listen to their story. But I haven't seen them yet, maybe tomorrow I will do that. And if they would like to do that, I will keep them in the queue and later I will do that.

8.52PM Kazem: Hi Jon, how are you? No, brother, I didn't get the recorder—I'm waiting for it. Mm, I looked for Behrouz, but I didn't see him. Maybe

tomorrow. I will ask again tonight, from his roommate.

4:02 PM Kazem: You know, Jon ... today I wanted to record someone. When I talked to them about the reason, and he said to me, Oh, no no, nothing gonna change ... noone can help us. I did that before, long time ago, many times, and no, nothing is working for us. And after that I told him no problem, brother it's okay—it's not force. If you're happy, we do that. If you're not, no problem, okay. [laughs] And that was my, you know, my day. For recording.

10:23 PM Kazem: You know, as usual, I'm walking alone, and no friends. You know, I have lots of friends, but not really best friends. You know, I need to have a friend that be like me, you know, musician, heavy metal, in the same way. But there is not at the moment, and that's why I feel alone, really. And it's difficult for me.

Aziz, 4 August 2018

2:57 PM Aziz: I have an idea of recording relaxation music just me and myself trying to relax my mind

3:07 PM Michael: That's a really good one

3:08 PM Aziz: Oh really

3:09 PM Michael: Yeah! Definitely, because it's been such a hard time ... it shows how you try to cope

3:10 PM Aziz: I have two sound one birds sound

how are you today

3:10 PM Aziz:

Heave rains

3:10 PM Michael: Really? You listen to bird sounds?

3:11 PM Aziz:

Yes some time

3:12 PM Aziz:

Which one do you think is the best

3:13 PM Michael: Maybe birds will sound more interesting in the gallery than rain

3:14 PM Aziz:

Birds sound , heavy rains .grand clock .serene waterfall

3:14 PM Aziz:

Wonderful

3:14 PM Aziz:

Birds sound I like it too

3:15 PM Michael: How often do you listen to these?

3:15 PM Aziz:

Once a week

3:16 PM Michael: Does it help you relax?

3:21 PM Aziz:

Yes it does help some of time

3:21 PM Aziz:

If am on the pressure it help me

3:26 PM Michael: That's good

3:27 PM Aziz:

Ah what do you think

3:27 PM Michael: Do you listen by yourself or with friends?

3:28 PM Aziz:

With my friends

3:28 PM Michael: That's really interesting to record, with you chatting as well
Wonderful

3:28 PM Aziz:

Behrouz, 2 August 2018

7:03 AM Michael: Hi Behrouz, good morning! Did you make a recording last night?

7:13 AM Behrouz: Hi Michael. Yes i did last night, i have to find a comouter to send it

7:14 AM Michael: Fantastic! Great! I know Aziz has one

7:16 AM Michael: How should I describe the recording, for the gallery?

7:18 AM Behrouz: I will send it today

7:18 AM Michael: Thank you!

7:26 AM Behrouz: Living in jungel. Its one of my favorite moments when i am tired sit down in jungel and hear voice of jungel

7:27 AM Michael: Excellent. What time was it, when you made the recording?

7:31 AM Behrouz: I made it at 8 Pm

7:31 AM Michael: Do they let you out, even though there is a curfew?

how are you today

7:33 AM Behrouz: I sit down beaide the fance. Curfew can not prevent voice of listening to voices

7:34 AM Michael: Oh, so you are inside, but next to the fence?

7:40 AM Behrouz: Yes exctly

5:58 PM Michael: Hi Behrouz, do you have the file? I need to mix it and upload it tonight for the gallery!

5:58 PM Michael: Would be great if you can send as soon as possible!
Thanks!

6:00 PM Behrouz: I am going to join the book launch. I had such a busy day. I will do it tonight

6:01 PM Behrouz: Is it ok if i do it tonight? Im so sorry. So much busy i was

6:01 PM Michael: Ok, no problem! Good luck for the book launch ... I know it is a crazy busy time for you!

6:01 PM Behrouz: Also a refugee bite another one with a knife and just i came back from hospital

6:02 PM Michael: holy shit

6:02 PM Behrouz: Yes im sorry

6:03 PM Behrouz: I will do other recording in begining of week

6:06 PM Michael: Ok sure, I don't mind waiting to tonight. It's ok! Don't want to add to your stress!

6:07 PM Behrouz: Thank you Micheal. Im sorry again

6:07 PM Michael: 🙏 No worries at all!
Good luck for the launch!

8:45 PM Behrouz: Just Kazem sent my file to John

8:46 PM Behrouz: There is a sound behind it that its natural. Its a sound of water tanks

8:54 PM Michael: Oh fantastic, thank you so much!

Farhad, 24 August 2018

10:05 AM Farhad: Hi Jon, how are you today? This is my recording it is about local teaching trumpet! At music hall for church.

10:08 AM Farhad: Some Germany musicians came to Manus to teach and give instruments to young local boy and girl. Now the young boy can play and teach trumpet!!

Shamindan, 6 September 2018

10:26 PM André: Hey Shamindan, how are you? How are your plans for the boat trip going?

10:28 PM Shamindan: Hello Andre. I'm good thanks. When will it be need brother?

how are you today

Shamindan, 7 September 2018

7:13 AM André: Hey Shamindan, we need a recording by tonight if that's possible

8:26 AM Shamindan: I'll do my best

8:46 AM André: Thanks Shamindan!

8:46 AM Shamindan: My pleasure brother

6:14 PM André: Hey Shamindan, thanks for sending this—it sounds great! Really atmospheric

6:17 PM André: Could you describe for me where the boat went—did you go to another island?

6:34 PM Shamindan: Yes I took a boat and went to an island call Rara island. It's just 10 to 15 minutes boat travel. And I just went around the Rara island.

6:35 PM Shamindan: It's just a small island many refugees we to go there for swim and relax.

7:04 PM André: How was it? Did you get to relax a little bit?

8:33 PM Shamindan: No not really I was very scared as I can not swim brother. 🤔😓

Shamindan, 11 September 2019

5:51 PM André: Hi Shamindan, I'm sorry to hear that someone tried to commit suicide this morning.

Everyone must be feeling terrible at the moment.

7:28 PM Shamindan: Yes brother everyone now losing their hope.

7:46 PM André: I'm truly sorry to hear that. I hope something will change for you soon.

7:46 PM André: I also wanted to say that if you wanted to address the loss of hope, or the suicide attempts in some way in your recordings, you should feel free to do so

7:47 PM André: you don't have to, of course, but if you would like to that would work as a recording

8:13 PM Shamindan: Yes it would be good

8:13 PM Shamindan: I'll work through it

8:13 PM Shamindan: And I'll let you know when I'm ready for it

9:10 PM André: thanks Shamindan

Shamindan, 14 September 2018

9:04 AM André: Hi Shamindan, I know you probably haven't had time to do something addressing the suicide attempts, but as we need something for tomorrow, would it be possible for you to make another recording today? just something simple if you can

how are you today

9:08 AM Shamindan: Good morning

9:08 AM Shamindan: Yes yes absolutely it's fine

9:08 AM André: thanks Shamindan, I hope you're feeling ok today

9:09 AM Shamindan: I have already prepared for the suicide attempts matter.

9:09 AM Shamindan: Just waiting for your reply

9:09 AM Shamindan: I'll send it by this evening

9:09 AM Shamindan: And I hope you have a good day Andre

9:10 AM André: oh thank you so much for doing that

9:10 AM André: i look forward to hearing it

9:11 AM Shamindan: OK brother

2:57 PM Shamindan: Hello Andre

2:58 PM Shamindan: I prepared to do much better but I didn't as I didn't want to say many things as I don't feel comfortable to. So I hope this might be OK.

Samad, 17 September 2018

2:07 PM Michael: Hey Samad, how are you? Are you in Pom now (or are those old photos you are posting on Facebook)?

2:29 PM Samad: Hey Micheal and Andre. I was trying to send you message but I got busy in things and forget. 😞😞 Yeah I'm in POM

2:30 PM André: No worries, Samad, I understand! what are you doing in POM?

2:32 PM Samad: I got a small job in hospitality field and tomorrow will be my first day at work

2:32 PM Michael: What? Wow!

2:32 PM André Dao: oh wow

2:32 PM Michael: Amazing! When/how did this all happen?

2:35 PM Samad: That's was such a wonderful news when I got a job, it's in Hilton hotel and I would love to enjoy my field

2:36 PM Michael: Congratulations!

2:36 PM André: this sounds great! congratulations!

2:37 PM André: would you like to make a recording explaining a bit of what happened?

2:57 PM Samad: I'm still confused to decide whether to share this or not ... But I'm so happy to share with you guys

2:59 PM André: ah yes, that is a good point—did anything change with your visa status?

3:00 PM Samad: Visa status?

how are you today

3:01 PM Michael: You are allowed to work?

3:01 PM Samad: Yeah, I'm

3:01 PM Michael: By PNG government?

3:01 PM Samad: Yeah

3:02 PM Michael: Ok great! What is your worry about sharing it?

3:06 PM Samad: No worry, but when Manus comes in my mind it hurts me

3:07 PM Samad: I just thought I have to take some rest and trying very best to forget Manus out of my mind

3:12 PM Michael: Right! That is understandable!

3:14 PM Samad: Thanks Michel brother

3:25 PM André: If you'd like, we'd be happy for you to make recordings about POM, and not talk about Manus at all. But of course if making the recordings makes you feel too bad, then we don't want that to happen.

3:25 PM André: what do you think, would you like to make more recordings, about about what it's like in POM?

3:26 PM Samad: Yeah ... I'll think about that and I'm yet to discover things in POM

3:27 PM André: Ok! good luck with the first day tomorrow!

3:27 PM Michael: Great! Where are you staying there?

3:45 PM Samad: Thanks Andre

3:45 PM] Samad: I'm staying in waigani

3:50 PM Michael: Oh I don't know where that is, but I will google it! Does the hotel give you a place to live?

3:52 PM Michael: Oooh! It is a really fancy area! That's nice!

3:52 PM] Samad: The hotel won't give me place, it's just a small job with low salary, which will be really hard to survive. but my priority was to get out of Manus and to gain some experience

3:53 PM Michael: I think you will do so well in your job Samad! They are lucky to have you.

3:54 PM Samad: Thank you Micheal, I have to work really really hard to get a job in a good position. I need your wishes and prayers I hope I'll achieve my goals

3:55 PM Michael: You will do so well, I am sure! Thinking of you there!

3:56 PM Samad: Thanks brother

how are you today

4:44 PM Michael: Hi Behrouz, I hope you have had an ok day. Maybe you are playing soccer right now! Will you still send a recording today?

5:15 PM Behrouz: Hi Micheal. Im sorry to say that but i can not do it today. I was with someone today and could not have the recorder

5:15 PM Behrouz: I can do it by tomorrow

5:25 PM Michael: Hi Behrouz, no worries, I understand!

5:25 PM Michael: We are just asking Shamindan and Samad if either of them have recordings we can use for tomorrow.

5:26 PM Michael: If not, do you think maybe you could record something else tonight?

5:36 PM Behrouz: I will do my best

5:37 PM Behrouz: Yes i can record making coffee and spend sometimes in the kitchen

5:54 PM Michael: Oh that would be great!

8:49 PM Behrouz: Hi Micheal. Im sending the audio

8:49 PM Behrouz: Its about my time in the kitchen and making coffee

8:52 PM Michael: Great! Can't wait to listen 🧐

8:54 PM Behrouz: Actually im washing the dishes

8:58 PM Michael: Very important! 😊

9:03 PM Behrouz: 😊

9:38 PM Michael: Got it!

9:41 PM Behrouz: I hope you like it

9:41 PM Behrouz: There is noise which is for the cattle

9:46 PM Michael: Excellent! Kettle

Behrouz, 20 September 2018

8:45 AM Michael: It's a wonderful recording! It is funny to hear you speaking in Kurdish, but then hear you say 'Peter Dutton'! Great sounds of the kitchen and you singing. It is playing now in the gallery and in the law school.

9:03 AM Behrouz: 🍲

9:05 AM Behrouz: Yes we are talking about him and Australia in many languages

Farhad, 28 September 2018

12:37 AM Farhad: Hi Jon, this is my new recording, I'm cooking food. I play a Kurdish song and sing with singer!!

6:13 PM Jon: hey farhad, thanks for sending this! i'm just downloading

how are you today

it now. the days are a bit mixed up at the moment because samad has moved, so we will probably be putting this in the gallery tomorrow!

6:46 PM Jon: i've written 'Farhad, on Thursday, cooking, listening to Kurdish music and singing along'— does that sound good to you?

7:11 PM Farhad: Hey Jon. Yes it is awesome 🎵🎵

Farhad, 17 October 2018

4:06 PM Farhad: Hi Jon, hope you are well. The project is really beautiful for me, this is new experience. I can record a file audio about 10 minutes and share with people and they understand, what life is look like on Manus Island for me. I tried to show the audiences what I do in during a day. But I wish it was a little bit longer this project. Thank you very much all of you guys for this project and thanks to all who spent thier times and listened to my recordings

11:27 PM Jon: hey farhad! thank you for this, and sorry for my very very slow reply. i am so glad you feel this way about the project. maybe we will do something similar again; we've also been talking about whether these recordings might find a home somewhere at some point, because it's a very unique archive. we'll see and of course we'll discuss it later on. but thank you too for the work you've been doing. it has been an absolute

pleasure to work with you and an honest privilege to spend some time listening through your ears.

Farhad, 18 October 2018

12:15 AM Farhad: Thanks Jon, it is ok. The recordings were so exciting for me and all my recordings were completely natural.

12:15 AM Jon: i'm looking forward to the last two! ✨

12:16 AM Jon: i hope you're having a nice night!

12:16 AM Farhad: Thanks 🌹🎵

Farhad, 20 October 2018

11:07 AM Jon [voice message]: Morning Farhad. How are you? Just wanted to say it was a real pleasure to play your recordings in the gallery last night for everyone. And a lot of positive response ... I think it's good to feel like the work that you're doing is reaching people and means something to them, so thank you very much. And we shared a little bit of what you said above about how the project has felt to you. So that was a really good thing to do. I'm just sending you a message to see if, just in case, if you've already done a recording? And if you could possibly

how are you today

send it? Because Samad's meant to do one today, and we haven't got one. So yeah. If you have anything that we can use today and you're able to send it, that would be great! Anyway, let me know, and I hope you're having a good day.

11:16 AM Farhad [voice message]: Morning Jon. Thank you so much. I saw the picture, Michael share it. It was really awesome, thank you so much. Yeah, I have a recording, it's ready. I will send it to you today. Thank you.

11:17 AM Jon [voice message]: Hey Farhad, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I look forward to hearing it. Let me know! Thanks.

11:18 AM Farhad: Thanks Jon, yes I'll send it to you very soon

11:23 AM Jon: 🙏🙏🎧📡🎈

11:29 AM Farhad: I'm sending it now

11:31 AM Farhad: 🎸🎵🌹🍌🍏🍏

11:32 AM Jon: Legend!

11:40 AM Farhad: I like this so much. My recordings are very natural.



how are you today

Fig. 28, 29 Screenshots of Kazem playing the guitar, laundry room of the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre, August 2018.



Fig. 30 Zoom H1 Audio Recorder

Recordings

24 July 2018

Aziz, last week, watching the World Cup final with the guys

25 July 2018

Samad, a couple of weeks ago, listening to slow music

26 July 2018

Farhad, last week, playing music, making tea and listening to songs

27 July 2018

Behrouz, the day before yesterday, walking in the jungle in the morning

28 July 2018

Shamindan, last week, speaking with Srirangan while he cooks fish curry

29 July 2018

Kazem, a couple of days ago, talking to Mansour in the East Lorengau camp

31 July 2018

Aziz, the week before last, consoling his Somali friend with some Somali music

1 August 2018

Samad, last week, at boxing practice

2 August 2018

Kazem, two days ago, donating blood at Lorengau General Hospital

3 August 2018

Behrouz, the night before last, sitting by the fence near the jungle

4 August 2018

Shamindan, a couple of days ago, at Lorengau market

5 August 2018

Farhad, a couple of days ago, speaking with a local Manus man

7 August 2018

Samad, last week, listening to the waves and trying to relax

8 August 2018

Aziz, the night before last, listening to bird sounds on his phone to relax his mind

9 August 2018

Kazem, at the start of this week, playing guitar in the laundry room of the East Lorengau camp

10 August 2018

Samad, yesterday at three in the morning, listening to the creatures in the jungle

11 August 2018

Behrouz, last night, practicing singing with his Kurdish friend Arin

12 August 2018

Farhad, on Friday, trying to do his washing and waiting

14 August 2018

Aziz, the day before yesterday, playing cards and listening to music from Sudan

15 August 2018

Shamindan, on Sunday, at church

16 August 2018

Kazem, on the weekend, shopping at Lorengau market

17 August 2018

Behrouz, yesterday, practicing singing in a place beside the camp

how are you today

18 August 2018 Farhad, a couple of days ago at the beach with friends (and Shalan, their dog), talking to a young Manus man	31 August 2018 Behrouz, late last night, having a discussion with Mansour the duck man
19 August 2018 Samad, this morning, listening to rubab music	1 September 2018 Shamindan, last night, waiting in the mess for dinner
21 August 2018 Aziz, on the weekend, cooking kebabs for his friends	2 September 2018 Aziz, last weekend, making a speech to a protest in Melbourne via phone
22 August 2018 Kazem, on Sunday, buying electric-guitar strings	4 September 2018 Farhad, walking through Lorengau's town centre on Manus Day, last Monday
23 August 2018 Shamindan, yesterday, sitting in his room and listening to a classic song	5 September 2018 Samad, last night, celebrating a friend's impending resettlement to the United States
24 August 2018 Behrouz, yesterday, speaking at Macquarie University via WhatsApp with his translator	6 September 2018 Kazem, on Saturday, taking a shower
25 August 2018 Farhad, a couple of days ago, taking his first trumpet lesson with Sky, a Manusian musician	7 September 2018 Behrouz, the day before yesterday, speaking about his book to an event in Sydney
26 August 2018 Shamindan, yesterday, on the local bus to town	8 September 2018 Shamindan, yesterday, on a boat to Rara Island
28 August 2018 Aziz, on the weekend, speaking to Nurann, who is on hunger strike	9 September 2018 Farhad, a couple of Saturdays ago, taking the bus to the market and music hall
29 August 2018 Samad, on the weekend, going for a walk	11 September 2018 Aziz, yesterday, with Behrouz and visiting refugee advocates Ian and Nicole
30 August 2018 Kazem, on Tuesday night, walking around the East Lorengau compound	12 September 2018 Kazem, on Monday, making a capsicum, mushroom, and chicken pizza

13 September 2018
Samad, the night before last,
watching *Home Invasion*

14 September 2018
Behrouz, on Monday, speaking
with visiting refugee advocate Ian
Rintoul

15 September 2018
Shamindan, yesterday, discussing
recent suicide attempts in the camp

16 September 2018
Farhad, yesterday, trying to wake
himself up by listening to music

18 September 2018
Aziz, yesterday evening, replying
to phone messages and organising
people to see dOctoberors

19 September 2018
Kazem, on Monday, cleaning the
oven and making coffee

20 September 2018
Behrouz, last night, in the
kitchen

21 September 201
Shamindan, yesterday, speaking
about the last five years

22 September 2018
Farhad, on Thursday, walking along
the beach and into the forest

23 September 2018
Samad, last night, speaking about
moving to Port Moresby

25 September 2018
Aziz, yesterday, convincing other
guys to sign a petition

26 September 2018
Shamindan, the day before
yesterday, speaking about losing
loved ones

27 September 2018
Kazem, yesterday, improvising
classical guitar in his room

28 September 2018
Behrouz, on Wednesday, talking
with friends about Australian
politics and soccer

29 September 2018
Farhad, on Thursday, cooking,
listening to Kurdish music, and
singing along

30 September 2018
Samad, yesterday morning,
speaking about his studies and
listening to music

2 October 2018
Aziz, last week, listening to Native
American flute music before bed

3 October 2018
Kazem, yesterday, clipping his nails;
his neighbour in the background

4 October 2018
Shamindan, yesterday, in his room
recovering from a migraine

5 October 2018
Behrouz, today, speaking to Kazem

6 October 2018
Farhad, yesterday, following a
group of friends visiting from East
Lorengau camp as they're refused
entry at Hillside House, then West
Lorengau House, before being
allowed to enter Hillside House

7 October 2018
Samad, yesterday, watching
Baaghi 2 on his day off

9 October 2018
Behrouz, on the weekend, visiting
his friend Chris from Manus who
has a new baby

how are you today

- 10 October 2018
Shamindan, yesterday, speaking about the US resettlement process
- 11 October 2018
Kazem, yesterday, talking with Behrouz about his book, his film, and the award he's just won
- 12 October 2018
Aziz, the day before yesterday, chatting with his friend Obida, the only Syrian man on Manus
- 13 October 2018
Samad, yesterday, trying to study while recovering from a cold
- 14 October 2018
Farhad, yesterday, walking around Hillside House, talking with friends and local workers
- 16 October 2018
Aziz, last night, talking with Abdulla about the soccer game they won against West
- 17 October 2018
Shamindan, yesterday, in the new self-service kitchen at West Haus with his friend Sri, who is preparing breakfast
- 18 October 2018
Kazem, yesterday, watching videos from the day's swimming with friends
- 19 October 2018
Behrouz, the day before yesterday, playing soccer
- 20 October 2018
Farhad, yesterday, listening to and chatting with kids cutting grass in the garden behind Hillside House
- 21 October 2018
Samad, this morning, on his balcony listening to the comings and goings of Port Moresby
- 23 October 2018
Kazem, yesterday, talking to Farhad about his health issues at the medical unit
- 24 October 2018
Aziz, yesterday, speaking to Reilly Kanamon, a journalist with NBC Manus
- 25 October 2018
Shamindan, today, at the medical-clinic checkpoint in East Lorengau Transit Centre
- 26 October 2018
Behrouz, last night, on a phone call with photographer Hoda Afshar
- 27 October 2018
Farhad, yesterday, taking a bus to the music hall, to record vocals for his new song
- 28 October 2018
Samad, at three o'clock this morning, home from work and lying in bed, listening to music

Listening Back Subsequent Reflections

Samad, 11 June 2019

8:46 PM, André Dao: for the book of the exhibition, was there anything you wanted to say about taking part in the project?

8:46 PM André Dao: perhaps something about why you took part, and what it felt like to make those recordings? did you feel like doing the recordings changed anything for you, or made you learn anything new about yourself?

8:52 PM Samad: Yeah, I will think about that and will let you know ... To be honest, at this stage I just hate myself and I'm so scared when I think about my future

8:53 PM André Dao: oh no, what makes you say wyou hate yourself?

8:54 PM Samad: It's so hard to see my friends hurting themselves every day and unfortunately no body can do anything ... It's like so painful moments

how are you today

We cannot change this generation. They are following what the government thinks. It is a kind of Fascism culture around that doesn't let people to understand what exactly is happening in Manus and Nauru. Unfortunately, this project, and my works, and other peoples' works, is only a record of history. It's for the young and next generations. Because we couldn't change people, you know? ... It's for the future. So that's why, unfortunately, we should accept that we were defeated by this government in so many ways, although we have had some great achievements too. They could continue to inflict this violence for six years and we couldn't change this. But at least ... I'm very optimistic actually that the next generation are able to evaluate what we have done... We have movies, we have books, we have this project, we have many materials. And these materials are important so that researchers are able to do research on the basis of this work, and all of the young generation are able to engage with this ... [inaudible] I think we should accept that ...' What I think is that we should work with the education system and on transformation of this experience through education system. If we want to creat change we definetly should work with education system.

from a talk at *Sound Proofs*,
Goldsmiths, University of London,
14 June 2019.

Farhad, 23 June 2019

Where are you now? What and how are you doing?

I am still on Manus, still in the Australian refugee prison camp. I am not doing well. It is really hard. Lots of people suiciding. People are setting themselves on fire. They are cutting themselves open. There is a lot of pressure. I am just thinking and thinking a lot. When will we be free from this hell. This is the situation I am in.

Could you describe your experience of making the recordings? What did you think about before, during, and after each one?

The experience was some are really sad and some were really happy. When I record inside the compound and outside the compound. When I would record outside the compound it was like a little bit of freedom, I can breathe and listen and pay attention to the sounds around me. The sad parts when I record inside the compound, it highlights I am imprisoned and the daily things over and over and over and over. The recording was last year and we are still here. Nothing has changed. I am still in prison.

how are you today

I would love it—only if you have time or want to, of course—if you could listen to some/parts of your recordings (even just one), and tell me what you think of them—what they suggest to you—now. What are you listening to, how does it make you feel, what do you remember, and is it strange to listen to yourself listening?

12.08.18 FARHAD, ON FRIDAY, TRYING TO
DO HIS WASHING AND WAITING

There is no air conditioner, it is so hot and so boring just waiting. It is not new. It is like repeating, over and over and over again. We wait for everything.

18.08.18 FARHAD, A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO AT
THE BEACH WITH FRIENDS (AND SHALAN, THEIR
DOG), TALKING TO A YOUNG MANUS MAN

This was a nice recording, the young local guy and I was with Shalan on the beach. The boy and the dog were feeling free. I could feel their feeling of being free. It was joyful their feeling.

20.10.18 FARHAD, YESTERDAY, LISTENING
TO AND CHATTING WITH KIDS CUTTING GRASS IN
THE GARDEN BEHIND HILLSIDE HOUSE

I don't really remember this.



End Matter

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN is an artist and audio-investigator associated with the research agency Forensic Architecture, at Goldsmiths, University of London. His work explores techniques and politics of 'forensic listening' — diverse listening practices associated with legal forums and the technoscience of acoustic evidence. He is a finalist in the 2019 Turner Prize. He is based in London and Beirut.

JEN BERVIN is an artist and poet based in Guilford, Connecticut. Her research-driven, interdisciplinary work involves collaboration with other artists and specialists, ranging from material scientists to literary scholars. She is currently artist in residence at the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute, in Mountain View, California.

FAYEN D'EVIE is an artist, writer, and curator based in Muckleford, rural Victoria. Her work argues the radical potential of blindness in challenging ocularcentric norms and offering a criticality attuned to complex embodiment, sensory translation, wayfinding, and the invisible.

SEAN DOCKRAY is an artist, writer, and programmer based in Melbourne. His work explores the politics of technology, particularly artificial intelligence and the algorithmic web. He is the founding director of the Los Angeles non-profit Telic Arts Exchange and the initiator of knowledge-sharing platforms The Public School and Aaaaarg.

MANUS RECORDING PROJECT COLLECTIVE was established in 2018 to produce work for *Eavesdropping*. It comprises six asylum seekers detained on Manus Island by the Australian government (Samad Abdul, Abdul Aziz Muhamat, Farhad Bandesh, Behrouz Boochani, Shamindan Kanapathi, and Kazem Kazemi) and their three collaborators in Melbourne (André Dao, Michael Green, and Jon Tjhia). For individual bios, see pages 176, 177.

NORIE NEUMARK is a sound/media artist and theorist based in Melbourne. Her research focuses on voice and the new materialist turn. She exhibits internationally with Maria Miranda as Out-of-Sync. She is an Honorary Professorial Fellow at Victorian College of the Arts, Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University, and founding editor of *Unlikely: Journal for Creative Arts*.

JAMES PARKER directs a research program on law and sound at the Institute for International Law and the Humanities, Melbourne Law School. His 2015 book *Acoustic Jurisprudence: Listening to the Trial of Simon Bikindi* was awarded the 2017 Penny Pether Prize for scholarship in law, literature, and the humanities. He has been a visiting fellow at the Program for Science, Technology, and Society at Harvard Kennedy School for Government, and a faculty member at Harvard Law School Institute for Global Law and Policy Workshop, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is an associate curator at Liquid Architecture and co-curator of *Eavesdropping*.

Contributors

BRYAN PHILLIPS is an artist working in community arts, music, and performance. His practice developed in Chile, but, after completing his Masters in Community Cultural Development at Victorian College of the Arts in 2013, he has been involved in projects with artists from Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Australia.

PUBLIC OFFICE is a Melbourne-based design agency focused on the intersection of physical and digital publishing.

SUSAN SCHUPPLI is an artist and audio-investigator. Over the last twenty years, she has repeatedly returned to the theme of eavesdropping, particularly the material history and politics of audiotape and telephone. She is Director of the Centre for Research Architecture and Board Chair of Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London.

ANDY SLATER is a legally blind musician, sound artist, and author. He is a 2018 3Arts/Bodies of Work Fellow at the University of Illinois and an Institutional Incubation Artist at High Concept Labs, in Chicago.

JOEL SPRING works across radio, architecture, art, and activism. A Wiradjuri man raised in Redfern and Alice Springs, his work focuses on contested narratives of Australia's urban culture and indigenous history in the face of ongoing colonisation.

JOEL STERN is a curator and artist concerned with theories and practices of sound and listening. With Danni Zuvela, he is Artistic Director of Liquid Architecture, Melbourne, which stages sonic experiences and critically reflects on systems of sonic affect at the intersection of contemporary art and experimental music. His other initiatives include the artist collective OtherFilm and the residency programme Instrument Builders Project. Stern is a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash University. He is co-curator of *Eavesdropping*.

SAMSON YOUNG is a sound artist and composer based in Hong Kong. His interests include the politics of Western classical-music writing systems and the orchestra, and sound as a weapon.

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN

Conflicted Phonemes 2012
vinyl print, printouts, shelf

Rubber-Coated Steel 2016
video
21min 49sec

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)
2016
mixing console, audio
12min 48sec

WILLIAM BLACKSTONE

*Commentaries on the Laws
of England* 1765
book
collection Alexander Turnbull
Library, Wellington

FAYEN D'EVIE AND JEN BERVIN
WITH BRYAN PHILLIPS AND
ANDY SLATER

Cosmic Static 2018
copper radio-telescope feed,
five-channel audio
13min

SEAN DOCKRAY

Always Learning 2018
Amazon Echo, Apple HomePod,
Google Home Assistant,
rug, cushions

Learning from YouTube 2018
video on computer monitor
11min 31sec

ATHANIUS KIRCHER

Musurgia Universalis 1650
book
collection State Library of New
South Wales, Sydney

MANUS RECORDING
PROJECT COLLECTIVE

Samad Abdul, Abdul Aziz
Muhamat, Farhad Bandesh,
Behrouz Boochani, Shamindan
Kanapathi, and Kazem Kazemi,
with André Dao, Michael Green,
and Jon Tjhia

how are you today 2018
eighty-four ten-minute audio
recordings
14hr

SUSAN SCHUPPLI

Listening to Answering Machines
2018
seven answering machines,
five listening stations, audio
approx 25hr

The Missing 18½ Minutes 2018
colour photograph (584 x 876mm),
fifteen black-and-white
photographs (each 438 x 584mm),
audio (18min 30sec), two
headphones, printed document

JOEL SPRING

Hearing, Loss 2018
two-channel video projection
10min 9sec

SAMSON YOUNG

Muted Situation 5: Muted Chorus
2016
video
9min 6sec

List of Works

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City Gallery Wellington
Te Ngākau Civic Square
101 Wakefield Street
PO Box 893
Wellington, New Zealand
citygallery.org.nz

Liquid Architecture
PO Box 12315
Melbourne, Australia
liquidarchitecture.org.au

Melbourne Law School
185 Pelham Street
Carlton, Australia
law.unimelb.edu.au

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