



craig dworkin
unheard music

information as material

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pavel büchler
making nothing happen

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Front cover:
Pavel Büchler, *3'34"*
installation version
Kunsthalle Bern, 2006

Back cover:
Pavel Büchler, *LIVE*
installation view
Ateliergemeinschaft Gramophon
Hannover, 1999

*Heard melodies are sweet,
but those unheard are sweeter.*
John Keats

JOHN CAGE: *4'33"* (1952). The classic. In three movements. Premiered by David Tudor on piano, although it sounds pretty good even in transcriptions. Not to be confused with either the showier *0'00"* (1962), “to be performed in any way by anyone” “in a situation provided with maximum amplification,” or the watered-down *Tacet* (1960), which “may be performed by (any) instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.” Recommended recordings: Frank Zappa’s acoustic rendition on *A Chance Operation* [Koch 7238], or Lassigue Bendthaus’ electronic version on *Render* [KK Records 115]; the definitive recording of *0'00"* is by Peter Pfister [that ART CD 2-6070]. For real range and lots of artistic license (well, lots of license at least), check out Roel Meelkop’s compilation of nine different performances on *45:18* [Korm Plastics 3005].

PAVEL BÜCHLER: *3'34"* (2006). Shrewdly collected silences from the lead-in tracks on ten John Cage albums from Büchler’s record collection. These grooves are like the canine musicians in Franz Kafka’s 1922 *Forschungen eines hundes*: “sie redeten nicht, sie sangen nicht, sie schwiegen im allgemeinen fast mit einer großen Verbissenheit, aber aus dem leeren Raum zauberten sie die Musik empor [they did not speak; they did not sing; each of them remained silent — almost concertedly silent — but they conjured music from thin air].” That thin air, as well as the music conjured from it, is what Duchamp would term “l’inframince [the thinner than thin; literally: below the thin].” Duchamp said that *l’inframince* could not be precisely defined but only approached by examples, such as “le bruit ou la musique faits par un pantalon de velours côtelé comme celui ci quand on le fait bouger [the noise or music

made by corduroy pants like these rubbing when one moves]; “Pantalons de velours—/ leur sifflement (dans la) marche par/ frottement des 2 jambes est une/ separation infra-mince signalée/ par le son [velvet trousers—/ their whistling sound (in) walking by/ brushing of the 2 legs is an/ infra-thin separation signaled/ by sound].” Kafka’s dogs, accordingly, make their own silent music by moving their legs: “Alles war Musik, das Heben und Niedersetzen ihrer Füße” [Everything was music: the lift and lower of their limbs].”

In 3’34” the lifting and lowering of the tone arm conjures the music: a barely audible phonographic hiss, whistling like fur or velvet, above the persistent crackles and the odd reports of needle-hopping pops which return the listener with a jolt to Duchamp’s other example of the “séparation infra mince entre le bruit de *détonation* d’un fusil (très proche) et *l’apparition* de la marque de la balle sur la cible [infra thin separation between the detonation noise of a rifle (very close-range) and the apparition of the bullet hole in the target].” As this example suggests, the inframince is related, in Duchamp’s lexicon, to “delay” — precisely what the lead-in track is meant to effect — and it is only the slight delay of the tone arm’s descent, the inframince moment of deferral between the drop and the playback, that preserves the silence in this project, since the crunchy noise of scratch and wear becomes louder with every spin. Indeed, even the sounds of the original master are an index of how often Büchler listened to his Cage albums; the disc is as much confession, or proof, as concept. And as a concept, it is a nearly perfect gesture, in which even the flaws of deteriorating vinyl provide sonic interest. The only possible improvement to 3’34” would be an adjustment to the total timing, which is tidily palindromic but not quite there. Had Cage been more sanguine about recordings of his work during the LP era, or Büchler more of a completist, he might have managed three more albums — enough for another 59 seconds of silence [Kunsthalle Bern].

Although the resulting track is of negligible musical interest, mashup enthusiasts should note that Matt Wand sampled Büchler’s

disc for his contribution to *Soundtrack for a Mersey Tunnel*, a tribute album produced by Alan Dunn to honor the Number 433 bus, which travels the Mersey Tunnel between Liverpool and Birkenhead [limited edition CD-R, hors commerce].

ALPHONSE ALLAIS: *Marche funèbre pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd* (1897). The great granddaddy of silent pieces. Allais — something of a cross between Erik Satie, Raymond Roussel, and Joel Stein — is probably best known for pioneering fiction structured on holorhymes, but he was also a composer. Sort of. The first movement of his *Funerary March* is simply nine empty measures [see the *Album Primo-Avrilesque* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1897)]. No recording, to date, but a scaled-down version for string quartet was premiered at the FestivalManké (Nice) in 2000, under the direction of Ismaël Robert (who perhaps took a cue from Henry Flynt's 1961 Fluxus score, which reads: "The instructions for this piece are on the other side of this sheet." The other side, of course, is blank).

STEPHEN VITIELLO: *Fear of High Places and Natural Things* (2004). Like a substantially more animated dance mix of Allais' Marche, Vitiello's installation at the Long Island City Sculpture Center visualizes sound in a mute choreography. An array of speaker cones hung from above in a semi-circle pulse and bulge, deforming with the powerful sounds that they're making. But try as you might — head cocked, ear cupped — you can't hear a thing: those sounds are at such a low frequency they can't be heard by human ears. The huffs and puffs of expended air, however, can actually be felt as the woofers pant with the exertion, dancing on, without a sound, eternally suspended in the *grand jeté* of their aerial ballet.

JAMES WHITEHEAD (aka Jliat): *Still Life #5* (2000). Six types of silence, all sounding the same but all empirically different. And potentially damaging to boot. The medium is the message, and

in the case of the 16 bit 44.1khz compact disc the message can have 65,536 types of silence, none of which are the same: different data but all sounding null. In *Still Life*, Whitehead wrote those data directly to a PCM file, creating 6 ten-minute pieces with all of the values in a given track set to the same binary values. As Whitehead explains:

pausing the playing of a track will show this to be so, for the data being played is halted and the CD system jumps back to zero — resulting in a click (if the value ‘playing’ was not zero or near to it). Interestingly this click is heard but is not actually on the recording — it physically doesn’t exist! It is the interference of the continuous stream of data which causes the sound.

The second track, “Swing” [+16383], is my favorite. Since the CD player translates every one of the continuous set of binary values to DC voltage, playing the disc can actually damage the speaker-system coils and electronics in direct-current coupled equipment. Play at your own risk [Edition... 011].

KEN FRIEDMAN: *Zen for Record* (1966). Blank phonograph record in homage to Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1964): a 16mm film consisting only of clear leader (often claimed to be an hour long, the screening I saw was advertised as 10 minutes, though it clocked in at closer to 8). Not to be confused with Christine Kozlov’s *Transparent Film #2* (16mm) from 1967, or Madison Brookshire’s 2007 sound film *Five Times*, an audio update of Ernie Gehr’s 1970 *History* (“five rolls of film, unedited, spliced one after the other,” as Brookshire describes his version: “The only images and sounds come from the light that reaches the film when it is loaded into and taken out of the camera”). The incidental soundtrack to Paik’s film is a lot louder than Friedman’s disc. If you get a chance, sit near the projectionist; even after only eight minutes you’ll never forget the nervous clack and twitter of the shutter, blinking like a blinded Cyclops in the noonday sun...

Christian Marclay: *Record Without a Cover* (1985). Issued without a sleeve or cover, and with the stern instruction “do not store in a protective package,” one side of the 12" 33rpm disc contains music made by “manipulated records on multiple turntables recorded 4-track at Plugg New York City March 1985” (as the inscription on the verso of the grooved side reads). Though museums and collectors probably take pretty good care of their copies, the inevitable damage to the unprotected vinyl was intended to increase the nonmusical noises over time, in a collaborative duet between chance inscription and the carefully recorded turntable improvisations. On initial release, the former member of that duo is entirely silent. While the side engraved with written text remains silent, its legibility decreases in an inverse ratio to the audibility of the grooved side’s aleatory duet [Recycled Records/reissued by Locus Solus in 1999]. In contrast, Marclay’s sophomore release, *Record Without a Groove* (1987) was issued in a swank suede protective package. In mint condition it reportedly sounds a lot like a Coil B-Side. Edition of 50 [Ecart Editions].

W. MARK SUTHERLAND: *Scratch* (2002). Piero Manzoni meets Christian Marclay. In a more articulate version of John Berndt’s neoist performance at the Berlin Apartment Festival (1986), in which he vandalized a blank record with intentional scratches, Sutherland ruined a perfectly good metal master by scratching the word “scratch” into the plate, from which two-hundred phonograph records were pressed. With no recorded sound to guide it, the needle skates across a frozen vinyl lake, tripped up by written ruts in need of resurfacing, as the LP spins to a unpredictably post-bop syncopated set of skips and pops. Recursively iconic, the work repeatedly performs its title: a hastily written [*scratched*] word canceling [*scratching*] the master and producing chance [*scratch*] music, with oblique references to the cultural history of the phonograph as it cut across musical genres, from jazz [the *scratch*, or money, that commercialized recording promised and too frequently denied to the players and composers themselves] to

hip hop [the DJ's *scratching* of the phonograph in a quick manual shuffle for cross-faded rhythmic effect] [Koffler Gallery].

STEVE REICH: *Pendulum Music* (1968). Like your high-school physics lab, but without fudging the results. Several microphones (no input) are suspended from a cable over a loudspeaker, with amplifiers arranged so that they generate feedback only when the microphone and loudspeaker are in alignment. The mics are set swinging along their pendular paths, honking briefly each time they pass the speaker and coming naturally to a droning stop. Premiered in Boulder by Reich and William Wiley, the performers for the 1969 Whitney concert were Reich, Bruce Nauman, Michael Snow, Richard Sierra, and James Tenney. Two good recordings from the Ensemble Avantgarde (two versions) [Wergo 6630-2] and Sonic Youth on *Goodbye 20th Century* [SYR4].

MATMOS: "Always Three Words" (1998). First word: 4-channel tape recorder. Second word: walkie-talkie (no input). Third word: another walkie-talkie (no input). Both of the hand-held walkie-talkies are put in transmit mode and moved over the recorder; producing interference which can be manipulated with gestural sweeps. Last word: smart and funny and it's got a beat [*Quasi-objects*, Vague Terrain 001].

JARROD FOWLER: *70'00"/17* (2004). A precision stopwatch without that irritating ticking noise nagging at you constantly — or any noise at all, for that matter — Fowler's disc is a template with which the compact-disc player functions merely as a clock, without any sonic decoding. With seventeen tracks timed to exactly four minutes each, it's intended to explore bounded aspects of space and extension, but it's also handy for timing a brunch's worth of perfect soft-boiled eggs when they come cold from the fridge. Limited edition CD-R [JMF 002]. Similarly silent chronographic projects have included audio-file translations of texts, in which one page of the source equals one second of playing time, and

a mashup audio translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Sartre's *Time and Nothingness*, which results in an empty file. Clicking on the link from Fowler's website provokes Quicktime into placing a transparent question mark over its clock-like logo *Q* in an angst-ridden existential shrug of the MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 shoulders. The result is probably a lot like what La Mort was listening to while composing *Nudisme* at the Café des Poètes in Cocteau's *Orphée*. "Aucun excès," as Orpheus is admonished, "n'est ridicule!"

HACO: *Stereo Bugscope 00* (2004). Like ripping the pickups out of Taku Sugimoto's guitar and running them over Toshimaru Nakamura's no-input mixer. The avant-pop chanteuse gives up her surreal, after-dinner crooning and '80s fashion frock, dons a crisp white lab coat and grabs a couple of induction microphones to amplify the normally unheard electromagnetic noises generated from common consumer electronics: a cell phone's hibernating heartbeat clicking off the seconds even in the sleep mode; a wireless router sending out its fluttering protocol pulse; cooling-fans and mini-discs in spin; the tug and stretch of bootstraps as computers start themselves up and shut themselves down, still in constant hum even when dataless and asleep; the interior integrated circuits of their motherboards and lithium-driven real-time clocks oscillating with nearly silent currents. Unplugged and idle, the electronic world surrounding us on standby is in constant whine and chatter, tiny poltergeists and banshees and lorelei with luring whispers in the near dark night of small red indicator lights [IMJ 523].

MATTIN AND TAKU UNAMI: *Shyrio.No Computer* (2004). Haco may have taken her inspiration from Basque artist Mattin, who has been playing the computer in that manner for years, and Taku Unami may well be doing much the same thing on his disc *Intransigent Towards the Detectives of Capital* [w.m.o./r 8] though I downloaded the tracks and to be honest can't really hear what's going on over the noise of my own computer. On *Shyrio* [the Shinto term for the spirit of the dead acting on the living], Mattin and Unami facilitate

the studio improvisation between a speaker cone and the computer feedback that drives it, self-generated when the input and output ports of the same machine are connected in one of Mattin's trademark perverse loops. The result is like the placid burble of electric brooks, barely audible inside a slumbering laptop dreaming of Arcadian runnels. Twigs snap now and then, there's a rustle in the leaves just beyond the field of vision, from somewhere a panting picks up, too late the dreamer and the nightmare inextricably meld, prey and pursuer merge, the pacific pastoral shatters, awakened by outbursts of autophagic choke and failed squelch, the electric ouroboros gagging in an outraged roar and leaving you shaking with the unshakable dream of a inhuman silence we can never attain. Compare with the earlier Mattin and Unami duet *Attention* (1997), on which they turn up the volume on what it means to listen to a CD in the first place [h.m.o./r 01 and h.m.o./r 3 respectively].

MIKE BATT: "One Minute of Silence" (2002). The kind of thing that gives the avant-garde a bad name. Third-rate excerpt from Cage's *4'33"*, impatiently arranged by British impresario Batt and included on the album *Classical Graffiti* by The Planets. An imposter child of Silence and slow Time, Batt was promptly sued by Cage's publisher for copyright infringement. The suit was eventually settled out of court for an undisclosed six-figure sum [EMI 5 57316 2].

LEIF ELGGREN, PER JONSSON AND KENT TANKRED: "60 Seconds of Silence for Per Jonsson" (2004). Far superior to Batt's similar-sounding composition, decidedly quieter than Hoyland's equally-timed minute, and less maudlin than Semper's, Per Jonsson's piece plays as a deep sigh of recuperation, relief and fortification programmed between two works of loud theatrical absurdity. Collectors should note that in an inversion of *The Phantom Pregnancy's* technophobia the steely studio digital silence is available only on the CD release, and is not included on the 12" record from which the opening Fylkingen performance was remastered [UGN/MAT, Ash International 5.3].

NO NOISE REDUCTION. "0'0,060" for a Rock and Roll Band" (1995). Rowdy post-punk thrash from Tina and The Top Ten, featuring the enthused guitars of Johnny Santini and Paulo Feliciano, with all the amps set to 11. The precision edit by Portuguese conceptualist Rafael Toral captures the band at their top-volume full-blast blow-out for exactly 60 milliseconds — just long enough to jolt you up out of the mosh pit and give a palpable sense of the band's early exuberance and de-skilled attack. The rest of the piece is an ironically skillful 15 seconds and 40 milliseconds of silence. Careful listening reveals that band-member Mimi is sitting those milliseconds out, and unfortunately is not heard on this track [Moneyland records, MR0495].

YVES KLEIN. *Symphonie Monoton-Silence* (1957). Meant to provide a sonic equivalent of his monochrome paintings, the second movement of Klein's *Symphony* consists of twenty minutes of silence — just enough time to give the audience a chance to shake the sense of ringing from their ears: the first twenty minutes consist of a sustained D-major chord. The work was originally conceived for full Wagnerian orchestra, but performed in 1960 at the Galerie International d'Art Contemporain by a small chamber orchestra who memorized the score on short notice (though perhaps after peeking at the scrupulously notated version prepared by Pierre Henry a few years earlier). There is also a later, atmospheric version scored for mixed choir, strings, flutes, oboes, and horns. Not to be confused with the similar-sounding conclusion to Guy Debord's film *Hurléments en faveur de Sade* (1952), which stretches aggressively on for a full four minutes longer. Though he denies any influence, Klein, not coincidentally, was present at the premiere screening. There are rumors that Klein also issued a completely silent recording, in 1959, of a *Concert de vide* [*Concert of Vacuum*] (not to be confused with Sir Malcolm Arnold's roughly contemporaneous concert of vacuum cleaners [Op. 57, 1956]).

DAVID HOYLAND: “A Minute’s Silence for the Queen Mum” (2002). The inverse of Klein’s *Symphonie*, in some respects. Or dis-respects. The unpatriotic Brits at this football match cheat the Queen out of about 12 seconds, but the pompous anthem that follows, with its slightly sour brass, makes one nostalgic for every second of preceding quiet. The unshielded mic picks up a lot of wind noise, so this lo-fi recording is primarily of documentary historical interest [Sonic Arts Network SA301-2].

JONTY SEMPER: *The 1 Minute Silence from the Funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales* (2001). Mawkish tabloid silence captured in Hyde Park on 6 September, 1997. Ecouteuristic document of private emotions put on public display as they aspire to the bathos of private tragedies published as national spectacle, with every second scripted and conscripted in turn. Limited signed and numbered edition (of 250) on 7" vinyl. Semper’s *Minute Silence* stands as a contemporary free-verse lyric proem to his historic epic *Kenotaphion* (2001). Taking the long view of Matt Rogalsky’s one-day sample, *Kenotaphion* fills two CDs with absences culled from seventy years of BBC, British Movietone, and Reuters broadcasts of the annual two-minute silences during Britain’s Armistice Day ceremonies. Each year, while telephone and telegraph exchanges idled, trains braked to a stop, and factory machines powered down, the BBC did not just cut its signal but continued to broadcast what at any other time would be the journalistic sacrilege of dead air (a state that is in fact finable in the UK at a rate of £25,000 per minute for stations that continue in silence without alerting their listeners). Unlike the Cenotaph at Whitehall, these recordings are far from empty, with Big Ben drowning out the coughs and uncomprehending children of the reverent, amid atmospheric weather effects, broadcast static, startled birds and rifle reports. The only truly silent Armistice minutes occurred during the Second World War, from 1941 to ‘44, when the ceremony was suspended. Absent from Semper’s discs, those years speak the loudest and are by far the most moving. Joint productions between Charrm and Locus+ [CH060887 / KENO1].

JEAN-LUC GODARD: *Bande à part* (1964). In a moment of boredom, unable to think of how to entertain themselves and too agitated to indulge in a true French *ennui*, Franz (Sami Frey) proposes that the *bande* take “un minute de silence.” Godard obliges by cutting the soundtrack [*la bande sonore mise à part*]. “Une vraie minute de silence, ça dure une éternité” [a real minute of silence can last forever], Franz notes, but Godard’s lasts only 33 seconds. Accessible, funny, narrative reprise of the acerbic mean-spirited abstract silence from the final twenty-four minutes of Guy Debord’s *Hurléments en faveur de Sade* (1952). The Situationists would denounce Godard’s version as a “tardily plagiarized and useless [...] pretentious false novelty” but they were never known for their sense of humor, and it’s really pretty funny. A similar and even shorter composition, presumably by Michel Legrand, accompanies the tabletop finger performance of the film’s iconic dance scene, in which Odile and Arthur negotiate the steps they’ll soon dance to Legrand’s hipster swing number “Le Madison.” In mono.

JOHN CAGE: *Silent Prayer* (1949, unrealized). Hints at the neo-dada origins of *4'33"* and its latent corporate critique. Cage’s plan was to “compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. It will be three or four and a half minutes in length — those being the standard lengths of ‘canned music’.” Cage, that still unravished *mariée*, would have *mise à nu* canned music and translated it into a Duchampian “*hasard en conserve* [canned chance].” Always seemed to be playing in the elevator in my old building.

COIL: “Absolute Elsewhere” (1984 *et seq.*). Reichian music (though that’s Wilhelm, not Steve), Coil’s EP is the sonic equivalent to the architecture of an orgone box: a lot of attitude and BS with nothing inside. In this case, BS stands for B Side: the verso of the 12" *The Soundtrack to the Program HOW TO DESTROY ANGELS: Ritual Music for the Accumulation of Male Sexual Energy* (a long way of saying what T. Rex summed up with “bang a gong; get it on”). Unlike the gong-show A Side, “Absolute Elsewhere” manifests itself — de-

pending on the particular pressing — as a track of sheer noise, a constant quarter-hour tone, a series of lock-groove test tones, or a smooth grooveless slab (that is, a record with no “coil” at all). The CD version (1999) consists of one second of silence [L.A.Y.L.A.H. Antirecords LAY05].

TELIUM GROUP: *Record 1* (1991). Occasionally listed as self-titled or “t” (from the retro lowercase letter encircled on the silk-screened cover), this Magnatone Records release is a grooveless 7" (edition 354). And I mean grooveless: George Clinton would be mortified [MGT 700-7].

REYNOLS: *Blank Tapes* (1999). Yep. Pieces made by the digital and analog processing of blank magnetic tapes. But special blank tapes, some of which had been saved, with a kind of touching sentimentality, since 1978. A lot noisier than the Argentine trio's first release, *Gordura Vegetal Hidrogenada*, which was a “dematerialized cd” (it came as an empty jewel case, reprising Psychodrama's 1984 release *No Tape*, a cassette shell that did not, as promised, contain any tape [the band's best release to date]). That (lack of a) debut CD was appropriate for a group whose leader, Miguel Tomasin, occasionally asserted that they don't exist. Tomasin, whose Down's Syndrome misprisions were taken as oracular pronouncements by his partners Alan Curtis and Roberto Conlazo, also regularly announced that the United States doesn't exist either. Which substantially cut down on his touring there. As Tomasin also says: *todo afrazarmo de lo spolido cintas* [TrenteOiseaux 002].

LINEAR REGRESSIONISTS: *Living on the Regression Line* (1990). The statistical tool of linear regression analyzes the relation of independent variables for some quantity of interest. Here the variables include an unrecorded compact disc (X) drilled with holes (Y). The quantity of musical interest rapidly approaches zero (0), while the quantity of collectors' interest rises over time. Observable data plots the current value to collectors at \$30 (+/--\$10). Find the

sum of squares who will make the purchase (HINT: the slope is downward and the intercept rare). Edition of 50 [rrr 02].

PEETER VÄHI. *Supreme Silence* (1999). The third movement of this Estonian composer's piece is indeed scored for silence, which was probably a nice break for Kristjan Järvi and the men of the Estonian National Choir. Not to mention the listener who has to sit through the new-age orientalist mysticism of the other movements (the first of which, just to give you an idea, is entitled "Mandala Offering"). Fine silence, to be sure, piping to the spirit ditties of no tone, and it's nicely recorded on this disk, but "supreme" is probably overstating the case [CCnC 182].

*0: *0.000* (2002). Actually not so rigorous as the title (or the pseudonym of Nosei Sakata) suggests, but rather the subtle hum and the molecular waver of air from frequencies just beyond the threshold of human perception: an ultrasonic 20200hz and a subsonic 14hz (or, in the case of one raucous track, the overtone produced when the two are combined). Though even that relatively lower frequency isn't likely to be reproduced on most sound systems. If you've got a good stereo, turn it up really loud and see how the neighbor's dog reacts [Mu-Label 002].

MIEKO SHIOMI: *A Musical Dictionary of 80 People Around Fluxus* (2002). Music worthy of the OuLiPo, in which Shiomi "describes" each of those people either by realizing one of their works, putting a signature compositional method into practice, or through a general pastiche of technique or timbre, but in all events using only the pitches available from the letters in the dedicatee's name. The disc from Galerie Hundertmark doesn't match the rigor of its concept with musicianship — a few selections feature Shiomi's lackluster keyboard work, while others are left to an equally impassioned computer-driven synthesizer. "Oh no," you're thinking, "eighty people?" Oh, yes, but the best piece is #56, for Yoko Ono, whose name wisely refused to supply any notes [? Records 10].

Though no definitive recording ever emerged, the anti-expressivist wing of the Japanese *onkyo-kei* [sound reverberation school] brand of minimal gesture had been moving toward working entirely with non-networked equipment before the moment passed. The musicians themselves would object, but you might think of it as applied zen. More ascetic than spiritual, some performances matched Otomo Yoshihide and Akiyama Tetzui on empty turntables with Sachiko Matsubara at the sampler, but with no samples (only its sine-wave test) — all mixed together by Toshimaru Nakamura’s mixer without any input. For reference, audition *Good Morning Good Night* (2004) [Erstwhile 042-2], which sounds like an old grade-school hearing test, deep in some cinderblock nurse’s office, mis-administered with faulty equipment. Then again, it may be better to meditate on the idea than to actually listen; try to imagine the hand of one clap sounding (in applause).

INSTITUT FÜR FEINMOTORIK: *Penetrans* (2002). Following Martin Tetreault’s minimalist work directly with tone-arm pickups, this Southern German collective of turntablists spin their machines without any records. The record players, however, are very well prepared, in the Cagean sense of the term, with household items: rubber bands, tape, a toothbrush, *et cetera*. As the hearts of the *hochwertige Discoplattenspieler* beat away, a few wheeze and cramp with the repetitive stress, some begin to click and thrum, and before you know it the resultant low-tech techno creates a wry roots electronica. Most astonishing of all, though, is that what might have been an inspired conceptual gesture or a ‘pataphysical investigation into “precision motoricity” has been going on for years now and led to nine (!) albums. Put on your narrow black-rimmed glasses and check one out [Staubgold 25].

ERVÍN SCHULHOFF: “In Futurum” (1919). Manic, anxious silence. The influence of early jazz and dada cabaret songs is palpable in the third movement of the Czech modernist’s *Five Picturesques* for piano. Though entirely silent, the score bristles with

notation: from long, angst-filled tacets to jittery quintuplet rests. The counting is tricky, and with any but the most accomplished pianist it can detract from the work's potential for emotional outpouring; according to the composer's headnote, the piece is to be played with as much heartfelt expression as desired — always, all the way through [“tutto il canzone con espressione e sentimento ad libitum, sempre, sin al fine!”].

RICHARD EIGNER: *Denoising Noise Music* (2007). The laboratory findings of Eigner's Master's Thesis at the Fachhochschule Salzburg, these two discs document the use of noise-reducing technologies on a range of soi-disant “noise music” — from Iannis Xenakis and Merzbow to Luigi Russolo's *Risveglio ù una città* and Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*. Intended to clean up non-musical sounds and restore damaged audio signals, the denoising algorithms set diligently to work on an entire genre. With few structural clues or melodic sequences to alert the denoising software to the presence of “music,” the original compositions were carefully erased and only a few stray signals survived the cleansing. Occasional and soft, squeeged squeaks and muted bleeps break unpredictably from the granulated quiet like sonar pings from the sunken impulse of the avant-garde, stifled under the slowly shifting sands of some abyssal oceanic basin. The once desperately deafening SOS broadcasts of the most strident musical extreme barely break the surface of Eigner's discs in dreamy liquid echoes, a few drops of cleanser still clinging from the scrub [Wald 01].

PAVEL BÜCHLER: *LIVE* (2003). The audience applause from the three-hundred-and-fifty-one “live” albums in Büchler's collection, with none of the music. Although anyone can hear the occasional rowdy rock crowds and stoned, 70s country, folk fan inclusions, connoisseurs will note that most of the audiences seem to be composed of avant-jazz hipsters, with a number of distinctive acoustics discernible among the open seaside spaces of Newport and Antibes: the heavily curtained converted hockey rink in Victoriaville, Canada;

the wood-beamed and paneled concert hall in Willisau, Switzerland; the concrete and flagstone bandshell in Montreux; the deep-echoing cave created by the balcony at the old Fillmore East. Ranging from 1957 to 1998, the recordings utilized by Büchler, not coincidentally, correspond to the major historical shift in jazz audiences and their responses, as the gin-soaked swingers who rallied the band for certain tempi and communal intensity gave way to the more intellectual responses of the post-bebop era, when jazz fans stopped being alcoholic dancers eager for entertainment and hoping to hook up and instead became frowning brow-crowned introverts, more inclined to subtle, aloofly knowing head nods than any sort of vulgar foot-stomping. In *The Sound*, Ross Russell pinpoints the moment when the demographics shifted to

the ‘alligators’ of the late swing period, those serious types, self-styled students of American jazz, who used to edge up to the orchestra shell and remain there all night, indefatigably listening. [...] They gave the impression that they had never danced a step in their lives, nor had any intention of so doing (54).

Despite the historic sweep of *LIVE*, certain key jazz recordings are absent. At the beginning of *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* [America Records AM6082], the authoritarian eponym admonishes: “ladies and gentlemen [...] restrain your applause [...] don’t even take any drinks, or no cash register ringing, et cetera.” The audience compliance was perfect, and so can’t be heard on *LIVE* (although I suppose *Mingus Presents* wouldn’t have made the cut anyway, since despite the bandleader’s chatter it was actually a studio album, which made it a lot easier for the chastened audience to keep themselves in line). An album such as Pharoah Sanders’ 1972 *Live at the East* [Impulse! AS-9227] presents a trickier decision, since — *pace* the title — it was actually recorded in the studio when the logistics of transporting recording equipment to The East Afrocentric cultural center in Brooklyn proved too costly; but the habitués did tramp across town from the center to the studio instead. Similarly, The Cannonball Adderley Quintet’s 1966 *Live at*

“*The Club*” [Capitol ST-2663] was also recorded in the studio with an imported audience, this time paid with free alcohol. Putting the “lie” back in “live,” the disingenuous album title was a favor to Adderley’s friend, club owner E. Rodney Jones (beautifully enough, unbeknownst even to jazz insiders the Quintet had indeed been recorded live at The Club a few months earlier, although that album wasn’t released until 2005 when the forgotten tapes were discovered, and so it isn’t on *LIVE* either).

However Büchler might resolve these conceptual issues, the result is visceral: the waves of collaged applause are giddy. With all the emotional triggers of anticipation and catharsis but never a recognizable moment for cathexis the listener is continually buffeted from an eager expectation that builds but never climaxes to *dénouements* that always ring false. *LIVE*, in this respect, is thus a thorough and rigorous anticlimax. The ultimate effect, however, is euphoric: all the optimism of crowds expecting a good performance to come and all the gratitude for the performance just past, but with none of the wrong notes, botched timings, or annoying feedback. The album, however, is also a philosophical proposition posing as conceptual art: what does it mean to be (a)live? The title prompts one to wonder what might constitute a recording that was *not* live. But then again, on reflection, as the cheers and whistles and clapping continue, one starts to wonder what recording might ever in fact be truly “live”: experienced for the first vibrant time and not merely a recorded document of something always already terminated, of some guaranteed past in which the performers, however vital at the moment of registration, might now no longer be living. Büchler’s disc, like his *3’34”*, would seem to answer both questions at once: pre-recorded sounds reanimated in their unprecedented new context, as they have never been heard before. A paradox that resolves itself, *LIVE* now lives as a not live live album. Limited edition (to 351) [FACT].

PAVEL BÜCHLER: *Encore* (2005). Once more, from the top, with feeling: a 7" vinyl reprising *LIVE* by including the audience respons-

es on the opening and closing tracks of the fifty-two live albums added to Böhler's record collection since October, 1999 (when the *LIVE* project was produced). Arranged in the order of acquisition over a playing time of four minutes and thirty-three seconds, this is a collector's edition of collected editions, limited to a pressing of 433 discs. Put it on before going to the next big show and practice shouting out requests for "Freebird" [Kunsthalle Bern].

CHRISTOPHER DELAURENTI: *Favorite Intermissions: Music Before and Between Beethoven — Stravinsky — Holst* (2007). Illegal, undercover surveillance as musical composition. DeLaurenti went wired to classical music concerts, making bootleg binaural recordings of everything but the programmed music: laughter and footsteps and the scrape of chairs on an emptied stage, the audience mill and mumble, the returning musicians' arpeggiated warm-up scales, all sorts of noodlings and tunings and autistic snippets of melodic lines. Heavy on percussion, woodwinds and low brass, one wonders what the string players are all doing backstage during these breaks. The result, in all events, often sounds suspiciously like a composition by Carl Alessandro Landini. The album ends with a public-address announcement: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Maestro and orchestra will not stop between the Ravel and Strauss, please hold your applause." Such programming not only prevents DeLaurenti from sneaking in a bonus track from that concert, but it also ensures that the recording won't show up as part of an encore to Böhler's *Encore*. Two editions (neither to be mistaken as the audiobook version of the eponymous Victor Borge memoir), the first with a cover designed in the mode of classic Deutsche Grammophon albums, the second redesigned to satisfy the lawyers at Universal Music Group (DG's parent corporation) [GD Stereo].

THE PHANTOM PREGNANCIES: "Project P.K.O." Riot Grl meets Mike Batt. Nearly a minute of pregnant silence, the phantom sound on this contribution to the Damaged Goods comp *Hey Mom, The Garage Is On My Foot* is apparently not the result of some

deskilled mastering oversight but rather a manifestation of the PP's hatred of digital technology, manifested in a refusal to contribute anything other than mardy silence to a CD project. Best track on the comp: garage punk never sounded so good, and here it finally lives up to the pretenses of its attitude [DAMGOOD 102].

NICK THURSTON: *Erased Motion Poems* (2008). In the audio equivalent of airbrushing a photograph to remove blemishes, Thurston edited out the poems of England's Poet Laureate from the 2005 Poetry Archive CD *Andrew Motion Reading from His Poems*, evacuating the vacuous verse and leaving only Motion's introductory explanations of what the poems are about: "This next poem is called 'A Blow to the Head,' and is about just that.... This poem is called 'The Spoiled Child'.... This next poem is called 'Goethe in the Park' and is a kind of miniature biography of a bit of wood...." The best erasure here is a poetic retelling of Jonty Semper's *I Minute*, "a short poem about the death of Princess Diana." The great paradox of the project comes from what Cleanth Brooks called "the heresy of paraphrase": if poetry, by definition, is what cannot be paraphrased, then Thurston hasn't really removed any poetry at all [self-released mp3 file].

LANGUAGE REMOVAL SERVICE: *Static Language Sampler* (2003). State of the art in speech elimination, LRS cleans and purifies recordings of all language. Sources from their archive include entries from various categories: "divas" (Callas, Monroe, Dietrich), "critics" (Susan Sontag, Noam Chomsky), "musicians" (Mingus, Monk, Cage), "artists" — well, I guess they're actually all divas once you think about it. In every case, LRS takes out the words but leaves all the other sounds untouched: air whistling in buccal cavities, the pool and drain of saliva and phlegm, the glottal pops and deglutinations that punctuate the inframince spaces between even the most rapid speech. With that speech liberated from the distracting clamor of language, the cleansed recordings let ye soft pipes play ever on. With a good pair of headphones you can almost

imagine the aolean echo of inspiration and the calcinated drip off stalactites in the caverns of bucolic grottos... [promotional CD].

MATT ROGALSKY: *S* (2002). Like the LRS but even cleaner. Rogalsky plays Doktor Murkes with this project, actually collecting the *gesammeltes schweigen* [collected silence] that Heinrich Böll's character supposedly splices together on tape. Doktor Murkes works in a radio studio, and S, not coincidentally, compiles all of the silences in one day of BBC radio broadcast. Testing both the proposition that "the tedium is the message" (as Darren Wershler-Henry phrased it) and that "silence is golden," the result was released as a limited edition boxed set (24 audio CDs and a CD-ROM documentation) priced at £300. No doubt feeling some pressure from the masses, Rogalsky later used filtering software to distill the set into a single disc of excerpts — a "best of" album, of sorts, containing only the quietest silences — which was later released in a more democratic unlimited edition (though still kinda pricey at £15). Although they congratulated themselves on treating the whole project lightheartedly, the BBC did assert its rights to the silences, risking a showdown with Cage's publisher.

TAC: *Lapse of silence* (2003). A project of such conceptual integrity that the already very quiet recordings are not compromised by audible events. The result is a sort of "virtual aurality" untainted by sound. A distinctly romantic pastoralism, however, can nonetheless be felt. With a clear echo of Yoko Ono's 1963 *Tape Piece I* ("Stone Piece: take the sound of the stone aging") and *Snow Piece* ("Take a tape of the sound of snow falling./ This should be done in the evening./ Do not listen to the tape...."), the seven brief tracks on *Lapse* document the sounds of shadows moving, sun shining, ice melting, water evaporating, grass growing, candles burning, and — in a nice nod to Cage — mushrooms dropping spores. With this do-it-yourself kit Tom Cox takes the *tac* out of *tacet*. Limited to an edition of only 50, the 3" self-released CD-R comes in a unique sculptural encasement of *papier-mâché* and eggshells [taccdr 006].

JENS BRAND: *Stille-Landschaft* [*Silence–Landscape*] (2002). Real, authentic, documentary silence. The soundtrack to Brand's video installation (a full-circle pan across a desert landscape) is almost as empty as the view, which records a spot in Botswana that is one of the few places in the world where, at certain times, there is indeed almost absolute silence. Since the only way to really hear what was there is to not hear it, a full appreciation of the soundtrack requires its site-specific installation in an anechoic chamber. Brand's video art is less in the tradition of the 19th-century landscape painting or the spectacle of the panorama than the philosophical proposition: if there are no trees in the forest to fall...?

JOSEPH BEUYS: *Grammophon aus Knochen* [Record Player of Bone] (1958). A higher-fidelity version of Beuys' *tonband in filzstapel* [audio tape in stacked felt], the *stummes grammophon* [mute phonograph] displays a covered phonograph record, perhaps with a recording of Beuys' felt-wrapped piano (felt, of course, is a material known for damping sound, as it's used around the hammers *inside* a piano). Though we'll never know, because the swing-arm and needle have been replaced by a bone, bluntly inverting Rainer Rilke's hallucinatory dream of playing the jagged coronal suture of the skull with a phonograph cartridge.

BAUDOIN OOSTERLYNCK: *Variations du silence*, Opp. 73-104 (1990-1). Twenty-three preludes, five oratorios, three overtures and a sonata — a quarter century of confessional, romantic, egotistically autobiographical silence. Following extensive research covering 15,000 kilometers over western Europe, Oosterlynck documents silent locations that were of particular importance to him. Not sufficiently outsider to excuse the visionary pretentiousness, Oosterlynck is like Joseph Beuys without all the dead rabbits and felt (but keeping the goofy haberdashery in a silent tip of the hat to the German master).

PIERRE HUYGHE: *Partition du Silence* [*Score of Silence*] (1997). Who says you can't get something for nothing? Huyghe took a digital recording of Cage's 4'33" and used computer software to enlarge the scale of the digital print. Like blowing up a photograph to reveal what couldn't be seen, the result of Huyghe's magnification amplified what was previously inaudible. Huyghe then scored those sounds using traditional musical notation to create a playable transcription of Cage's piece. Like a map drawn to a scale that's greater than one-to-one, the Score is thus simultaneously a grossly inaccurate distortion and a minutely faithful facsimile.

In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg convinced Willem de Kooning to give him a drawing, which Rauschenberg promptly and studiously erased (playing out a dada performance from decades earlier, in which André Breton chased Francis Picabia around a sheet of paper, immediately erasing whatever Picabia drew, as soon as it appeared). Now you can hear the conversational version. Finding that he had accidentally erased an interview he'd just conducted with J. G. Ballard, Jeremy Millar exhibited it as the *Erased JG Ballard Interview* (Nothing Exhibition, Rooseum, 2001). Just enough metallic hiss to make Reynolds reunite and head back to the studio. While it's nice to see a stupid mistake transformed into a genius installation, it would have been better if he'd wiped out a specially commissioned electroacoustic composition from someone at Dartmouth, or given a full performance of Maciunas' *Homage*.

GEORGE MACIUNAS: *Homage to Richard Maxfield* (1962). A student in John Cage's composition course at The New School For Social Research (and the first professor of electronic music in America when he took over the class as Cage's successor), Richard Maxfield must have heard the story Cage liked to tell about his own student days: "One day when I was studying with Schönberg, he pointed out the eraser on his pencil and said, 'This end is more important than the other'." Maxfield, who seems to

have taken good notes, was best known for using the erase button on the tape machine as a compositional tool. Maciunas' *Homage*, accordingly, instructs the musician to follow a performance of one of Maxfield's compositions by flippantly flipping the erase switch while rewinding Maxfield's master tape. There is no record that Maciunas' piece was ever performed, although he did provide a "chicken variation on the same theme" ("just rewind the previously played tape of R. Maxfield without erasing"), thus exponentially increasing the likelihood of a performance and opening the possibility for an encore. Maciunas' self-canceling composition became a kind of *tombeau* in 1969 when Maxfield performed a fatal defenestration.

WANDELWEISER GROUP. New York (School) by way of Vienna, on a direct flight with one of those noise-canceling headphones on. Founded in the early 1990s by Burkhard Scholthauer and Antoine Beuger (later joined by Jürg Frey, Michael Pisaro, Radu Malfatti, and Manfred Werder among others), the group has recorded seminal performances of John Cage's *Branches* and Christian Wolff's *Stones*. Given the formal conceits of their own compositions — works with durations extending from only four seconds to more than a week, compositions for two CD players, nine minutes of lead-in silence, *et cetera* — one might mistake them for post-Fluxus avant-garde pranksters (minus the squeaky toys and smashed instruments). But despite the overuse of tubas and accordions, these guys really seem to mean it. These are not just silences, but rigorous, deliberate, purposive silences. Dissertations on phenomenology, architecture, and memory, Wandelweiser compositions come off as philosophical investigations into the negative ontology of silence. And yet, in the patiently controlled quiet of the performances they manage to end up as more weighed than weighty, more studied than studious. Taken together, their recordings are arguments for musical planning (along the lines of "family planning"): none of the pauses here are pregnant.

ROBERT WATTS: non-vinyl records (1969-72). Starting with the *String Record*, Watts began manufacturing records with various groove depths and material properties, but with no sound reproduction, to played at a number of speeds. As Watts explains:

I began experiments with the manufacture of a series of records in different materials such as metals, plastics, wood, clay and latex. Most of these were made on a machine lathe at Rutgers University, and I thought of them as being sound portraits of this machine.

At 20rpm, with lots of ripping scratches breaking the drone, the *String Record* sounds like the cabin noise of jumbo jet as its aluminum skin suffers a catastrophic structural failure.

TIM ULRICHS: Schleifpapier-Schallplatten (1968). A series of monaural discs made from thirteen grades of commercial sandpaper in a nuanced mood-music suite orchestration of V. A. Wölfl's industrial noise composition "Pferd/Horse/Elastic," named after the Pferd company's steel-cutting discs. Wölfl's apparently just slapped a hundred of the construction-duty grinding wheels inside record covers (safe to 5100rpm if you can crank the player that fast, but try only at your system's risk). Putting the dust in industrial, the anarcho-duchampians Dust Breeders (Michael Henritzi with Thierry Dellès and Yves Botz, aka Mickey H and Yuri Potlatch), issued their first single, "Sandpaper Mantra" (1989), as a 7" piece of sandpaper guaranteed to *elevage de poussière* when run under a diamond stylus. Their 1995 dance classic "I'm Psycho 4 Yur Love" then swapped the materials, so that vinyl was housed inside a sandpaper record sleeve, making the psychedelic noise even noisier every time the disc is removed [rrr062/EPP02]. An anonymous release in 1980 had used the same strategy on a microhouse track, issuing a blank grooved disc inside a sandpaper sleeve of Adolor/Norton P80 G21 abrasive sheets; starting as minimal techno, the track becomes increasingly glitch with repeated play (variable speed). These discs are all introverted and considerate versions of various antisocial packaging for albums from The Durutti Column

(1979: *The Return of the Durutti Column* [FACT14]); *Illusion of Safety* (1999: *Illusion of Safety* [Mort Aux Vaches 2]); and Feederz (1984: *Ever Feel Like Killing Your Boss?* [Steal 1]). Housed in sandpaper covers with the abrasive surface on the outside, in homage to Verner Permil'd's design for Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's book *Mémoires*, they deface the albums next to them with every reshelving.

ALVIN LUCIER. "Quiet Coffee." Undercaffeinated composition by the master of conceptual music. I suppose it's the sonic equivalent to those sleepy early-morning moments lost staring at the steam rising from the coffee mug, but to be honest, I can't hear much going on here — even wide awake with headphones and the volume turned up all the way. But it does give me an excuse to mention the collection *A Call for Silence*, curated by Nicolas Collins for Sonic Arts Network. Though it often confuses quiet with silent, the compilation highlights include Christian Marclay's *Unused Space*, which would make a good encore for an Institut für Feinmotorik show, and Matt Rogalsky's "Two Minutes and Fifty-Five Seconds..." in which he bullies George W. Bush into rushing through a patriotic performance of Cage's masterpiece and gets him to say a lot more than usual in the process. The CD also contains a couple of tracks in homage to Lucier's famous *I Am Sitting in a Room*: the Kapital Band's raucous party game "How Many People Are in This Room" and Richard Beard's contrarian "I Am Not Sitting in a Room." The latter is not quite silent either — you can hear the tick-tock allusion to Lucier's *Clocker* as well as some shuffling and fidget — but it demonstrates with conviction that Beard isn't going to take this kind of avant-garde nonsense sitting down [SA301-2].

JOHN LEVACK DREVER. "Pastoral Pause." Another track of note from the *Call for Silence* CD, this is ominous, edge-of-your-seat silence recorded on location in Dartmoor. A sudden epic opening, *in medias res*, just moments after a car has passed over a cattle grid in the sonic foreground: the drum-roll clang and reverb of the grating die with

a quick decay and the motor fades into the distance, replaced with some solitary birdcalls, the sluice of a rill, and the sound of wind over an unimpeded expanse (Drever's work is not for the agoraphobic). But wait, what was that? A noise in the distance? The approach of another car? Who could be coming? Et in Arcadia ego? The suspense builds, but we never hear what happens when it gets to the crossing. With an echo of the crop-duster scene in *North by Northwest*, this is environmental art reimagined as a horror movie. Terrifying.

JACOB KIRKEGAARD: *Four Rooms* (2006). Alvin Lucier meets Andrei Tarkovsky. Sounding at first like the title-menu cue music to a creepy science-fiction film — with slowly pulsing drones, metallic-tape abrasions, disquieting high-frequency crackles, and ominous echoing pings reverberating like inhuman cries in empty space — the looping of Kirkegaard's tracks comes not from failing to press Play but from the recursive logic of their own construction. The spaces summoned by the sounds, however, are indeed haunted. Kirkegaard made his recordings in four of the silent, evacuated public spaces of Pripyat (and neighboring Krasno), Ukraine, ground zero for the nuclear reactor that served Chernobyl until 1986. Recording the silent spaces deep inside the deserted Alienation Zone for ten minutes, he then played back the tape inside the same space, recording again; the result was played back again, recorded, and so on, proceeding like Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*, but without the narration and in rooms where no one can sit for long. The results sound like the gravely static of a Geiger counter, stretched to the thirty-year duration of a Cesium half-life. The narrative pull of the increasingly laminar sonic spaces is compelling, and suspenseful, but the tracks would have been just as effective without their irradiated *mise-en-scene*: all spaces are haunted by their own interiority [Touch Tone26].

BRACO DIMITRIJEVIC: *Njegove Dvije Glas* [*His Pencil's Voice*] (1973). Pre-post-historical work from the Sarajevo-born conceptualist, who has written: "I want a style as neutral as possible, a kind of universal

writing.” In this case, the neutral style takes the form of a stylus, the carbon of the diamond transformed into a softened graphite: the universal phonography here was done with a sharpened pencil on a piece of white cardboard, creating a unique variable-speed phonograph record (16, 33, 45, or 78 rpm). I’ve never heard this one (well, you know what I mean), but apparently the album was exhibited in Zagreb and Chicago in the ‘70s. Whereof one cannot speak....

NICK THURSTON: *33 1/3* (2009). Like machine-age assembly-line versions of Dimitrijevic’s Old-Master, hand-sketched artisanal craft object, Thurston’s concentrically ridged paper records — pressed from a precision, laser-etched template — play the paper itself rather than transmitting any prerecorded sound. While the matrices are smooth and hard-edged, the irrepressibly rough grain of the paper is an order of magnitude larger than the clean die of the template pressed into it (not to mention the minute wavers of a typical phonograph groove), and so offers itself up as a source of amplified variance and vibration. With its recording filter larger than any information it might be required to record, the substrate of the phonograph is manifest as “noise” in both the audio and media-theory sense. The medium itself, in the absence of any information from the matrix, gladly supplies the message. With a similar turn, Thurston’s project establishes a mode of mechanical reproduction in which the original master cannot make replicas: each disc sounds distinctly different, depending on the chance arrangement of its pulp’s pressed fibers and the type of paper used. Like Apollinaire’s Merlin, the enchanted needle makes “des gestes blancs parmi les solitudes,” spinning like a desert dervish toward a centrifugal collapse as the stylus surgically incises, slowly abrades and ultimately cuts through with sufficient playings, revealing the black humor of Ubu’s spiraled *gidouille* beneath. Sized so that the needle completes its course in exactly sixty seconds (when spun at the eponymous thirty-three-and-one-half revolutions per minute), these inflexibly flexible pages are little clocks each timing a perfect minute waltz.

VASILII GNEDOV: “Smert’ Iskustvu” [“Death to Art”] (1913). Sound poetry reduced to the blank page. “Silence in this sense, as termination, proposes a mood of ultimacy,” as Susan Sontag would write about the rhetoric of silence in 1967, framing the post-war aesthetics of silence as a *reductio* of modern art: the logical conclusion of Greenbergian modernism arriving at a “point of final simplification.” As James Sherry has observed, a blank sheet of paper is worth about 4 cents, but as soon as you print a poem on it, it’s rendered economically worthless; “Smert’ Iskustvu,” accordingly, keeps its value and is worth every cent. While one might consider Jason Kahn and John Müller’s 2004 *Papercuts* [Crouton 22] or Steve Roden’s 2005 *Forms of Paper* [Line_007] to be versions, the definitive recording of Gnedov’s page was realized by Miguel Molina in 2007 and pressed by ReR Megacorp in 2009 in an edition of 150 personalized copies, strictly *hors commerce*. An historically informed production that would make all three Kuijken brothers proud, that disc records playback from an unregistered wax cylinder, recreating the sound of silence circa 1913. Molina’s realization thus transforms Gnedov’s poem into a cenotaph for the particular silence of wax, which was replaced by amberol celluloid plastic in 1912, just as Gnedov composed his text. Following the recitation of Gnedov’s alternate title, *Poema kontsa* [“Poem of the End”], the disc hisses and pops with the vacuum squall of a brittle wax wind for 93 minutes and 55 seconds. As Molina’s CD-R evinces, Sontag’s vanishing point is always a point of departure as well; Gnedov designated his work as an epic poem (*poema*), rather than a lyric (*stikhotvorenyye*), and his histrionic declamations of the work were immensely popular with audiences who clamored for renditions at poetry readings and brought down the house with their applause. All of which must have sounded a lot like a Pavel Büchler album.

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The University of Utah



LIVE

QT
N.W.:
KGS.
KGS.
KGS.

MADE IN TAIWAN