

EAR | WAVE | EVENT

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Introducing *Ear / Wave / Event* BY BILL DIETZ & WOODY SULLENDER

In the distant 1990s, that dinosaur of the late twentieth century Jean Baudrillard once challenged us to “be meteorologically sensitive to stupidity.”¹ A bit more recently, Jonathan Sterne offered a much cited moniker for a particular meteorological phenomenon which to this day insists on clinging to so much thinking of the sonic - what he calls, “the audiovisual litany”:

[A]n appeal to the “phenomenological” truth about sound sets up experience as somehow outside the purview of historical analysis. This need not be so – phenomenology and the study of experience are not by definition opposed to historicism. [...] The audiovisual litany...idealizes hearing (and, by extension, speech). It alternately denigrates and elevates vision. [...] Instead of offering us an entry into the history of the senses, the audiovisual litany posits history as something that happens between the senses.²

Ear | Wave | Event is tired of hearing that music or sound is beyond language or outside meaning. *Ear | Wave | Event* can’t deal with another hymn to the ethicality of hearing. *Ear | Wave | Event* will scream if another art historian reports “discovering” sound. *Ear | Wave | Event* does not consider the descriptive cataloguing of audio recordings as criticism. *Ear | Wave | Event* was founded because there is a growing community of artistic practitioners and theorists who are eager to come together and address those strains of sonic intelligence (material, intellectual, other) that are too often drowned out by the perpetually rediscovered euphoria of sound’s “mystery.”

Our premiere issue might be read as a collection of attempts to theoretically frame problems of sonic thinking and articulation (Ablinger, Cimini/Sullender, Griffin, Feldman, Barrett/Lodhie) along with a battery of alternative

¹ *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (translated by Paul Patton, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 67

² *The Audible Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 14-16

genealogies for musical practice and thought offering ways out of what feels more and more like the dead-lock of the “sound” scene (Marble, Rosenfeld, Strakovsky, Griffin, Hennix, Ablinger). As these brackets show, both moves (critical and historical) often occur within the same texts, and are at times indistinguishable.

The reversal of sonic causality implicit in the name *Ear | Wave | Event* seeks to position the listening subject in all her affective, perceptual, conceptual, social, cognitive, and embodied psychological complexity at the center of the discussion. Our title and subtitle are also intended as an intervention into the growing debates around “the status of sound” – in particular, the problematic polarity declared between “conceptualism” and “materialism” as often associated with the work and thought of authors Seth Kim-Cohen and Christoph Cox, respectively. Though this division has recently come under increasing scrutiny³, it remains symptomatically relevant insofar as it describes the self-identifications of a great many sound practitioners. Our own proposition for countering what Amy Cimini diagnoses as the latent neo-Cartesianism surrounding such discussions is for the actualization of Roland Barthes’ concept of “sensuous intelligibility”⁴: an entanglement of “mind” and “body” in the wake of the twentieth century avant-garde that is at once specific to sound (respecting the physiological particularity of audition as a sensory modality), but without any claim to that specificity’s *intrinsic* value.

New York City’s “phenomenological” summer of 2013 (James Turrell at the Guggenheim, Robert Irwin at the Whitney, “Sound Art” at MoMA, “sound-based works” at Lisa Cooley) is an instructive example here. Robert Irwin’s *Scrim veil—Black rectangle—Natural light*, Whitney Museum of American

Art, New York (1977) offers a prime example of the hallucinatory “self-perception” that Peter Ablinger insists upon in his contribution, “Cézanne and Music.” Ablinger’s goes on, however, to make a critical distinction: “It became obvious that ‘immediacy’ coincides entirely with mediation – [...] that immediacy is a cultural product, [...] an illusion!” Ablinger’s recognition of sensorial mediation (cultural, historical, mechanical) very precisely “offer[s] us an entry into the history of the senses” in the sense which Sterne opposes to his “litany.” This move in contradistinction to what Hal Foster calls the “techno-aesthetic sublime”⁵ is further in keeping with Foster as the remedy to spectacular phenomenology is *not* polar reversal ‘back’ to a form of disembodied conceptualism, but toward an account of artistic work which insists on historical and corporeal contingency – work which transgresses distinctions between the intellectual, experiential, and perceptual. Two accounts of how this problem might be mapped onto last year’s parallel New York sound offerings appear in the contributions by Jessica Feldman and Doug Barrett/Lindsey Lodhie.

More broadly, we might present the sonic problem thus: what if Western music history (and *sine qua non* the concept of the musical work as it also lingers in the sonic arts at large) has always already been “non-cochlear?” Or put another way: if the artistic work in the history of Western visual art was tied to (and then variously divorced from) arrangements of physical substance (objecthood), in historical music, work status was conferred via constellations of instituting practices – which for the listener were largely cognitive (aural cues for beginnings and ends, recognition of structures of repetition, reference to mnemonic conventions for affective response, patterns of enforcement). The implications of this articulation are as far-reaching as they seem undigested.⁶ Understood thus, wouldn’t sound discourse be poised to offer a unique contribution to debates on immaterial economies in both the art world and beyond? Might not historical varieties of asignifying institutionalization specific to the sonic be of critical interest to thinking affect and the semiotic? These are precisely the kind of questions we mean when we assert our non-prejudicial commitment to the particularity of a sensory modality.

³ See, for example, Brian Kane’s excellent, “Musicophobia, Sound Art and the Demands of Art Theory” (nonsite.org, Issue #8, <http://nonsite.org/article/musicophobia-or-sound-art-and-the-demands-of-art-theory>)

⁴ “Beethoven’s deafness designates the *lack* where all signification is lodged: it appeals to a music not abstract or interior, but endowed, one might say, with sensuous intelligibility, with an intelligibility somehow perceptible to the senses. This category is specifically revolutionary, inconceivable in terms of the old aesthetics, the oeuvre which accepts it cannot be received according to pure sensuality, which is always cultural, nor according to an intelligible order which would be that of (rhetorical or thematic) development; without it, neither the modern text nor contemporary music can be accepted.” From “Musica Practica,” in *The Responsibility of Forms* (translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 264-265.

⁵ In *The Art-Architecture Complex* (New York: Verso Press, 2011), p. 286.

⁶ E.g.: the naïve gesture characterizing a recent self-proclaimed “conceptual turn” among certain sonic artists consists in large part of the literalist importation of tropes from historical visual Conceptual Art into the sonic realm, as though this might somehow produce an equivalent, belated effect.

Ear | Wave | Event is pleased to welcome submissions from all sonic walks of life, but says FUCK YOU to “experimental” as stylistic genre or niche.

We dedicate this first issue to the memory of Robert Ashley.

But around 1970 there was a palpable turn toward conservatism in every aspect of American life and, predictably, the artist led the way... Composers renounced the 'theater' of music of the nineteen-sixties. Steve Reich wrote a book saying as much, 'We have to get back to reality.' That meant getting back to the five-line staff and what it meant. And it meant getting back to 'recitals.' So, we still have recital halls. More, in fact. The postwar boom in higher education produced hundreds, maybe thousands, of all-purpose recital halls in new colleges and universities. The Law is expressed in the architecture of the culture. It could be different.⁷

⁷ “We need more *music*: Opera versus Recital,” in *Outside of Time: Ideas about Music* (Cologne: MusikTexte, 2009), p. 146-148

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THE ILLUSIONED EAR
Disembodied Sound & The Musical
Séances Of Francis Grierson
BY MATT MARBLE



Jesse Shepard / Francis Grierson, 1890

Several days ago, Grierson had just completed one of his extraordinary piano performances, during which he channeled the creative energies of deceased musical geniuses and presented previously unheard compositions from beyond. As the music ceased, Grierson became very still, as was his habit... but after a long moment, his audience grew restless, and Tonner went to the piano to shake his friend. Grierson was dead, aged 79, most probably from heart disease exacerbated by malnutrition.

West Adams, LA Obituary, June 1, 1927

FROM THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS

Music is a metaphysical illusion, whose secrets are often felt but never uttered.

Francis Grierson, *Celtic Temperament* (182)

The life of Jessie Shepard (a.k.a. Francis Grierson), born Benjamin Henry Jesse Francis Shepard, is shrouded in mystery and hearsay. Today he is almost completely unknown. However, at the turn of the nineteenth

century, in America and abroad, he was an acclaimed singer and pianist, essayist, psychic medium, and mystic philosopher. His mystical perspective was forged during the zeitgeist brought on by the popularity of H.P. Blavatsky's Theosophical philosophy and the rising popularity of Spiritualism, the popular and controversial practice of contacting and communicating with the spirits of the deceased. Both had entered into American consciousness by the second half of the nineteenth century. Like Blavatsky, whom he knew personally, Grierson believed there was an invisible spirit world coexisting with the phenomenal world; and, via Spiritualism, he believed he could channel and communicate with the spirits of the dead. As a pianist and singer, Grierson claimed that his music, almost entirely free-improvised, was channeled from the spirits of deceased composers - such as, Chopin, Mozart, Schubert, Liszt, and numerous others - while referring to spirit communications with other historical figures in his séances and writings. His performances were so compelling that he quickly found himself traveling extensively, singing at Notre Dame, and giving private concerts for kings and queens across the globe. By his mid-20s Grierson was beginning to enter into popular consciousness, being featured in newspapers and tabloids: he was "the strangest" sensation.

By 1887 Grierson was so highly regarded that two admiring benefactors offered to custom design and build him a Victorian-style mansion, the Villa Montezuma, in San Diego. Grierson lived in the Villa two years before deciding to move to Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century Grierson was focusing more and more on writing, and with his first publication in English he made explicit the personal transformation he was then undergoing. He changed his name from Jesse Shepard, the "psychic pianist", to Francis Grierson, world traveler and essayist. Under this new identity, Francis Grierson - as he'll be referred to throughout this essay - went on to publish over 10 books and numerous articles for magazines and newspapers. He would be lauded by esteemed minds, such as William James and Edmund Wilson, while he befriended significant artists of the period, such as architect Claude Bragdon, composer Arthur Farwell, and writers Alexandre Dumas, Maurice Maeterlinck, Stephane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Walt Whitman. Mallarmé once proclaimed that Grierson did "with musical sounds, combinations and melodies what Poe did with the rhythm of the words" (Wilson, 74); as Maeterlinck announced Grierson to be "the supreme essayist of our age" (73).

Adding to the mystique of his medial music practice and prophetic

writings, Grierson's appearance over the years offered as much mystery to the onlooker: rouged cheeks, a waxed or orange-dyed mustache, wigs, a ruby ring surrounded by diamonds (and other expensive jewelry given by the royalty he entertained), and a fur coat made of 3,000 squirrel skins. He was known by many notable artists and royal powers as a genius, a madman, or both; but he fascinated the majority he encountered. Dumas had told Grierson during his passage through Paris in the 1860's, "[w]ith your gifts you will find all doors open before you." And for quite some time that is exactly what the young Grierson found.

Nevertheless, as he aged and the times changed, his confident esotericism would begin to lose the interest of the public eye, especially during the last two decades of his life. Despite several flurries of success and adulation in his later years, Grierson ultimately lost his audience. After a significant stay in Europe, from 1913 on he lived in Los Angeles where he was consumed by poverty and malnutrition. On May 29, 1927 Grierson died as he played the final piano chord of an improvisation during his last concert in LA. At the age of 79, he left the material world utterly forgotten, and he has largely remained so to this day. While a biography and a smattering of essays and mentions have recalled his name over the years, these have largely occurred in obscure academic journals or as anecdotes in books and articles. Tapping into the ubiquitousness of the information age as well as engaging the progressive forum of sound practice that Ear|Wave|Event offers, *The Illusioned Ear* hopes to bring Grierson's life and work to the attention of a contemporary audience.

While it may remain easy for many to dismiss Grierson, like so many other mediums from the same period, as a charlatan, that would not diminish the intrigue nor the artistic value of his creative work, despite its inaudibility. As Edmund Wilson once noted, "[o]ne's impression is, in fact, that Grierson himself was never quite able to account for the mysterious resources, subconscious or extra-human, on which he was able to draw" (Wilson, 77). And as sound artist and author Joe Banks repeatedly notes in his recent book, *Rorschach Audio*, these illusioned auditions of spirit are fundamentally a creative activity, engaging in perceptual ambiguities, imaginative projection, and often theatrical persuasion to varying degrees of success (or awareness). As the title of his work alludes, Banks associates Spiritualist sound practices with the intuitive readings of Rorschach ink-blot tests used in psychology. The abstract images of these tests leave open a space for subjective intuitive interpretation. Focusing primarily on EVP

[Electronic Voice Phenomena], developed by Latvian writer and Spiritualist Konstantins Raudive in the 1940s, Banks claims that "EVP experimenters [and other technicians of medial illusion] are or were, in effect, creative artists, producing, through their audio experimentation, forms of sound art and poetry" (Banks, 114).

"EVP," says Banks, "is a religious belief system based on the misperception of illusions of sound" (Banks, 102). The technologically-derived EVP was an outgrowth of the techniques of illusion developed through the séances of American Spiritualism and, preceding them, the multimedia horror shows of the European phantasmagoria, combined with the accessibility of audio recording technology. Readers are encouraged to read Banks' work, which resonates throughout this essay. While Grierson was steeped in American spiritualism, which we will explore further, we will also be looking into the techniques of illusion in the phantasmagoria to better understand similar approaches in Grierson's own work.

Throughout this essay, these techniques of illusion are highlighted to show how they, despite their esoteric nature, served as a cultural synthesizer of psychological and spiritual catharsis, artistic creativity, and popular entertainment. In Grierson's work and in so many other instances in cultural history, the disembodiment of sound has served an amphibious perception of Rorschach-like imagery, calling upon the willing subject to rummage through resonances of perception within their interior, and, if nothing else, discover a true feeling. As the first part of this essay focuses upon Grierson's life and philosophy, the second part draws connections to contemporary music and sound art. We'll be looking at the role of echo in popular music, the metaphysically devised *intonorumi* of the early twentieth century Italian Futurist, Luigi Russolo, and the disembodied choir of Janet Cardiff's contemporary sound installation, *Forty-Part Motet*. Through this mosaic of historical perspectives, the manipulation of sonic disembodiment, at the heart of Grierson's musical séances, is seen to be a key factor in cultural patterns of paranormal interest, as well as in experimental advances in the art of sound. Francis Grierson, it now seems, was the prophetic prototype of American experimentalism.

As most prototypes are forgotten and replaced by their successors, so has been the case with Grierson. Pioneering an independent and experimental music practice, before Charles Ives and Henry Cowell, Grierson was one of the first American "maverick" composers. Preceding the evolution of jazz into "free improv" and the "aleatoric" developments of

avant-garde composition, Grierson was one of the first American “free improvisors,” devising his music spontaneously, without forethought, systems, or the templates of formal tradition. And through his musicales and séances he offered - as the work of many séance directors did - prescient uses of multi-media, spatialized sound, site specificity, and other techniques.

All of Grierson’s experimental advances were derived from his metaphysical approach to music. Through spontaneous improvisation he felt directly attuned to receive inspiration and contact with the spirit world. The resulting music was to be an inspiring feat of channeled intuition, remaining - for the audience, as well as for Grierson himself - a “spiritualized pleasure” (Grierson, HU, 178). While Grierson’s music was never known to be recorded, and thus remains inaudible to us now, I invite the reader’s audition to join his illusioned ear. For, somewhere between theology and theatre, Grierson’s impassioned writings and medial music point towards an auditory imagination that is rare and inspiring in any era.

SIGNS OF DIVINE PREPARATION



Francis Grierson at piano (San Diego History Center Collections)

In the late [eighteen]-fifties the people of Illinois were being prepared for the new era by a series of scenes and incidents which nothing but the term “mystical” will fittingly describe. Things came about not so much by preconceived method as by an impelling impulse. The appearance of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” was not a reason, but an illumination; the founding of the Republican party was not an act of political wire-pulling, but an inspiration; the great religious revivals and the appearance of two comets were not regarded as coincidences, but accepted as signs of divine preparation and warning.

Francis Grierson, “Proem,” *The Valley of Shadows* (VS, b1)

Born in Birkenhead, England, on September 18, 1849, Grierson and his family moved to the prairies of Sangamon County, Illinois, where they would live for 10 years. Growing up in a log cabin, Grierson’s youth was largely spent wandering in the soon-to-be colonized wilds of Illinois, amongst a din of animals and flowers, sounds and silences, lights and shadows. Grierson’s memory of America reads like a history book, one he would drench in poetic reverie. Fugitive slaves stayed at his family’s log cabin, which was an Underground Railway outpost; and he was in attendance at the Lincoln-Douglas debates in Alton. He witnessed the pre-war days, the onslaught of the American Civil War, and the emergence of industrialism. Grierson, always identifying as a foreigner or non-American, found himself in a first-row seat watching America undergo its birth pangs. What’s more, through his European travels he would witness the fall of France’s second empire, which he saw as the end of the “wonderful, romantic movement” (Grierson, PP, 145), as well as the passing of Queen Victoria in London, where he witnessed her funeral procession.

Most of our knowledge of Grierson’s youth is only to be found in his reflective writings, which were not put to paper until later in his life. In *The Valley of Shadows* (1909) Grierson’s childhood and America’s history are both retroactively portrayed through the Claude glass of ominous mystery and prophetic fervor. Everything in the environment could be read, as he noted in his introductory “proem,” as “signs of divine preparation.” Grierson was raised in this prophetic language. Within this pervasive supernaturalism, he was immersed in local Methodist camp meetings, where wild impassioned preaching was recalled by one historian to be “more psychopathic than the witchcraft mania” (Simonson, 19). The only books he knew growing up were the Bible and an Anglican prayer-book. Later identifying with the Catholic faith, this direct exposure to a highly emotional Christian form of worship, emphasizing personal experience and communication with the Divine, would only reinforce Grierson’s growing

attraction to the mystical. But his unique spiritual affinities would not find their voice until he discovered the piano.

After their initial stay in Sangamon County, Grierson's family went on to live in several other Illinois locations, including Alton, St. Louis, and Chicago, as well as a brief stay in Niagara Falls, New York. Reflecting on his year living in Niagara Falls with his family, Grierson recalls that it was there that he first played the piano in 1863. At age 16 he was acutely aware of his spiritualized musical ability: "In fooling over the keys I happened to strike a full chord, and I at once realized the influence and direction of something independent of my intellect and will... Little did I dream when I awoke to a realization of my hidden faculty on that Sunday at Niagara Falls of the ordeals attendant on a wandering life which was to endure as a sort of apprenticeship for more than forty years" (Simonson, 23). Never formally trained, Grierson developed his music through pure intuition and impulse, which he was embracing more and more and learning to hone.

After his pianistic revelation at Niagara Falls, Grierson pursued the instrument with passion. He recalls one of his earliest public concerts, during a brief visit to New York City in 1868, as being a spontaneous public intervention. As he walked past a lecture hall on 35th and Broadway, he saw a piano through the departing crowd and instinctively ran to it:

There was not time for a prelude. With an allegro accompaniment, and chords that produced the effect of a piano duet, I attacked a high C and held it long enough for the people in the street to stop and listen. In less than two minutes people began to rush back into the hall and continued coming until my audience must have been nearly as large as the audience that had left. (Simonson, 24)

Inspired by his own progress as well as the attention and money he was beginning to receive from such public improvisations, Grierson continued giving impromptu recitals in New York, Boston, Baltimore, and other major cities along the East coast. In 1869 his European travels and concert touring began with concentrated force. He would later recall his state of mind at the time as follows:

I moved along on the stream of experience under the illusion that society was full of poetry and romance. To me the world was a sort of dream, and through it I walked, a living but sealed book of illusions. My head was full of unwritten Arabian Nights adventure, and in my ignorance I imagined that the world was full of charming and generous people willing to aid art for art's sake, and to further truth for truth's

sake... A desire to see the world was born with me; it was an instinct... It seemed quite natural to go about alone in foreign countries, without funds in the bank to draw from, and without rich relatives to help me in time of trouble. To see, to hear, and to know the world for myself, that was the 'instinct.' (Grierson, CT, vii-viii)

He first went to Paris, where he would perform for the 80-year-old Daniel Auber. A renowned composer and head of the Paris Conservatory of Music, Auber took Grierson under his wing and arranged all manner of performances for him, as Grierson dove into the artistic salon culture of Paris amongst Dumas, Mallarmé, and others of the period. Grierson was even commissioned by composer Leon Gastinelle to sing the lead voice in Gastinelle's mass, dedicated to the Emperor for his royal birthday celebration, and performed at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in 1870. A year later Grierson's intuition led him to London where his improvisatory musicales gained further attention.

Grierson's twenties were spent wandering across the globe, with notable forays in Baden-Baden, Cologne, and St. Petersburg. His travels and performances had him crossing paths with the highest peaks of wealth, nobility, and celebrity and the lowest ranks of poverty, vulgarity, and anonymity. Grierson's family moved to London in the early 1870s where he joined them for a while, before further international travels through London, Paris, Australia, Chicago, San Francisco, and elsewhere. Grierson maintained this nomadic lifestyle until the end of the 1880s.

Until 1889 I was a wanderer through the world with a knapsack filled with ornaments which none cared to look at. But in waiting for better days I accepted the situation. I had to wait twenty years, every month of which was replete with some form of hard work, rude experience, mingled success and failure, and trials of every description. But, as I said before, I was my own world of romance. I had to create it, without knowing how or why. (Grierson, CT, xiv)

As soon as he had left the Illinois prairies, Grierson voraciously digested philosophy and literature, both classical and contemporary. And he wore his idols on his sleeve. Over the years he proclaimed and revered the mystical personas of Novalis, William Blake, J.W. Goethe, Abbé Joseph Roux, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others. Still, he could be incisively critical of his idols, as when he accused Emerson of being overly intellectual, having never walked in the "valley of the shadow" (Grierson, CT, 93). But his earliest and most enduring hero was Abraham Lincoln, whose mystic prowess was memorialized both in *Valley of the Shadows* (1909) and more

explicitly in his *Abraham Lincoln, Practical Mystic* (1918). He saw in Lincoln a man that was in touch with his own interior as well as with Divine Will, a prophetic leader who was key to realizing the spiritual destiny of man in America. In one of his *Abraham Lincoln*, Grierson compiles quotations of the ex-president and others' commentary or recollections combined with the author's own reflections. His mystical portrayal of Lincoln is clear in the choice of quotes he offers, such as this one by the ex-president himself:

Somewhere there is a fearful heresy in our religion, and I cannot think it lies in the love of liberty and in the aspirations of the human soul. I hold myself in my present position, and with the authority invested in me, as an instrument of Providence. I have my own views and purposes. I have my convictions of duty and my ideas of what is right to be done. But I am conscious every moment that all I am, and all I have, is subject to the control of a Higher Power. (Grierson, AL, 11)

In many ways, Grierson identified with Lincoln, as a prophet, a genius, and a leader. In Grierson's later writings, his critique of culture, politics, and the arts is always one drawn towards synthesizing the zeitgeist and calling for a mystically driven renaissance, or as one reviewer put it, he was "engaged in making the time conscious of its own spirit" (Grierson, PM, 15). Grierson was insistent that genius was needed for the spiritual development of man. "Genius, which is the supremest personal force in the world of thought, is a central sun of itself, back of which the essence of the unknowable rules and acts in mysterious, inscrutable, and eternal law" (Grierson, CT, 166). Elsewhere he offers what might as well have been his own guiding methodology, if not a suggested method for others. Those on the path of genius, like Grierson and his heroes mentioned above, have four tenets: "First, he has confidence in himself; Second, he has confidence in others; Third, he feels that in the eternal mysteries there resides a law and a force which may be revealed by flashes of intuition; Fourth, he knows that the world is not standing still" (Grierson, IA, 175).

Genius, for Grierson, was not composed of the intellectual so much as the mystical. The etymology of the term itself [Latin, *genius*] originally referred to a "guardian deity or spirit which watches over each person from birth", or to a person who has "prophetic skill". And it was mysticism, in general, that provided the broader context for Grierson's philosophy in both his life and his music. As he declared in his introduction to *The Valley of Shadows*, he believed there was a spiritual renaissance of mystical character occurring across America, and beyond, during the turn of the nineteenth

century. In *Modern Mysticism* (1899), Grierson defines "mysticism" as follows:

Mysticism is the astronomy of the soul; and a mystical mind is an intellectual telescope probing for specks of truth in a universe of eternal mystery. The non-mystical is dissipated by centrifugal force; but mystical thought is centripetal in its action, ever aspiring towards the central and the ideal, yet always in an epicycle. No sooner does poetic intuition penetrate to a new conception of Nature's enigma than the mind becomes conscious of revolving inside a new circle of unsolved problems. Paradox and illusion are the riddles, the tempters, and the tormentors of the poets, for the deeper the soundings the more imperative the mystery. (15)

As for many, Grierson's mysticism was rooted in meditative reflection of the intuitive and imaginative realms of his own inner space. He was insistent on prioritizing the mystical role of this interiority, shunning the ephemeral garb and fads of culture and tradition; or, in his own words, "[t]here is but one Universal mode of thought, that of interior consciousness freed from schools and systems" (Grierson, MM, 14). Grierson spent many hours in meditation, honing his relationship to his intuition and prophetic calling:

Meditation is the secret of refined and durable intelligence, without which no prophet ever preached, without which the passions and sentiments of poetry are only a passing impulsion, composed by the dilettante in a day, to be read and assimilated by the novice in an hour. The presence of meditation gives grace to solitude and courage to patience; it acts like an arbiter between the personal power and the reason which dominates the brain and the egoistic pleasures that dominate the heart. Study is agitation, movement, like the juice of grape in fermentation, but meditation is like the pure wine which sharpens the wit and gives power to the wings of genius. Meditation contemplates the past, appropriates the present, and anticipates the future. (Grierson, CT, 125)

Others encouraged Grierson's extremely independent approach to life. Auber had urged the young pianist: "Don't study. Perhaps if you study music, you will lose, or at least spoil, your strange gift" (Wheeler, 135). By his own inclination or with Auber's advice in mind, Grierson never took up formal study of music. But he continued studying and practicing his "strange gift". And as he aged, Grierson became intent on probing the philosophical implications of this strangeness. His own philosophy was highly syncretic and idiosyncratic, expressed in patches and swaths through various reflective essays over the years. But clairvoyance and mystery would form the center

There is a psychic and magnetic correspondence through all things. Viewed hastily, everything looks like chance; but the deeper we go into the meaning of the things which appear casual, the plainer does the law of phenomenal relativity become. Perhaps the chief cause of inharmony among people is the ignorance of the world concerning the attractive and the repulsive forces in trivial as well as in great things. If we could become clairvoyant and psychometric, the harmonious relation of people and things would become apparent; colours, sounds, and perfumes would blend in an endless symphony of chromatic tones and tints, and we should recognize law where we now see nothing but chance or chaos. (85-86)

Certainly no man can call himself a thinker who refuses to do battle with the mysterious forces which encompass us round about, as palpable as the air we breathe. If there were no mysteries there would be no such thing as science, and if book-learning contained all practical wisdom there would be no such thing as intuition. Everything is like everything else. There is but one source; but an infinite variety of appearances. The soul of the universe is one - its manifestations are without limit in variation. Phenomena produce mystery; the whole conscious world is engaged in the unraveling of mystery. (169)

How is one to make them [the popular audience] see the difference between a spiritual and esoteric improvisation and music played from notes from a cold-blooded, reasoned, and so-called classical mode?

The STRANGEST MAN in the WORLD!



"Bill's got a free job now, announced the old man to a neighbor one morning. "a free job! Stealing money fast."

"What's he doing?" asked the other man.

"He's a night prisoner," the old man answered. "Oh, a free job! He works nights and saves his tonight's, and then he sleeps all day and serves his food."—*Yank's Companion.*

Throughout his musical career Grierson's pianistic improvisations would also often take programmatic concepts or thematic scenes as guides to a given improvisation, e.g. in 1912 he would improvise upon "the sinking of the Titanic." More commonly, over the years, he would use the orientalized imagery of foreign lands and cultures - Egypt, Assyria, Palestine, Greece, et al - as well as the creative nostalgia of ancient times to conjure unique and unprecedented musical experiences by improvisatory interpretation. These improvisations on a mental theme would often be combined, in the same concert or musicale, with pieces by Chopin or pianistic excerpts from European operas. Grierson himself had a youthful admiration for the music of Wagner. But according to Grierson, who would write a scathing essay on the phenomena of "Parsifalitis," Wagner never realized "the desired esoteric serenity"; rather, he praised French impressionism, "[s]ince Debussy began his work, orchestral music has become more absolute, more transcendent, forcing technique and counterpoint to take an inferior place" (Grierson, IA, 113). Grierson's own perspective on the importance of music and its' role in society, which he stated in *The Invisible Alliance* (1913), was something he had felt from his initial years as a musician.

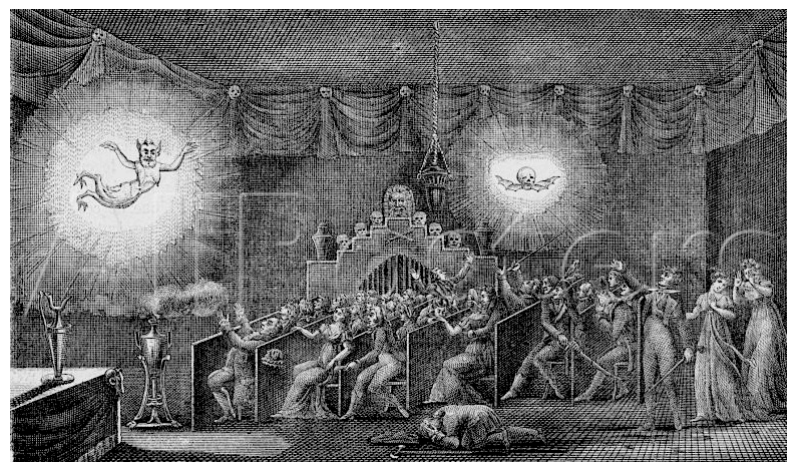
[N]ow once more in the history of civilization the signs point to a union of music, literature, and philosophy, with music as the key to all. If such a union is consummated it will metamorphose the world of art, literature, and psychology. One thing may be taken for granted - music, in our day, has become for many thousands of people a refuge against the onslaughts and delusions of materialism, and just in proportion as opinions become more positive, people will become more and more attracted to the harmony created by rhythmic sounds. But more than all else, music is becoming a psychic necessity. (115)

By the time Grierson had entered his 20s, the "psychic necessity" of the prophetic path that he felt in music was joining forces with a ghostly pastime. During his first travels in Europe, Grierson's improvisations would begin to take the voices and musical auditions of the spirit world as their thematic material and generative vehicle. Likely having been exposed to séances during his visits to major east coast cities, let alone the superstition and prophecy he encountered in backwoods Methodist preaching, it was in 1871, during a stay in Russia, that Grierson received first-hand training in séance direction by locally renowned spiritualist. Three years later, Grierson resided at a farm in Chittenden, Vermont, where he met the founders of Theosophy, Madame Helene Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, and joined them

in an intensive residency focusing on spirit communication. Through his own pianistic mediumship, Grierson's notoriety would only increase over the next two decades.

But prior to Grierson's séance techniques and the American popularity of Theosophy and Spiritualism in general, Europe had been exercising a similar form of ghostly performance as pure popular entertainment. More in the spirit of a horror film or a haunted house, the nineteenth European phantasmagoria conjured all sorts of ghosts and monsters through multimedia illusions. The mysterious illusions of the phantasmagoria, as we'll see, carry forward into Spiritualist practice.

PHANTASMAGORIC AFFINITIES



Robertson's phantasmagoria, Paris, 1797

Everything in theatre is illusive, except the audience. [...] A theatre is a cauldron of emotional witch-broth; the things that are done pertain to magic. [...] It is the world of illusion, where an act or a scene may reflect a magic ray of reality in a sphere as vast as imagination and as potent as life and love. But to the actors themselves there is no mystery. It is the playgoer who has entered the region of artifice, the realm of light and shade, the abode of fancy and fascination, where enigma, mystery, and emotion are one, and where the problems of life revolve in a kaleidoscopic world of romance and realism. A theatre is a hot-bed of paradox.

Francis Grierson, "Theatrical Audiences" (CT, 100)

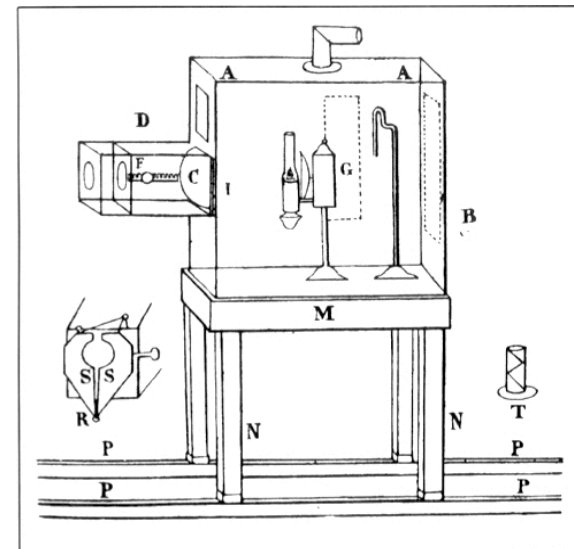
Phantasmagorias were a proto-cinematic and theatrical form of entertainment, involving performers, costumes, projectors, mirrors, and props, that depicted ghosts, monsters, and other phantoms aimed to frighten and fascinate. The term itself was coined by a French dramatist; derived from its likely combined Greek and French roots [Gr., *phantasma*; Fr., *agora*], “phantasmagoria” literally meant “a crowd of phantoms”. Phantasmagorias were widely popular in Europe during the nineteenth century and they effectively amplified the interest in the performance of phenomenal fantasies and the desire to believe in spirits in European consciousness. This led to the development of a vast array of techniques aimed at creating convincing, and fear inducing, illusions. One of the most notable is that of ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ - named after its inventor, John Henry Pepper - now commonly used in haunted houses, magic tricks, and live musical performances. Using an angled sheet of glass, set off-stage, and a lantern-projected image, the audience will see an transparent image appear to hover on the stage. This effect has been consistently used since its invention, most recently adapted to 3D holographic technology, which allowed the superimposition of a deceased Tupac Shakur to “perform” live with Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg at the Coachella festival in 2012, and has given rise to the completely holographic Japanese pop star Hatsune Miku.

During its heyday, the most popular, influential, and elaborate phantasmagorias were those staged by Etienne Gaspard Robertson. Like many directors of theatrical illusion, Robertson would often begin his shows by denouncing so-called superstitious impostors, with the emphasis being placed on the verity of his own projections: Robertson’s phantoms were “real.” And like many phantasmagoric works, Robertson’s phantasmagorias anticipate aspects of twentieth century experimental art; they aren’t a far cry from modern acousmatic listening or contemporary sound and performance art. Author Theodore Barber describes one such show in evocative detail:

Robertson quickly extinguished the light so as to plunge the room in total darkness for the next hour and a half. This in itself was frightening, but to increase the terror he proceeded to lock the doors. The audience then heard the noise of rain, thunder, and a funereal bell calling forth phantoms from their tombs, and [Benjamin] Franklin’s Harmonica, a form of musical, water-filled glasses, provided a haunting sound which served both here and throughout the show to mask the noise of the goings-on behind the scenes. During these sound effects, Robertson was setting up his magic lantern behind the screen, rear projection being in fact a key to his performance. The audience could see the

slides on a cambric screen that had been made slightly diaphanous by coating it with a varnish of white starch and gum arabic, but the lanternist and the actual workings of the show remained hidden. Another brilliant touch was that he sometimes rear projected his slides on to smoke, creating an eerie effect. (75)

The phantasmagoria was a synthesizer of progressive technology, multi-media creation, and performative illusion. Its key ingredient was the “magic lantern,” a precursor to the slide projector, and, by its application, a proto-cinematic tool, originally invented by philosopher and esotericist, Athanasius Kircher. Many creators of phantasmagoria devised their own lanterns to suit their needs. Robertson called his projector the ‘Fantascope.’ Using an Argand oil lamp, the Fantascope also had the possibility of creating “zoom” effects and, a shutter mechanism to alter the intensity of light, and mechanical slides to give more dynamic motion to his projected images. His slides were painted with transparent oils and the images were set in relief to the slides’ black background, which gave them a floating appearance in a dark room. Multiple projectors allowed for the superimposition of different images and perspectives. Robertson and other cohorts would also give voices to these images.



Robertson's Fantascope: G) Argand lamp, F) adjustable focus, SS) shutter mechanism, D, optical tube (Barber, 75)

Phantasmagorias were scarce in America; they were present, but largely outmoded by the middle of the nineteenth century. Their failure to be imported was in part due to the increasing popularity of an analogous practice, Spiritualism; while the technology of the magic lantern was being outmoded by the beginnings of early cinema and the first film cameras that were rapidly evolving at the time. While phantasmagoria's had little direct influence on the development of Spiritualism in America, the former remains a significant antecedent for their shared merging of entertainment and art in the metaphysical illusionism of sound and image. Both phantasmagorias and Spiritualist séances projected disembodied images and sounds in a physical performance space. Interestingly, while the visual projections of the phantasmagoria anticipates experimental practices in early film, Spiritualism anticipates experimental practices in modern music and contemporary sound art.

AMERICAN SPIRITUALISM & SÉANCE THEATRICS

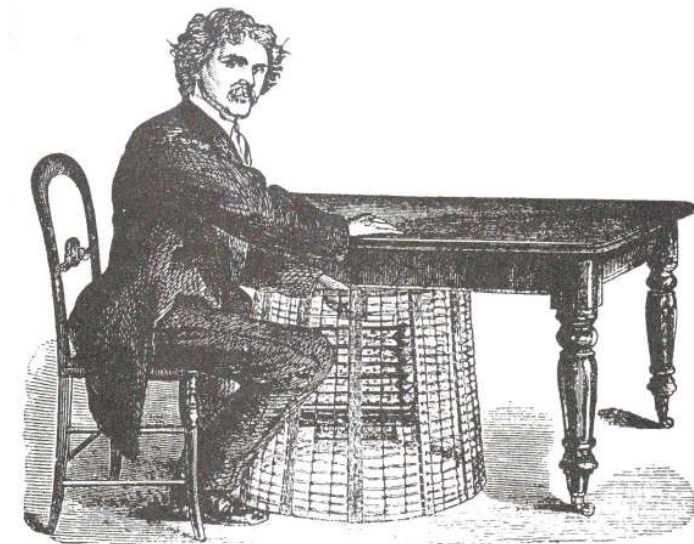


The popularizers of American Spiritualism, The Fox sisters

Spiritualism took on a widespread interest almost as soon as it manifested in NE America around 1845 with the ghostly “rappings” famously reported by the Fox sisters. From the huge waves of war, poverty, and illness, Americans had seen so much death that the longing for spiritual contact must have felt universally acceptable and passionately expressed. Spiritualism, then, came as a welcome icebreaker to these emotional burdens and longings. The Fox sisters claimed to hear “rappings” or knocking sounds they claimed were made by visiting spirits, whenever they made inquiry of a “Mr. Splitfoot.” They went on to make a good bit of money performing their rappings at various homes as well as at P.T. Barnum’s museum and other public venues. Perhaps their greatest performance took place on October 28, 1888. At the New York Academy of Music, no less,

Maggie Fox confessed that their entire mediumship had been a hoax from the beginning, and she proceeded to demonstrate how the ‘rapping’ sounds were made, not by spirits, but by the strategic cracking of her toe joints.

Meanwhile other spiritualists carried on the cause, with more explicit deceptive forgeries of spirit communication. One, “Miss Vinson,” would suspend musical instruments from her ceiling, and in the darkness of her séances, reach up and pluck the instruments, which to the ignorant audience members were presumed to be played by spirits (Britten, 246). Many such revenantly posed sounds pervade séance history, and were often manipulated or offered up as ‘credible’ signs of spirit contact. An unreliable though common credibility test, the “accordion test,” involved placing an accordion out of arm’s reach (e.g., in a cage, covered with a blanket, etc.). In the dark the accordion would then be mysteriously played by the spirits. In truth however, the sound was made by devised means of pumping air via a foot pump, or imitated by a mouth organ, among many other methods of illusion. This was notoriously performed by mediums Henry Slade and Daniel Dunglas Home for numerous séances as well as for questionable scientific scrutiny. Homes incidentally used a one-octave mouth organ to disembody the voice of his caged accordion.



Daniel Dunglas Home performing the accordion experiment

Similar tests and proofs often involved a guitar, piano, bell or percussion, among other musical instruments. The famous magician Harry Houdini, in later life, saw it his calling to weigh truth from falsehood in spiritualist practices. But he never found any nearness of being convinced of their credibility. In regard to the sonic dimension, in 1924 Houdini wrote of the auditory ambiguity of the auditor's sound localization, which aids the medium:

As to the delusion of sound [...] Sound waves are deflected just as light waves are reflected by the intervention of a proper medium and under certain conditions it is a difficult thing to locate their source. Stuart Cumberland told me that an interesting test to prove the inability of a blindfolded person to trace sound to its source. It is exceedingly simple; merely clicking two coins over the head of the blindfolded person. (Houdini, 7-8)

Grierson's séance study with Russia's grand medium, General Jourafsky, in 1871 was facilitated by Princess Abelmelik, who was an admirer of Grierson's. While there is no way to know what exactly Grierson learned from Jourafsky - whose own life is largely undocumented - Grierson's own séances would prove highly convincing for his audiences, and especially to the European nobility. Before the turn of the century, his acclaim was overflowing positive in nearly every country in which he performed. Over 20 years after Grierson's initial séance study began, Prince Adam Wisiniewski would recall a musical séance that Grierson lead in Paris on September 3, 1893:

After having secured the most complete obscurity we placed ourselves in a circle around the medium, seated before the piano. Hardly were the first chords struck when we saw lights appearing at every corner of the room... The first piece played through Shepard [a.k.a. Grierson] was a fantasia of Thalberg's on the air from 'Semiramide'. This is unpublished, as is all of the music which is played by the spirits through Shepard. The second was a Rhapsody for four hands, played by Liszt and Thalberg with astounding fire, a sonority truly grand, and a masterly interpretation. Notwithstanding this extraordinarily complex technique, the harmony was admirable, and such as no one present had ever known paralleled, even by Liszt himself, whom I personally knew, and in whom passion and delicacy were united. In the circle were musicians, who, like me, had heard the greatest pianists in Europe; but we can say that we never heard such truly super-natural executions. (Willin, 54)

Interestingly, Grierson would go through long periods of denouncing the

merits of Spiritualism. Just as Blavatsky had accused him of being a charlatan, so Grierson saw such deceit in the majority of mediums, who used phenomenalist means to beguilingly win their audience's belief. Later on, around 1887, Grierson would publicly denounce Spiritualism and deny that séances had ever occurred at the Villa Montezuma. Grierson recounted these distrustful sentiments in his letters to Claude Bragdon:

The phenomenologists are the gravest danger we have to face, even in this enlightened age. People who see in my music a phenomenal wonder may be innocent enough in themselves, but they are no company for me, and they will not assist in my mission and my message, or in anything whatsoever! The spiritists are on the lowest plane of all. A spiritist regards a man of genius as a mere machine to be worked, as a slave works, and small sums of money are handed to a medium as if wisdom and inspiration could be bought like coffee. There is no virtue in anybody who is wanting in reverence. (Bragdon, 154-156)

Here, as he would often in his later years, Grierson dismisses popular Spiritualism as a form of weak will, bending to the phenomenal gimmicks of money-grubbing charlatans. "Wisdom and inspiration," he wrote to Bragdon, "[cannot] be bought like coffee" (Simonson, 78). Nevertheless, Grierson would return to mediumistic practice towards the end of his life when he published a collection of channelled voices from beyond the grave. Mostly historical and political personages - including, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and others - Grierson's last published book, *Psycho-phone Messages* (1921), offered a contrasting embrace of Spiritualism after he had been dismissing it for several years. "The psycho-phonic waves," he writes in the introduction, "by which the messages are imparted are as definite as those received by wireless methods" (Grierson, PM, 16).

Grierson's draw to Spiritualism was rooted above all in his metaphysical perspective on inspiration, which in music belonged to the realms of intuitive performance and improvisation. Spontaneous improvisation is treated with absolute importance due to its direct proximity or union with the living moment of inspiration, which for Grierson was considered Divine. When he speaks of the nature of his performances, as many performing musicians have since noted, he speaks in terms of immediate and contextual energy. "When I give a musical recital I get 'waves' from the audience, and they get them from the piano. Each recital is one that satisfies the peculiar nature of those present at the particular time. I

interpret what is 'in the air.' We get each others' viewpoint" (Wheeler, 135).

In *Celtic Temperament* Grierson nostalgically and extensively recalls an affirmation of the fundamental importance of spontaneous improvisation as he encountered it in Bayreuth in 1891 - having, at the time recalled, drawn upon the resources of free improvisation for 20 years of séance work and years of musical performances.

My sojourn in Bayreuth [...] proved to me how much more potent spontaneous inspiration is to that which is written and printed. I had personal experiences among German friends and residents in Bayreuth which were worth more to me than all that had happened previously. The true magic is generated at the first contact of inspiration. But this instantaneous impression is only possible in the impromptu arts: oratory and improvisation. When we hear a great orator speak we receive the psychic power which comes with the first contact of thought; when we read the printed speech we get the form without the spirit - it has been stripped of the thing which made it vital. When a musical inspiration is written, printed, and rehearsed, it can never have the same effect as one that comes to the hearers direct. Even a Bayreuth orchestra has to produce Wagner's inspirations in a sort of phonographic way; they are simply repetitions. The psychic wave which produced them has rolled back and receded from our presence forever, to pass on, perhaps, to some far invisible shore, there to assume another form and a fresh outflowing.

It was only after my sojourn in Bayreuth that the law of spontaneous contact was made plain to me. The spontaneous phenomena of life are the things which dominate the affairs of the heart and intellect. At Bayreuth I put away the doubting, half skeptical, half convinced feeling as to my own gifts, a feeling that had possessed me all through my career up to this time, in spite of repeated successes. I now at last came face to face with the truth: the spirit is more potent than the form, the thing that is first heard more potent than that which is written; the force that arrives spontaneously dominates and controls all conventional forms of art and thought. The best that is written is still only a small part of the inspiration and the man. (xvi-xvii)

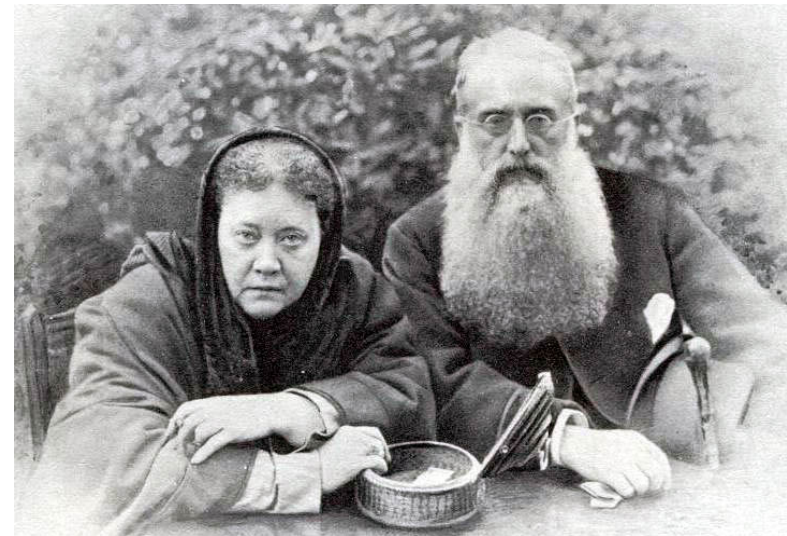
While Grierson's sentiments would be echoed decades later by the emerging participants of the "free improvisation" communities in both Europe and America, it was earlier, in 1920s England, that his illusioned ear found an unsuspected musical heir, when a seven year old girl named Rosemary Brown began to receive, in the form of spontaneous composition, inspired musical dictations from deceased composers, such as Franz Liszt. "I've always had the ability," she recalls, "ever since I can remember, to see and hear people who are thought of as dead." Like Grierson, Brown locates

the source of her mediumship to in an internal inspiration.

Well, it seems to me to come from a central source of inspiration, as if there were spheres of music, and I think it is channeled down to me, as perhaps it is channeled down to other composers, by various intermediary beings, spirits, whatever you like to call them. And in this instance, I think there are people who have been composers upon the earth, trying to channel the music to me. (Douglas, 2001)

Ultimately, Grierson's own practice, in his dual role as performing artist/medium, to some degree relied on the same persuasive techniques as the charlatans he criticized. But he believed that the role of the artist was "to give spiritualized pleasure," for it was art that served as "a complete union ... between the spiritual and the material" (Simonson, 85). Now, stepping back to the 1870s, after Grierson's séance study in Russia and his rapidly successful practice as a performative performing medium, his séance experience would be further expanded as he went on to spend considerable, if controversial, time with the founders of the widely influential Theosophical movement.

THEOSOPHY



The founders of Theosophy, Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, 1888

It was in 1874 that Grierson first met the founders of Theosophy, Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel-Olcott, during a 10 day stay at the Eddy Farm in Chittenden, Vermont, a national forum for Spiritualist practice. Theosophy was a highly influential spiritual movement that was proclaimed by its mouthpieces as originating in Ancient Egypt. Through spirit guidance Blavatsky et al were called to aid the rebirth of this ancient spirituality and spread it throughout America and beyond during the turn of the eighteenth century. Essentially Blavatsky, in collaboration with Olcott, et al., had researched and synthesized the spiritual and occult traditions of numerous ages and cultures across the world, finding and thematizing mutual concepts and themes; and it is from this intellectual- experiential synthesis, as well as proclaimed spirit communications, that the philosophical teachings of Theosophy were formed, first put into writing by Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled* (1877). These teaching were honed through subsequent writings and were offered with the greatest detail in her *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). In the latter text, Blavatsky outlined three primary tenets of the Theosophical perspective, with my own summary below each original tenet:

I. An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of Mandukya, “unthinkable and unspeakable.” To render these ideas clearer to the general reader, let him set out with the postulate that there is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being. This Infinite and Eternal Cause — dimly formulated in the “Unconscious” and “Unknowable” of current European philosophy — is the rootless root of “all that was, is, or ever shall be.” It is of course devoid of all attributes and is essentially without any relation to manifested, finite Being. It is “Be-ness” rather than Being (in Sanskrit, Sat), and is beyond all thought or speculation. (Blavatsky, SD, 14)

[All phenomena of the terrestrial, material world have a shared source in the infinite and eternal Universal consciousness. All visible manifestation has its source in the invisible absolute.]

II. This second assertion of the Secret Doctrine is the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of nature. An alternation such as that of Day and Night, Life and Death, Sleeping and Waking, is a fact so common, so perfectly universal and

without exception, that it is easy to comprehend that in it we see one of the absolutely fundamental laws of the universe. (17)

[Our recognition of the universal phenomena of periodicity offers itself as a perception of the infinite and eternal law of Universal consciousness.]

III. The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul — a spark of the former — through the Cycle of Incarnation (or “Necessity”) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term. In other words, no purely spiritual Buddhi (divine Soul) can have an independent (conscious) existence before the spark which issued from the pure Essence of the Universal Sixth principle, — or the over-soul, — has (a) passed through every elemental form of the phenomenal world of that Manvantara, and (b) acquired individuality, first by natural impulse, and then by self-induced and self-devised efforts (checked by its Karma), thus ascending through all the degrees of intelligence, from the lowest to the highest Manas, from mineral and plant, up to the holiest archangel (Dhyani-Buddha). (17)

[Each individual soul is an indivisible aspect of the Universal soul which manifests itself through the karmic cycle of reincarnation.]

More broadly Theosophy emphasized the comparative religious study, the scientific study of the supernatural, and the benevolence of non-sectarian unity and Universal brotherhood. The Theosophical Society of New York was founded in 1875 to spread their word and to foster this brotherhood, as well as to offer a forum for the study of comparative religion, and the scientific investigation of the paranormal. It is important to consider Blavatsky’s philosophical tenets, not only for her direct relation and influence on Grierson, but because Theosophical philosophy would influence the inception of nearly all occult and esoteric practices in twentieth century America - including the New Thought, New Age, Christian Science, and other alternative spirituality movements - while being a primary influence in the development of American experimental music.

Among the many composers influenced by Theosophy we find Henry Cowell, Arthur Farwell, William Grant Still, Dane Rudhyar, Katherine Ruth Heyman, Alan Hovhaness, Cyril Scott, Luigi Russolo, Ruth Crawford-Seeger, Edgard Varèse, and others. Theosophy went hand in hand with and helped to define the “ultra-modernist” music of the 20s and 30s. First performed at a Theosophical community in San Luis Obispo, *The Tides of*

Manaunaun (1917) was a solo piano work of Henry Cowell's in which he had developed his radical use of the "tone cluster" to express the mystical and mythical significance of the Irish god, Manaunaun. In his *Lousadzak* (1944), Alan Hovhaness, who had attended the same Theosophical community as Cowell, developed an early 'aleatoric' technique to express a vision that his spiritual teacher had described; Hovhaness called this technique "spirit murmur." Inspired by Theosophical conceptions of the afterlife, William Grant Still composed his *Summerland* (1936), while Theosophy only reinforced the use of dreams, meditation, and musical prophecy in Still's creative process. Examples, such as these, endlessly manifested themselves in American music during the early twentieth century. Blavatsky herself had written stories - such as "The Ensouled Violin" and "The Cave of Echoes" - concerning the occult experience of music, while she had made similar remarks in many of her writings. Amongst the pervasively European-styled imitations of composers of the eastern US states in the nineteenth century, Grierson was simply ahead of his time in applying these esoteric and widely influential philosophies directly and with experimental effect to his music. However, despite their shared affinities, Blavatsky had decided that Grierson was a phony, while Grierson expressed a similar distrust of her.

Here, it is worth noting that Blavatsky was instructed, by her spirit guide, to move to America specifically in order to test the truth and falsity of spiritualism. The development of Theosophy was born from this particular spiritual guidance. She did this by attending and assessing numerous séances, often returning to accusations of spiritual weakness and deceit in both the performers and the audience. Blavatsky, herself a talented pianist, was unimpressed by Grierson's mediumship. She and Olcott had only recently met around the time they met Grierson. In fact, in Blavatsky's first letter to Olcott, the latter recalls Blavatsky urgently warning him "not to praise the mediumistic musical performance of one Jesse Shepard [a.k.a. Grierson] - whose pretense to having sung before the Czar, and other boasts she had discovered to be absolutely false - as such a course on my part would 'injure Spiritualism more than anything else in the world'" (Blavatsky, 36). Judged to be inauthentic in the eyes of Blavatsky, Grierson nonetheless continued to impress and fascinate. Meanwhile, Grierson recalls Blavatsky as an ominous foreboding figure:

Her kinky hair, her wide, almost flat nose, and thick lips, harmonized well with her swarthy skin. Her movements were languid and slow. She never smiled, nor did she ever display a sense of humor. Her dress was

ill-fitting, the fabric colorless, and of a nondescript character. The two things about her that attracted my attention were her slovenly appearance and her great staring eyes... I saw them a cold, callous grey. They suggested something hidden and forbidding, something between viper and vampire. (Simonson, 31)

Despite his tenuous relationship with Blavatsky, Grierson absorbed aspects of Theosophical thought into his own; his writings were published in Theosophical journals; and he would meet with Blavatsky at various intervals for the next few years. Later, when he would live in Los Angeles, Grierson would spend considerable time at the Theosophical Society in nearby Ojai. Always the outsider, the young nomadic Grierson continued in his idiosyncratic way, and by 1887, he began to settle down, as he arrived at an opportunity that no one could have suspected, the construction of his own spiritual palace: The Villa Montezuma.

GRIERSON'S SPIRITUAL PALACE: THE VILLA MONTEZUMA



The Villa Montezuma, 1925 K Street, San Diego, CA (San Diego Historical Society)

In the 1880s, after his extensive tour of Europe, Grierson gave a series of musical séances at the parlor of Mrs. H. H. Crocker in Chicago,

where he was quickly becoming a sensational “psychic pianist.” An attendant of the séances reported that Grierson demanded that no more than 12, or at most 14, persons be admitted, with each being charged \$2. Grierson covered the windows and locked the doors to perform his séance in complete darkness. Once seated Grierson had all attendants hold each other’s hand. And in this particular instance, once all attention was given to him, he announced that he was being controlled “by a band of Egyptian spirits, the leader of whom had lived on earth when the pyramids were young, and who gave what was then, and has constantly been, Mr. Shepard’s leading performance. After this, he sang in two voices, a feat which has astonished so many listeners, ‘Sontag’ (some familiar spirit) singing in one voice and the Egyptian in the other. Another ‘spirit’ accompanied on harp. Between the musical pieces, Mr. Shepard, ‘under the influence’, gave tests, describing spirit friends, etc.” (Simonson, 34). A Mr. Tonner has described Grierson’s musical performances as follows:

He would pass from a suave melody of the Italian school, or from a symphonic movement of the German, to a languid melody of the East, the pomp and melancholy of Nineveh or Babylon. And it is said that at certain wonderful moments, he could add the strangest, most inexplicable voice, that did not follow the music but went along with it, almost independent of it, rising up from out of the middle chords of the piano, faintly at first, and at last filling the room with indescribable and thrilling tones. (Grierson, VSb, xxiv)



Lawrence Waldemar Tonner

Lawrence Waldemar Tonner met Grierson, 15 years his senior, in Chicago around 1885. Born into Danish nobility, Tonner immigrated to the US and became a naturalized citizen in 1875. Among his many jobs, he would notably work as translator and an aid for Herbert Hoover. But ultimately Tonner would become Grierson’s lifelong secretary and clandestine lover. While their homosexual relationship was kept private, being known only by intimate friends, their public relationship was purely professional. Not long after meeting Grierson, Tonner would regularly accompany him on his musical séance tours.

During these tours Grierson passed through Vermont, where he would meet and befriend the High Brothers. William and John High were deeply impressed by Grierson’s psychic abilities, so much so that they encouraged him to move to San Diego, where they proposed - or Grierson persuaded them - to finance and build him a ‘palace’ where he could continue to work on his music and commune with the spirits. Some accounts claim it was through the spiritual contact with William High’s deceased wife, that messages were given (by Grierson’s channeling) encouraging the High brothers to mortgage their belongings and finance the building of the Villa. Built in 1887, the Villa Montezuma was made in the style of a Queen Anne Victorian mansion. Persian rugs, stained glass windows (one depicting Grierson as a saint), and ornate woodwork fill the building. Grierson and Tonner then relocated to San Diego to live in the Villa for the unforeseeable future.

Grierson held many séances at the Villa Montezuma, where several guests reported to have heard “drums, tambourines, and trumpets sounding all over the room; other guests reported hearing choirs of voices led by Grierson’s own soprano voice soaring among the higher notes” (Grierson, 12). But in actuality these sounds were most likely not played by the spirits, or even by Grierson. As one historian remarked, “[h]idden chambers and crawl spaces behind walls and fireplaces [of the Villa] may have helped [Grierson] produce the mysterious voices often heard during his concerts” (Davis, 35), i.e., by placing other musicians cued to perform in these locations. This architectural auditory illusion is very similar to the visual technique of ‘Pepper’s ghost’, which we met in the European phantasmagoria. With attention placed in one space, a visual or auditory image is placed in an alternate space, which illusively appears to exist in the shared attentional space of the audience.

In his letters and writings, Grierson clearly holds onto to his spiritual beliefs, critiquing others, while never explicitly admitting to such 'gimmicks' or theatrical techniques in his own practice. At the same time, while Grierson was primarily performing thematic improvisations and musical séances, he could also be heard performing operatic extracts and his own compositions. These were often put on, often outside the concert hall, with a flare of multimedia and communitarian context. One recount of a musicale in the Villa makes this clear:

On New Year's Eve, [Grierson] gave one of his most noteworthy receptions. Each room of the house was decorated with a different kind of flower that harmonized with the room's decor: there were orange blossoms, roses, lilies, holly, and ferns. After the guests had enjoyed refreshments, Shepard played and sang selections from the operas of Meyerbeer, Wagner, Mozart, and Verdi; and he concluded the performance with a composition of his own, the Grand Egyptian March. This was apparently an impressionistic composition, in which Shepard simulated the sounds of marching armies, trumpets, drums, tambourines, battle clashes and cannon booms. It was a real tour de force which never failed to impress the audience; and Shepard performed it often. (Crane)

This palatial life was short-lived. After being unable to pay the interest accruing on his mortgage and foreclosure of the Villa was imminent. Through deceptive aims, Grierson however managed to persuade the High Brothers to trade the Villa in exchange for what amounted to be an abandoned country store in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The Villa however still exists today, preserving Grierson's memory. Now considered a nationally registered historic place, the Villa, also known as "The Jesse Shepard House," has operated as a museum of Victorian architecture and the life of Jesse Shepard for over 30 years. Throughout the twentieth century the Villa became a venue of community education, arts, and private events, a place where couples were married, where archeologists dug up a buried Victorian fountain, where African-American artists gathered for salons, where the local neighborhood celebrated holidays such as the Mexican 'Day of the Dead', and where children learned the history of San Diego as well as various arts-and-crafts, including how to make Victorian quilts. In February of 2006, after years of restrictive visitor hours, low attendance, and financial struggle the museum was closed without warning. It has been closed to the public since this time.

Meanwhile, back in 1889 Grierson and Tonner were looking to

escape the ordeal with the High brothers and the California Spiritualist community. Shortly before the Fox sisters announced their hoax at the New York Academy of Music, Grierson was undergoing a transformation of identity at the Villa Montezuma. It was at this time that he became



Villa Montezuma, images of the interior (San Diego Historical Society)

increasingly critical of the phenomenalism of Spiritualist practices, and sought to distance his association with them. As he slowly began to withdraw from séance culture, he placed increasing effort into writing and publishing. Grierson's draw to Paris was for practical reasons, to keep writing and publishing. He and Tonner had just visited Paris in 1888 in order for Grierson to arrange for the publication of his first book of essays, *Pensées et Essais* (1899), written in French. Especially in regards to one of these essays, "La Revolte Idéaliste," Grierson received numerous letters of praise from some of France's most notable writers and academes of the time. Expressing something broader and more symbolic than this new literary path alone, "Jessie Shepard," as he was still known then, officially changed his name to "Francis Grierson," the name he would carry for the rest of his life - "Francis" was his given middle name, while "Grierson" was his mother's maiden name. As mentioned in the introduction, Grierson's new identity was publicly declared with the 1899 publication of his first English book, *Modern Mysticism* (1899). In this book Grierson speaks, perhaps, to one reason for his sudden change of artistic medium and name:

Intuitive knowledge, coupled with worldly experience, gives a natural leaning towards reticence. A certain indifference renders a man of much intuitive or worldly knowledge silent at the very moment when superficial wits are the most positive as well as the most triumphant. [While...] those who possess an intuitive mind are commonly misunderstood by their relatives and very often by their friends. (114-115)

Grierson's sensitive ear had, for so long, been attuned to his interior and to the external influence of spirits, while he witnessed more outspoken and dubious voices leading the public, in his mind, astray. Grierson was ready to talk. And his new identity was that of a very confident and opinionated world traveler who sought to be a spokesperson for a world-view that did not sell the watered-down veneer of mysticism and intuitive prowess, but spoke loudly from its very heart to a mass audience through the power of the printing press. Grierson wanted to communicate the belief that all aspects of life - art, politics, and religion, etc. - were directly affected by a higher power, the spirit world. Moreover he believed that the artist/genius, such as himself, could serve as the medium between the spiritual and terrestrial worlds. Through this mediation he could assist in the unfolding of prophecy, and writing had become his means to do so.

Following *Modern Mysticism* Grierson penned several well-selling books, typically collections of essays, aphorisms, travel accounts, portraits of

renowned figures he'd met, and his opinions on culture, many of which we have previously encountered in this essay. And though all of these works, except for *The Valley of Shadows*, are no longer in printed circulation, the curious reader may freely access many of them in digital form via Archive.org and/or books.google.com. Following is a list of books published during Grierson's lifetime:

Pensées et Essais (1889)
Modern Mysticism (1899)
Essays and Pen-Pictures (1889)
The Celtic Temperament and Other Essays (1901)
The Valley of Shadows (1909)
Parisian Portraits (1910)
La Vie et Les Hommes (1911)
The Humor of the Underman and Other Essays (1911)
The Invincible Alliance and Other Essays (1913)
Illusions and Realities of War (1918)
Abraham Lincoln, Practical Mystic (1918)
Psycho-Phone Messages (1921)

Grierson's most posthumously prized piece of writing, *The Valley of Shadows* (1909) - 10 years in the making - is a personal memoir of his childhood in the pre-Civil War prairies of Illinois. Theodore Spencer called it "a minor classic" (Simonson, 105). Edmund Wilson wrote extensively on the book in a *New Yorker* review and in his own book, *Patriotic Gore*. The book received and continues to receive rich praise, as one of the most detailed first-hand accounts of that period in American history. But more than nostalgic memory or historical documentation, Grierson worked intently to communicate the *spirit* of the time. Here he reflects on this work and its relationship to Spiritualism in the following letter to Claude Bragdon:

Since you speak of having read the *Valley of the Shadows* I may say that only the most clairvoyant minds can penetrate to the inner meanings of the book. The others read it as a fine novel. It took me ten years to write, and all my fortune to the *last* shilling. When the last page was finished the last shilling was spent. But, as you are quite able to understand, books like mine are not, and never will be, written for *money*. I was nearly two years waiting for the proper mood in which to write the portrait of Lincoln as he stood against Douglas at Alton. There is not a mechanically written page in the book [...] I am no believer in chance.

When my parents left England for America and went direct to Illinois in the midst of the great psychic movement, they had no idea why they went. My parents had not the slightest notion of what I was or what I was to do. There were no schools. No one ever taught me *one thing*. *The Valley of Shadows* had to be written by me, or not written at all. The fundamental reasons and conditions of that time had to be recorded in that *particular* form. But spiritists and others also must not think any portion of that book was ever dictated by any spirit. The art that is not felt is not art at all, but something else. Genius is self-conscious or it is nothing. (Bragdon, 154-156)

Reviewers who doubted his genius often accused Grierson's writings and musical séances of vanity, falsehood, and formlessness. Still even his detractors have often acquiesced to admitting a powerfulness and artistry in the manner by which he was able to create a palpable mood or atmosphere through his writing. In like manner, Grierson's music remained dependent upon the creation of deeply convincing moods. With this construction of atmosphere in mind, our historical look at phantasmagoria and séance theatrics have prepared us to better understand Grierson's musical séances from the perspective of performance and theatre, that "emotional cauldron of witch-broth." Grierson alludes to this in an essay called "Theatrical Audiences" (*Celtic Temperament*, 1901):

A playhouse is like a human entity; every theatre has its soul; each has its own form, colour, and influence. Theatrical superstition springs from an ignorance of the psychological laws which rule here as elsewhere. It is not then merely in the physical formation of a theatre that the secret lies, but in its personal so-cial attraction. Attraction or repulsion, all depends upon a unity of material and mystical law. The material de-pends upon the structural form, the mystical on a combination of subtle moods and influences too illusive to be grasped by any save those who feel them without being able to explain them. (Grierson, 100)

Whether through music or the written word, Grierson had become adept at conjuring these "subtle moods" within his work. His poetic language, theatrical illusions via spatialization of sound, suggestive imagery, and musical technique, while more widely conceived as spiritualist entertainment, were designed to enhance a credible sense of mystery as well as revealing how he thoughtfully translated spiritualism and esoteric spirituality into his own artistic voice and aesthetic.

THE SEER IN SECLUSION

The truth is, my finest music is esoteric! And more so today than before.
How can the big public understand?
It is impossible.

Francis Grierson (Bragdon, 157)

FAMED :: SEER :: HERE :: IN :: SECLUSION.

Praises Hoover; Calls Socialists Disciples of Materialism.



Francis Grierson.

A profile on Grierson, L.A. Times, March 8, 1920

Having left America for Paris, where he and Tonner would live from 1889-1896, Grierson continued traveling and touring, lecturing frequently and performing occasionally. He and Tonner then settled in London, living there between 1896-1913. It was during this time that Grierson wrote the majority of his published works, largely though the publishing house of John Lane. In 1913, after several decades in Europe, the couple decided to move back to the States, ultimately settling in Los Angeles, CA in 1920, where they would

stay for the rest of their lives. Speaking to the decline of interest in his work, only three more published books would follow upon their return to California. They struggled financially, often not able to eat dinner, and subsisted by Tonner's teaching French lessons and Grierson's metaphysical lecturing, as well as also by the support of friends. Tonner and their friend, a Hungarian refugee, Count Michael Teliki, also ran a dry cleaning business together, but to little financial gain.

As Grierson was focusing more and more upon his writings, he continued giving concerts, still theatric but more programmatic and imagery-driven than emphasizing any communion with spirits. In 1914 Edwin Bjorkman gave a detailed description of a Grierson concert which took place that year in New York City. With no mention of spirits, Grierson appears to have returned to his younger practice of improvising according to suggestive imagery and programmatic themes.

Although the audience had hushed in advance, I think it took most of those present several seconds to realize that the performance had begun. My own impression was one of intense surprise, as if the music had caught me unawares, issuing I knew not whence. It opened with a procession of chords - haunting, monotonous, primitive. It was as if the horns and drums of some African village had become civilized without losing their original weirdness - as if their uncouth noises had become miraculously transformed into genuine harmonies while still echoing the strife of primeval passions. Something more than sound issued from that piano: it was a mood 'uncanny', yet pleasing, exalting, luring...

"This is an ancient Egyptian improvisation —" Apparently Mr. Grierson had spoken, and his words were passed around in whispers. Again a complete change of atmosphere followed. The form of the previous pieces had been comparably vague; now the design of the composition was sharply outlined - and as it revealed itself, the perfection of that design became increasingly evident. The music was quaint, but not Oriental in any accepted sense. Its opening passages were characterized by harmonies that I can only describe as 'brittle' and that suggested the violin rather than the piano. Then the music swelled and became strangely urgent - I felt there was an image that wanted to break through - a consciousness of some might presence - and all at once it was there: "The Nile!"

Again Mr. Grierson spoke: "A fantasy on the destruction of Pompeii." Immediately I was carried into the serene beauty of the southern night, with its sky of unfathomable blue and its burning stars. Then, without preparation, and yet with no sense of any break or leap, the massive, crystalline chords of the first movement changed into a dance measure of irresistible charm. The sudden transition was as daring as it was

natural. The tripping rhythm that set my heart bounding with exhilaration seemed the very embodiment of the revelry and thoughtless merriment of the doomed city. Gradually, however, it took on a note of anguish, which in its turn was lost in thunder and lightning. At last the piano roared with the power of a hundred bass drums, but in that storm of sounds that assailed my ears there was not one discordant note. It was the supreme rage of the elements rendered supremely beautiful. (Grierson, VSb, xxv-xxvi)

Meanwhile, though his name and works were losing attention to the greater public, he nonetheless remained precious in the hearts of like-minded seer/artists. Fellow American mystic and composer, Arthur Farwell, who wrote and lectured frequently on intuition and musical metaphysics, was greatly inspired by Grierson, proclaiming him to be "the most authentically psychic and most daringly far-seeing critical musical personality of the time" (Wheeler, 135). In 1913 Grierson recollected the following in a letter to Farwell:

The exterior can only show what springs from the interior. The mind is double. The greater the work to be done, the more profound must be the consciousness of the subconscious. We are only beginning to get a glimpse of our secret selves as through a glass darkly. What we took for supernaturalism is beginning to be revealed as natural law working up from the secret springs of the subconscious.

Music is the most psychic and mystical of the arts. Only now are we beginning to realize its full meaning... There are four planes of music. On the first plane we get an expression of simple sentiments or emotions; on the second, joyfulness; on the third, the dramatic and the heroic; on the fourth we enter the serene. The last is the most psychic of all, and by far the most difficult to reach. When I am on this plane, I lose sight of my audience, consciousness becomes quiescent, space ceases to exist, and time disappears in the mystic rhythms that belong to the transcendental. The reasoning faculties have little to do with my musical gifts. Passivity and quietude are the leading essentials. The less I think about music the better my music is. I never practice at the piano. If I did, my power to improvise would cease. (Grierson, VSb, xxvii)

During his last decades it was not uncommon for Grierson to be accused of charlatantry in regards to his psychic abilities. Beyond Blavatsky's scathing denouncements, other new age pioneers such as guru George Gurdjieff's disciple A.R. Orage, who after publishing many of Grierson's articles in London's *New Age* magazine, ultimately came to doubt his psychic abilities (Wilson, 76). Having left the Villa Montezuma, Grierson's Victorian palace of spirits became a local "spook house." Meanwhile, the sales of his

publications drastically diminished and by two years after his death almost all of his books were out of print. In his old age Grierson continued lecturing, most commonly on metaphysical topics: "Theosophy," "The Fourth Dimension," "Cosmic Consciousness," and other esoteric interests as well as self-help topics. In one instance he lectured on "eternal youth," which only made his rouged cheeks and wig seem like a laughable parody to the audience. In regards to his music Grierson grew less confident - or interested - in his ability to make a connection with any substantial audience. "The truth is, my finest music is esoteric! And more so today than before. How can the big public understand? It is impossible" (Bragdon, 157).

More embittered and politically conservative in his old age, Grierson was disgusted by the swinging youth culture he began notice arising as he moved into the 1920s. After decades of pioneering free improvisation, Grierson was quick to disdain the "barbaric" sounds of jazz. Distrustful of both African-Americans and Germans, he was misguidedly advocating for Anglo-American unity. Having been soured by this perspective and the reactions he was receiving concerning these writings, Grierson withdrew from whatever spotlight he still had a foot in and returned to his old haunts. Through the support of old friends and the more occult-friendly culture of California, his passion for Spiritualist practice was renewed. This culminated in his final published book, *Psycho-phone Messages* (1921), in which Grierson documents the communications he'd been receiving as a medium, citing communications he had had with notable historical, political, and artistic figures, such as General Grant, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and numerous others. Moreover, he proposes in the book the desire for a telephonic technology devised for spirit communication. Interestingly, around the time of the book's publication, Thomas Edison was thinking along the same lines:

I don't claim that our personalities pass on to another existence or sphere. I don't claim anything because I don't know anything about the subject. For that matter, no human being knows. But I do claim that it is possible to construct an apparatus which will be so delicate that if there are personalities in another existence or sphere who wish to get in touch with us in this existence or sphere, this apparatus will at least give them a better opportunity to express themselves than the other crude methods now purported to be the only means of communication with those who have passed out of this life. I merely state that I am giving the psychic investigators an apparatus which may help them in their work, just as optical experts have given the microscope to the medical world (Simonson, 132).

Grierson himself toyed with inventing a "psychometric" device that could measure the "height and depth" of thought and feeling. Anticipating our own experience of using the internet, he sought a telepathic situation in which one could, as he described, "sit quietly in an obscure corner of the world and launch his psycho-electric currents of thought in a thousand directions" (Simonson, 80). Also around this time Grierson had begun organizing a collection of poetry for publication. Unfortunately, his previous publishers were neither interested in his clairvoyant litanies nor his metaphysical poetry - he published *Psycho-Phone Messages* on his own, hard-punched, dime.

Regardless, Grierson continued pursuing his esoteric interests with as much or more enthusiasm as before, up until his last years. He played often at various Missions around L.A., and during his last year of life he attended the newly founded Theosophical Society of Ojai, California. This society had migrated from its 1912 inception in L.A. to Ojai, where in 1926 its inauguration was overseen by Madame Blavatsky's successor, Alice A. Bailey.

Though Grierson's age and ill health were catching up with him, he continued performing and hosting musicales at his home. And in the unplanned dramatic ending of Grierson's final concert, he died as theatrically and mysteriously as he lived. While this event was summarized at the beginning of this essay, Waldemar Tonner recalls his first-hand account in more detail:

It was Sunday evening, May 29th. We had a number of people invited for a musical recital at our home - about thirty. A collection was to be taken up. Mr. Grierson had played a number of his marvelous instantaneous compositions on the piano and had given the company a talk on his experiences and impressions of France and Italy. He turned to the instrument and announced that the next and last piece of the evening would be an Oriental improvisation, Egyptian in character. The piece was long, and when it seemed to be finished he sat perfectly still as if resting after the ordeal of this tremendous composition. He often did that, but it lasted too long, and I went up to him - he was gone! His head was only slightly bent forward, as usual in playing, and his hands rested on the keys of the last chord he had touched. There had not been the slightest warning. He had seemed in usual health (he always had some indigestion), he had eaten well to gain strength for the evening, and he had been smiling and laughing with the company even a few moments before he passed away. (Grierson, VSb, xxxvi-xxxvii)

Despite being well-fed on his last day of life, Grierson's death was attributed

to heart disease via malnutrition, largely brought on by his poverty. During his last years he was known to have pawned off much jewelry and other expensive gifts given to him by royal European nobility, including a gold watch that was given to him by King Edward VII. Shortly before Grierson's death, Tonner had privately published a pamphlet, "The Genius of Francis Grierson" reflecting on Grierson's accomplishments and "genius." In this pamphlet Tonner recounts Grierson's travels and successes, both musical and literary, with a compilation of quotes from favorable reviews and letters. We are reminded of Maurice Maeterlink's claim that Grierson was "the supreme essayist of our age," Sully Prudhomme's assessment that he "his work was the expression of a penetrating and powerful originality," William James' praising his writings as being "full of wisdom," among others (Tonner). Grierson's endless supporter, during and after his death, Lawrence Waldemar Tonner passed away in 1947.

In his essays Grierson wrote often of the manifestations of "genius" in culture, often in reference to those he admired. And while Tonner and others would eagerly apply the title to Grierson, his own conception of genius placed its source not in the talents and ego of 'the genius' but at the mercy of unknown mysteries, the font of all his creations: "Genius, which is the supremest personal force in the world of thought, is a central sun of itself, back of which the essence of the unknowable rules and acts in mysterious, inscrutable, and eternal law" (Grierson, CT, 166). So it was that Grierson understood the guiding of his pen. And in regards to his music he most assuredly felt as Wallace Stevens described in his "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the selfsame sounds
On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound.
(Stevens, 89-90)

Forever falling in love with mystery, Grierson wanted more from his sounds than they could naturally provide. And so he disembodied them, diffusing his autonomy so that his sounds could be imbued with feelings and moods, drawn from or rather sent forth from the invisible realm of spirits, channeled from elsewhere. Genius or not, Grierson's intuitive drive, his techniques of illusion and love of mystery, and the idiosyncratic expression of his mystical perspective were artistically unprecedented and ahead of their time,

anticipating numerous influences and advances that would be realized in twentieth century music and art following his death.

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE



Francis Barraud, painting one of 24 replicas of the original Gramophone logo

Disembodiment, which was of prime importance in the experience and culture of phantasmagorias and séances, would be re-emphasized by the emerging industry of media technology that was rapidly evolving at the turn of the nineteenth century. During and after Spiritualism's popularity came the phonograph (1857, patented by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville) and, a bit later, commercial radio (1906, cf. Reginald Fessenden). Suddenly the voices of the living and the dead could be disembodied and heard coming from any number of technologically manifested locations. Perhaps no image more perfectly represents the curious reception and audition of these voices than the Gramophone's iconic logo. Entitled "his master's voice" (coined in 1899), the logo portrays a dog cocking its ear in bewilderment as it hears the sounds emerging from the conical speaker of a Gramophone.

These inventions were children of the radical discoveries made in the centuries before: Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity (1687), Benjamin Franklin's discovery of electricity (1750), and Charlières and Montgolfières' discovery of "miraculous" gases that would be used in the first balloon aviation (1783). These astounding discoveries gave way to intense awe and speculation by proto-spiritualists, such as Franz Mesmer, whose advocacy for the phenomena of "animal magnetism" and an etheric "fluid" fueled the supernatural affinities that would take root in America during the late 1800s (Darnton). As theories and discoveries slowly gave birth to unprecedented machines and technologies, popular fascination continued to give way to a kind of theological evaluation of these developments, but, even more, they opened people's minds to embracing or inventing other unknowns and a broader, more mystical, worldview.

In his extensive writing on disembodied voices in *Dumbstruck*, Steven Connor notes this theatrical and spiritual intersection, as well as their intertwined role with technology. The projected sounds of the Spiritualist séance and the voices emitted from reproductive audio technologies are described by Connor as a "vocalic body": "Our assumption that the object is speaking allows its voice to assume that body, in the theatrical or even the theological sense, as an actor assumes a role, or as the divinity assumes incarnate form" (Connor, 36). Ultimately what Connor is referring to is the power of suggestion and the will to believe, without either of which Grierson and his historical counterparts would have made little to no impact.

The power of this assumptive or suggested disembodiment is a core component of esotericism and mystical philosophy. There must be a hidden element, a secret, an invisible realm, etc. But when it comes down to an individual or a group of people who control what is hidden, this secret gives rise to great power by the few and great submission, or persecution of the many. From Pythagoras' shrouded voice, which lead his cult of *akousmatikoi* ["hearers"] in ancient Greece, to the use of the microphone by Adolf Hitler, disembodied sound - however deceptive, inspiring, or entertaining - can have profound influences and serious consequences. The illusioned ear is impressionable and dangerous when not attended to.

In Europe the phantasmagoria used this power of esoteric illusion to instill fear and wonderment through a unique style of theatrical horror; while Mesmerism used the invisible fluid of animal magnetism towards political ends. In America, Spiritualism's use of this power ultimately evolved into a form of self-serving capitalism, its practice becoming associated with

hoaxes and swindles. Throughout these applications of disembodiment, sonic or otherwise, projected "vocalic" bodies or mysticized machines are imbued with a felt presence, a ghostly life, often posed as a dualism that was inherited from Enlightenment philosophy. In critiquing this mind/body dualism, at the core of René Descartes' philosophy, Gilbert Ryle slandered Descartes' premise, pronouncing it a philosophical myth and coining it "the dogma of the ghost in the machine" (Ryle, ix).

I do not recall this history to evaluate Descartes. But, in regards to Grierson and the other sources constellated here, I will say that, good or bad, the ghost always exists for us, whether it is real, imagined, or devised. And myth will always remain an extremely valuable teacher. Now, moving across and forward in time, comparing a few more perspectives, we can see with a little more nuance how disembodied sound and the myth of "the ghost in the machine" have continued to play an influential role in aspects of contemporary music.



Les Paul and Mary Ford, in the studio

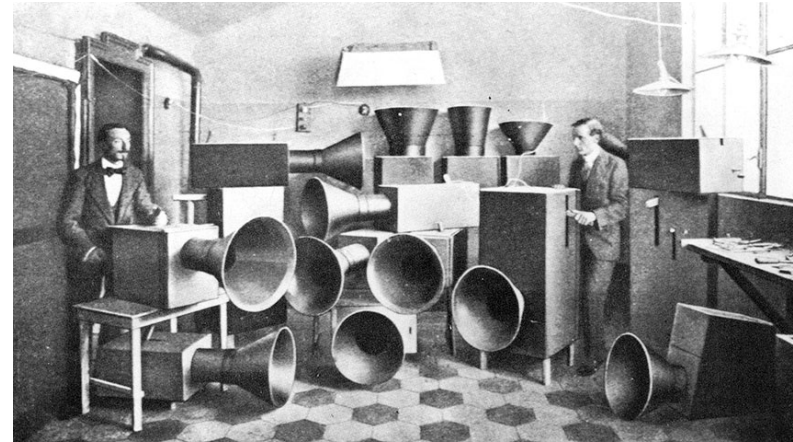
Les Paul was a pioneer of the solid-body electric guitar, as well as of various techniques used in analog recording and electronic effects, including overdubbing and the use of delay. While not the inventor of the electric guitar nor of the recording techniques mentioned, it was Les Paul's commercial application that brought these developments to broader attention and more wide spread use. These experimentations became such a staple of his work that even in live performance, often with his wife Mary Ford, he sought to create the illusion of such effects live. Paul's solution recalls us to the hidden rooms and voices in the Villa Montezuma. In replicating the echo effect used in the recording of the song "How High the Moon," Paul "came up with the bright idea of taking Mary [Ford]'s sister and hiding her offstage in a john or up in an attic - wherever - with a long microphone. Whatever Mary did onstage, she did offstage. If Mary sniffled, she sniffled. It just stopped everyone dead. People couldn't believe it or figure it out... One night I hear the mayor of Buffalo sitting in the front row tell his wife, 'Oh, it's simple. It's radar'... they began to think that they heard more than one guitar. They began to think they heard all kinds of things. They put in things that weren't there" (Doyle, 151).

In the 1880s the first guess at the source of such a strange sound as Mary's live echo would have been a spirit, but by the 1920s the mystery of spirit had been replaced by the mystery of technology: "Oh, it's simple. It's radar [...]" Interestingly enough, the first person to catch Paul's sonic hoax was a young child, whose innocence or naiveté was not distracted by spirits or gadgetry, and understood the simple truth of the illusion.

Then one night, a man came backstage with his little girl and says, "If I tell you how you're getting that sound, will you give me a yes or no?" I said, "Sure" and the little girl says, "Where's the other lady?" It took a little kid who didn't have a complicated mind. Everybody saw machines, turntables, radar – everything but the simplest thing. (Doyle, 151)

These same techniques, emphasizing sonic disembodiment, often under the more general genre of 'spatial music', have been used strategically according to various degrees of illusion, by composers over numerous centuries, from Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* (1630s) to Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question* (1906). In no small part it was the ease of technologically manipulating and disembodimenting sound that would influence the metaphysical experimentations of the modern avant-garde. Around the same time that the "father of electronic music" Edgard Varèse was embracing noise and "liberating sound" from its constraining past, Italian

futurist Luigi Russolo was speaking a similar language. But Russolo's perspective was steeped more explicitly in the mystical thought of spiritualism and Theosophy.



Ugo Piatti with Russolo and his *intonorumi* in his Milan laboratory. January 1, 1913. Reproduced in *L'Arte dei rumori* (Milan: Edizione Futuriste di "Poesia," 1916)

Russolo's *intonorumi* were handmade mechanical sound generators producing noises imitative of the sounds of war and industry. Russolo was insistent that the artist has "the insatiable desire to raise matter up to its own level, to see it spiritualized in the work of art" (Luciano, 135). In two separate passages Russolo's spiritual consideration of sound are explicitly stated:

Make first the senses vibrate, and you will also make vibrate the brain! Make the senses vibrate with the unexpected, the mysterious, the unknown, and you will truly move the soul, intensely and profoundly! Here lies the fated and absolute necessity of drawing the timbres of sounds directly from the timbres of noises of life. Here - sole salvation in the deep misery of orchestral timbres - lays the unbounded richness of the timbres of noises. (Chessa, 140)

Music apparently has no need of a universal ideality, nor of any kind of spiritual ideality, because thanks to its' fundamentally abstract language, neither narrative nor speculative, it escapes the contingencies of the collective idealities of each work. But sound, let us not forget, is the matter of this abstract language, as the word is for poetry and color is for painting. Let us not confuse the abstraction of this matter with the

spirituality to which all matter from which the arts are molded must take us. Music must make the same effort as the plastic arts: music must spiritualize its matter, as the plastic arts must spiritualize theirs. And whereas the plastic arts, when they do not succeed in this, remain either solely descriptive or banally and impressionistically documentary and fragmentary, music, when it does not succeed in this, remains abstractly amorphous. Music must move away from an abstract indefinite, which is the characteristic of its language, and of the matter that it uses, to arrive at a spiritual infinite. (Chessa, 128)

Russolo's *intonorumi* were then a creative response to this metaphysical logic in pursuit of "spiritual infinitude." Through disembodied the raw timbres of everyday sound, loosened from their physical and cultural bonds, the listener is brought in touch with a transcendental audition, of infinite possibility and a sense of wonder. Russolo was not alone in his spiritual beliefs, the entire collective of Futurists expressed similar metaphysical perspectives concerning painting, photography, sculpture, and all media. The associations between a metaphysical perspective and artistic innovation, especially in the realm of music, can be met nearly every step of its history in Europe and America from the sixteenth century, if not from the very beginning, to the present. And with the advent of reproductive media since the late nineteenth century, even the abstracted and idealized forms of sonic matter, e.g., music in all its various styles and traditions, becomes itself reduced to raw sonic material, disembodied from its original contexts of physicality and function, and projected into unprecedented spaces and projected bodies. Perhaps nowhere has this illusioned audition been more widely experienced in the last decade than in Janet Cardiff's *Forty-Part Motet* (2001).

Recently I experienced Cardiff's work in two very different realizations in New York. *Forty-Part Motet* had been presented at the white-walled gallery space of PS1 and the historically and religiously laden open-aired stone Fuentidueña Chapel at The Cloisters. The former had the ear tuned more into intimate auditions of the individuals, and to the interstices between the music, to the coughs, mumblings, and sighs of the singers as they held "silent" between their parts; the latter, with subtle architectural verb and more ambient chatter, tuned my ears more into the music, which was originally composed for analogous, if larger, religious architectures, and the dynamic spatial movement of the voices across speakers.



Forty-Part Motet at The Cloisters (source, Metropolitan Museum of Art; photographer, Wilson Santiago)

Beyond acoustics, however, if one takes notice of the people listening, the full spectrum of the effects of the work becomes clear. Many are seated or squatting with their eyes closed - a serious expression, or non-expression, upon their faces - as they listen intently. Two teenagers walk by briskly smiling, talking, and rolling their eyes, as if it were over-sentimentalized background music. Several couples hold hands or sustain an embrace as they listen. Two children are cozied into their mother's arms, all seeming to be peacefully asleep. An old woman is recording the music, placing her iPhone directly up to one of the speakers, while another is crying quietly against the cold stone wall. Several people are rushing about the space, as if they know of or are trying to find the most ideal place in which to listen to the work [no such place objectively exists]. And I, drawn to the innocence of the sound, stand motionless near a speaker projecting the voice of a child an inch away from my ear.

With this work Janet Cardiff had taken a composition by Thomas Tallis, *Spem in Alium* (1570), a choral work for 40 voices, and disembodied it, recording each individual voice of the choir and projecting it into another

space with its own individuated speaker. Tallis' *Spem in Alium* ("Hope in any other"), was inspired by a text in the "Book of Judith," an apocryphal book from the *Old Testament*. With old-fashioned Christian self-deprecation and reverential gratitude, the lyrics read in English as:

I have never put my hope in any other
but in You, O God of Israel
who can show both anger and graciousness,
and who absolves all the sins
of suffering man
Lord God,
Creator of Heaven and Earth
be mindful of our lowliness.

Beyond the inherent spiritual origins of Tallis' religious composition and its' appropriation of Biblical text, Cardiff speaks about the piece in her own humanistic and spiritual terms:

The piece serves as a record of all the people who are in it. Just the other day George was looking at the list of singers, and he Googled his favorite bass singer, only to find that he died two years ago. The piece also includes many children. Now those children are all grown up. Some of the singers we recorded weren't professionals. Some of them go off a bit. It's a very difficult piece to sing. But it is the piece it is. I've heard it so many times and sometimes I hear flaws, and I think maybe we should re-record it. But it's about those people too. That's why the first part of the recording includes the singers talking to one another. It's about the personal, the individual, and how people come together for the singing, and then it becomes ethereal, spiritual. (Cardiff, AinA)

For me it was an interesting piece to do because I was very interested in having this up-to-date technology playing back a 16th century piece of music. You can follow the music as it goes from one choir to another and to another. You can hear it moving around in a sculptural way. I just love the feeling of sound coming from one side, and another, crosses over you to another, until all of those sound waves are hitting your body. It's quite an effect. (Cardiff, TT)

Cardiff's take on Tallis, was not merely about quotation or appropriation, as it might be for other composers' re-appropriation of musical material. For Cardiff there is a cultural communication occurring across time. It is this juxtaposition of disparate times and spaces, and above all a kind of captivating and suspended sense of wonderment that she sought, or discovered, in disembodying these voices.

I think wonderment in our work is something that we really concentrate on, because we love to experience it. And we make work so that we can feel it, and so many of our pieces have this sense - whether it's through trickery of technology, or playfulness - it gives you a sense of 'Wow, how did they do that?' or all of a sudden you realize you're in one space in your mind, and in the physical reality you're all in different spaces and your mind kind of goes through this point where it can't concentrate and so it goes into a state of wonderment, I think. And that is very important to me because I'm almost political in my views that the art that I want to create should be transcendent. (Cardiff, TT)

By an unanticipated effect of intimacy and mortality caught in the human voice, Cardiff's piece, in the sense we give to it, returns our audition from the mystery of technology, which was becoming the poster-child of the inexorable and prophetic by the 1920s, back to the mystery of spirit, which had lost ground through the denunciation of Spiritualism and the spreading orthodoxy of institutional religion across America. By the acoustic intimacy of vocal isolation, *Forty Part Motet* humanizes the technology of the audio speaker (and the individual members of the choir) in such a way that there may be a greater connection between the listener and the recorded singer than one that is purely acoustic or conceptual. The intimacy of the recordings, personalized voices frozen in time, may open one's ears to a catacoustic audition, a listening by echo, and perhaps provide a sense of wonderment, that same wonderment which has accompanied every successful phantasmagoria, séance, or *intonorumori* performance across history.



Grierson

It is by this same catacoustic audition that I hear Grierson's silent contribution to American music. Unlike many séance directors or technology wizards, Grierson was not regularly using phenomenal illusions, like Miss Vinson who tied instruments to her ceiling, or like Les Paul's electronic manipulations and Mary Ford's staged echo. Often through the manner of simple suggestion, he claimed that the music he produced was inspired from beyond himself via invisible spirits. Posing himself as a vessel gifting the ghost, he and his music then point an attentional finger elsewhere, as far away or as ubiquitously near as one could imagine, and as mysterious as one allows it to be. Nowhere in the records now available had Grierson exposed any sense of doubt as to his spiritual beliefs nor to his spirit communications (only to those of others), nor any explicit references to devised manipulations or intentional duplicity on his part. Only his dealings with the High Brothers speak to any deceptive intentions. His aims were otherwise, as far as can be told, sincere and unpretentious, and he used all available tools - from sheer talent to persuasive suggestion - to guide the consciousness of his listeners towards a metaphysical audition. Grierson was never interested in proselytizing a traditional or occult God, nor of presenting himself as a guru, nor of swindling any false claims for personal profit. He had his profits with his practice - royal gifts and a short-lived mansion life - but these were never his motives, while he was ultimately consumed by poverty.

His self-professed aim was to provide "spiritualized pleasure." It was through his musical séances that he, apparently with a great deal of success, brought his audience, not towards a true or false belief in a given proclamation or verifiable spirit, but to the open engagement and actual possibility of "transcendental perception" (Simonson, 13), to a *sense* of wonder and mystery. And in that sense, the psycho-phone is not an imaginary technology that requires invention; rather, we are all psycho-phones. Wherever voices are disembodied, whenever sonic ambiguity and the panoply of noise meet our audition, we are all, if listening, subject to the pleasures and inspirations, as well as the confusions and duplicities of the illusioned ear. Grierson said it best:

All is mystery. Whatever we do we cannot escape that fact. This is the fundamental law which causes the illusion of progress and a constant desire to acquire more knowledge, to seek the unseen, the unheard, the unknown. Mystery engenders illusion - the most wonderful and subtle of all the primordial elements. Everything revolves or reposes on illusion; it is the action exercised on the mind by some person or some

thing, and we are always under its influence, whether it be good or bad or indifferent. Indefinable though they be, illusions are, nevertheless, realities. (Grierson, CT, 170)

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Cézanne and Music

BY PETER ABLINGER

Editor's note: what follows is the script for a lecture given by Peter Ablinger in 2013. A version of the German original was published in MusikTexte 140 (February 2014).

Preface:

That I'm speaking in the last part of the symposium¹ brings with it the unavoidable fact that many of my text's terms have already come up in earlier lectures – for example, the word 'hearing.' And yet it was rare that I had the impression we were talking about the same thing when saying, 'hearing.' As such, as a guide-post, I'd like to begin by noting that there is always a certain self-reflexivity in my use of words such as 'hearing' or 'perception.'

Beyond that, a few days ago just as I'd finished this text, the title of the symposium for which it was written finally caught my eye: "Historical and Contemporary Modes of Listening."² Well, the present appears in the text only in a few personal examples, and music history is only drawn on to demonstrate several of its shortfalls since the late nineteenth century (particularly in opposition to the visual arts). But the true dissonance between the symposium's title and my intentions is, for me, the restriction to "musical" hearing. Personally, I don't believe that we will ever learn much about hearing as long as we constrain ourselves to *musical* hearing. In any case, my text is about this dissonance.

¹ "Historical and Contemporary Modes of Musical Listening, International Symposium," Kunstuniversität Graz, January 2013, <http://musiktheorie.kug.ac.at/en/veranstaltungsarchiv/2013-historical-and-contemporary-modes-of-musical-listening-international-symposium.html> (as of 28.iii.2014)

² Editor's note: this is the official English title of the symposium. A literal translation of the German title is simply, "History and Present of Musical Hearing"

CÉZANNE AND MUSIC

Perception and Perceptual Deficiencies / Music and Painting of the last 150 Years

Music and perception seem to be in competition, perhaps even mutually exclusive: music functions only by excluding reality and the environment. Jacques Attali's "Noise" as well as Murray Schafer's "The Tuning of the World" were published in the same year, 1977.³ Schafer describes the artificiality of the concert hall's silence as the prerequisite for music, while Attali identifies the orchestral space of the bourgeois concert hall as a space of exclusion – keeping out everyday noises and the everyday itself.

The painters of the late nineteenth century left their studios and went outside to paint in the open air. Simultaneous with Hermann von Helmholtz' cutting-edge research, Ernst Mach and William James developed theories and concepts that led to the reformulation of form, color, composition, as well as the process of painting, the concept of the work, and the self-understanding of the artist.

At that moment, Paul Cézanne was the painter who went even further in his observation of objects, landscapes, forms, and colors.

When, for instance, Cézanne painted the edge of a table or the horizon of the sea, the result was not a straight line but a picture puzzle, a mosaic of nuances, the deconstruction of a straight line. When we ourselves observe the edge of a table or the horizon of the sea, we *think* we see a straight line. We don't see, we think we see. If as an exercise we would subject ourselves to insistent and precise observation, we would recognize that a line is actually not a line – that it jumps here and there, that it is sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker, sometimes sharper and sometimes more blurred, and that above and below its edges the most confusing modulation play out. The variability of these effects is multiplied as soon as we compare the area of the line in our focus with more peripheral areas. These effects are of

³ Jacques Attali: *Bruits: essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1977 [Ed. – in English, *Noise: the Political Economy of Music*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1985]. Murray Schafer: *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Random House), 1977; in German: *Klang und Krach. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Hörens* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum), 1988

course reminders of exactly how Cézanne himself would have painted a line. Cézanne did not paint what he saw, he painted seeing!



Paul Cézanne, *Mill on the River*, 1900–06, Watercolor, Marlborough Fine Art Ltd. London



Detail from: *Mill on the River*

But the further Cézanne went, the more he became conscious that his project could fail, that in the strictest sense it was unreachable.

What is said in this text about Cézanne, or Seurat, about Helmholtz and late nineteenth century visual perceptual research, I learned⁴ from Jonathan Crary's "Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture."⁵ Apart from that, I would describe my text as a "braid": an interlacing of this reading with other readings and my own notebook entries.

Back to Cézanne's failure. Crary speaks *precisely* about a "deficiency of attention"⁶: to pay attention to one thing means withdrawing it from many other simultaneous things. Cézanne became painfully conscious of how fundamentally sight and oversight⁷ are linked, how much he – in seeing – overlooked. But at least Cézanne was not alone in his observation of inattention and in putting the unobserved squarely into his sites. On the contrary, he and his painter colleagues found encouragement and specification in contemporary scientific research. Crary recounts researchers around 1886 siting the eye in the body and describing its self-perception.⁸ For instance, Helmholtz describes techniques through which one can see the blood vessels of one's own retina. Another phenomenon are the tiny particles, blotches, and shapes in the vitreous humor of the eye we call "floaters"⁹ (which, by the way, without any particular contrivances we can decide if we want to see, or not). Ernst Mach drew the limits of own eye's visual field.

In self-perception, says Crary, the dualistic division of subject and object is attacked. Just how *much* our attention is accustomed to filtering out precisely such self-perceptions in the everyday is also something which caught the attention of contemporary researchers: (William James, 1890) "The deepest inattention is to subjective optical sensations, strictly so called, or those which are not signs of outer objects at all."¹⁰

⁴ Actually, in the case of Cézanne I have a more specific and long term relationship. When I was 14, I road my bike 90km to the next bigger city to get a book on him...

⁵ The book itself was a gift from Bill Dietz. Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1999 [Ed.: page numbers throughout refer to the English original]

⁶ From the Introduction, p. 1, italics in the original

⁷ Ed.: The hint of the supervisory meaning of overseeing is not present in the German *sehen / übersehen* opposition

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 214-221

⁹ Ed.: The literal translation of the equivalent German colloquialism would be "flying mosquitoes"

¹⁰ James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), as quoted in Crary, p. 216

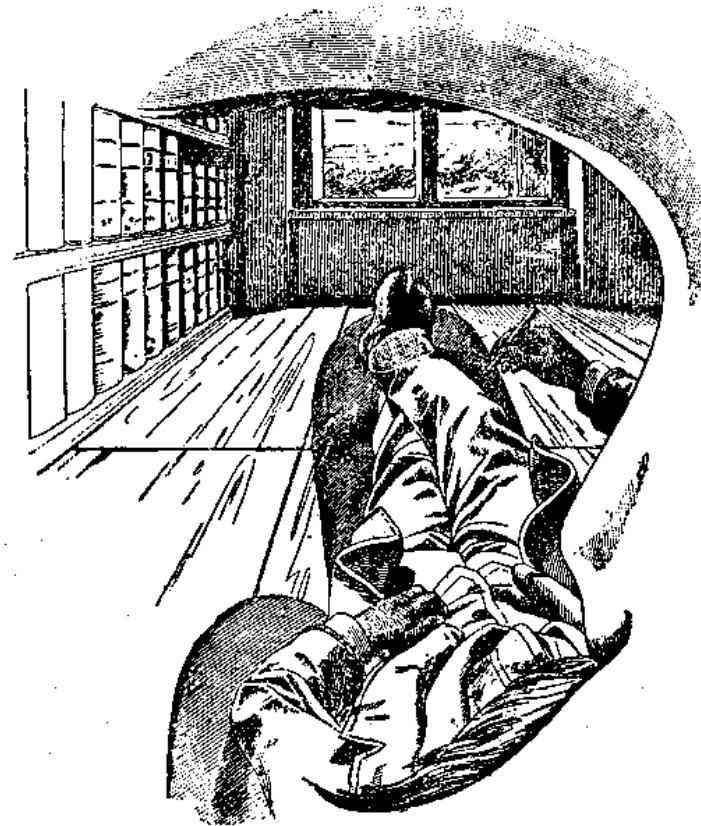


Abb. 60 Ernst Mach, Illustration aus *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen*, 1885.

Ernst Mach, *Visual Field*; looking through Mach's left eye at his own body stretched out in his studio; limited by the curvature of the eye socket, one sees his nose and beard.

It is to the credit of these researchers – *in the realm of the visual* – that that which was excluded was focused upon. Their painter contemporaries took up this research and developed it further in their art. Helmholtz and others *also* did research in the realm of the acoustic. The situation on the music side of things however reveals itself as quite contrary.

Singled out in the following short *responsory* are three of Helmholtz's objects of study from "On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music,"¹¹ each accompanied by a remark (or *lament*) on its missing or belated musical repercussion:

One of Helmholtz's chapters deals with the difference between noise and sound as a difference between periodicity and aperiodicity

- until Varèse it was precisely that noise instrument par excellence, percussion, that kept its distance from any trace of aperiodicity!

Another chapter, combination-tones

- Helmholtz's book has taken on in the meantime the greatest value for those younger composers dedicated to just intonation; which is to say, in the last few decades!

Third example, beating

- It has often been noted that Alvin Lucier's music is not based on science, but rather on nineteenth century research; it might as well be mythology!

The deficits of the music and the lack of receptivity to the fundamental theories and physical realities of sound in the composers of Helmholtz's time are manifest. But also even within Helmholtz's own research, one should not overlook the fact that his work on acoustics (in contrast to that on visuality) is focused less on perception itself and more on determining the physical laws of sound treated consistently as an exterior object.

Environmental noise, on the other hand, the periphery of acoustic perception, the un-heard¹², will remain excluded from music and science for a much longer time.¹³

Personally, music history has taught me next to nothing about the

¹¹ Hermann von Helmholtz, "Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik" (Braunschweig: Vieweg), 1863. [Ed. – in English, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, first translated by Alexander J. Ellis (London: LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.), 1875]

¹² Ed.: the original German *überhören* is symmetrical with *übersehen*, both signifying a lack of attention with respect to each sensory modality; "over-heard" is of course even less possible here than "over-seen" before.

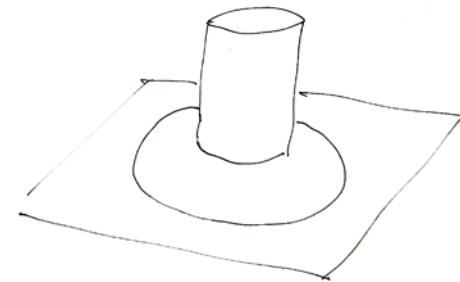
¹³ More on Russolo below. Don't even Cage's observations of inner ear noise seem scandalously late in relation to the observations of one's own retina in the 1880s?

characteristics of the act of hearing and the un-heard, I have however learned a bit from the history of the visual arts, and most of all from my own work. Through observation and studies which had no or almost no music historical point of reference (for instance, examining white noise and other phenomena), I began to turn my attention to the way in which consciousness, knowledge, culture, and education effectively push themselves between us and that which is heard. Dealing with noise, one can discover acoustic illusions that function like a projection – which reduce the *actual, factual* thing which is heard to a background, a screen. The projection schema reverses the alleged direction of the perceptual act: external stimuli are no longer represented in our brains, and instead, the brain projects itself onto the external stimuli. The inside and outside, subject and object, simply switch places!

Mode of Perception

In no way does perceiving mean that the brain, with the help of the sense organs, reproduces what occurs outside. The constitutive role of memory in perception was detected already in Helmholtz.¹⁴ In reading William Kentridge's "Thinking aloud,"¹⁵ which deals with anamorphosis, it occurred to me that the act of perception is comparable to the setup of an anamorphic drawing.

[The following example is Kentridge's, though the drawing is my own, as I've lost the book.]



¹⁴ Crary, p. 335

¹⁵ William Kentridge, *Thinking aloud, in conversation with Angela Breidbach* (Cologne: Verlag Der Buchhandlung Walther König), 2005

An anamorphic classic: if we place a mirrored cylinder on a piece of paper and draw a ring around it, the line's mirror image will describe a straight line. On the other hand, if one wants to see a circle in the cylinder, one has to draw something like a stretched bean...

In perception, the circle is the exterior stimulus which is to be captured. The mirrored cylinder is the perceptual apparatus, the *brain*. Only, in perception, we don't know exactly which form the cylinder takes. Otherwise, we might at least indirectly deduce how that which we see *really* looks or how that which we hear *really* sounds. But with perception, the only thing certain is that that which we perceive doesn't sound like it sounds. The minimalist conception of "color as color" (e.g., for Frank Stella) or the Cagean "sound as sound" is an abstraction that doesn't function this way. The only thing certain is that our brain shows us that which is perceived in a particular 'mode.'

The situation is comparable to the book "Flatland" where a society lives entirely in 2 dimensions, and is fully incapable of accepting the idea of the 3-dimensional.¹⁶ When we see the line in the cylindrical reflection, we call it a line, and we therefore deem it a line. But if we knew more about the way the mirror (our brain) works, we could re-synthesize the true form of the line and recognize it as a circle!

No Cézanne

Music is a system of exclusions which has seen to it that the last 150 years of perceptual observation and research that are my focus have been marginalized in both musicology and in the working processes and constitution of musical works. There has never been a Cézanne of music. A so-called *early* example of composition explicitly relating to perception would date back to just 1988 – James Tenney's 'Critical Band.' To me, before this date there were many meaningful aesthetic upheavals and serious changes in reception, but (almost) never works explicitly according to the perception of a stimulus precedence over the stimulus itself.

Regarding that 'before this date,' a few exceptions: in minimal art – the visual art of the 60s – aspects of perception and *self-perception* were dealt with intensively, and that, at least, had a prompt echo in minimal *music*. In certain

¹⁶ Edwin Abbott Abbott, *Flatland: A romance of many dimensions* (London: Seeley), 1884

respects, La Monte Young's work even preceded the visual arts. But in opposition to minimal *art*, which in its strict methodological approach was superseded by conceptual art, minimal *music* constricted the wide spectrum of hearing possibilities which had characterized its beginnings and went on to become a form of pop music. A truly open and simultaneously systematic handling of auditory perception is rare to find in music history: luckily we still have the one who was already mentioned above, Alvin Lucier!

If one looks back at *classical* new music, which is to say European avant-garde music up to now, one might have the impression that hearing in music has yet to take place! The actual history of hearing, for me, does not begin with hearing, but instead with 'hearing hearing,' with the observation of observation!

A greater contrast to the visual realm is nearly unthinkable. Let us recall again the intensive exchange between scientific theories and (visual) artistic practice – for instance in the work of Georges Seurat, whose working method one might almost call conceptual in its systematic examination of *visuality*!¹⁷

At least since the second half of the nineteenth century, a rift between the thinking and making of the visual and acoustic has opened up, a rift which expanded in the twentieth century to an abyss, and which today remains to be overcome. Emblematic of this rift would be painters' going out into the world at the same moment that walls of concert houses began to become thicker and even less porous (2 important dates for that: the construction of the Vienna Musikverein, begun around 1863, and the Vienna Konzerthaus, begun around 1890).

Here are two further positions in musical thought which, though un-canonized, could, in the next few years or decades, play an important role in the rehabilitation of music. Both of them are located squarely in the middle of the 100-year span between Helmholtz's "On the Sensations" and La Monte Young's "Composition Number 7."

The first, who particularly in relation to hearing should not be forgotten, is Josef Matthias Hauer. Hauer accorded hearing the highest artistic status,

¹⁷ If Seurat were alive today, he'd be the favored victim of 'artistic research' discourses.

even higher than that of the work. For Hauer, the composition of a twelve-tone-‘spiel’ was “child’s play.” And though the performance of a twelve-tone-‘spiel’ required a significant measure of craft and skill, real art could only occur in its proper audition. In a sense, Hauer turns the hierarchy of composing, performing, and hearing on its head.

The other figure, just before Hauer (even partially overlapping), is Luigi Russolo. Coming from painting, he manages to break out of the bourgeois concert hall and to invite us on a sound-walk through a large, noisy city!

Tolerances

How or what did earlier generations hear? I’m not sure that *before* Murray Schafer this question had been systematically posed. Schafer’s work could be the basis for a ‘history’ or perhaps a ‘prehistory of hearing’ in so far as it thinks socio-culturally instead of music historically.¹⁸ Perhaps the most obvious chapter in the history of hearing is that of consonance and dissonance. The fact that in the in middle-ages a third was not found to be adequately consonant is interesting only when connected with the question of *tolerance*. How far can intonational deviation go before the identity of a particular interval is lost? This question is a variant of that of ‘Critical Band’ – a question of ‘hearing correction’¹⁹ – something which testifies to that which we *want* to hear, and as such, to cultural identity. A characteristic example is Debussy’s faux-pas of interpreting the gamelan music at the Paris World Exposition in 1889 as pentatonic. Then again, instead of a culturally conditioned misunderstanding, perhaps we should see this as imperialistic intolerance pure and simple?

Let us compare such lack of differentiation to the painter Cézanne, who was brought to the brink of desperation because that that which he painted did not correspond with what he saw, who because of this lack of correspondence and frustration penetrated into the micro-intervals of color and brushstroke to include the idiosyncrasies of the human retina in the

¹⁸ Shamefully, this text contains much too little about hearing beyond the musical. My text works a bit like Mahler’s cow bells which point to an outside, but remain inside

¹⁹ Ed.: in the sense of post-production “image correction”; translation is not literal. The German original is *zurechthören* – a related word would be *zurechtschneiden*, cutting something to fit into a given pattern.

picture. To paint what his eye saw, and not what his brain thought.

Another observation in this history of tolerances and ‘hearing correction’ is that until the beginning of the 1980s, one can very clearly observe in recordings of 12-tone music that performers have no innate sense for the equal-tempered tuning system. Instead, they follow their own sense of intonation, orienting themselves to extant harmonic derivatives. This is even the case with Schöner’s contemporaries and closest associates – for example, the recordings of Rudolph Kolisch. This went on over the decades until the early 80s when there was a decisive generational shift in the world of performance (of which the nearly simultaneous emergence of Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Modern, and Klangforum Wien is symptomatic). Only since then has there been music with equidistant chromatic steps in the strictest sense. That this music has been playable from this point onward I take as an indication that it is also only since then that such music is also *audible*.

In a ‘history of hearing,’ the following evaluatory shift should not be overlooked: the determination whether hearing is inherently of a passive or active nature. Even with Lachenmann one still occasionally heard about the supposedly passive sense of hearing. A typical argument for hearing as a passive sense is (or was) that one cannot close the ears as one can the eyes, that one cannot choose what one hears and doesn’t hear. In the meantime we know much more about the active role of the ear, how pointedly selective it is capable of directing attention, in particular in relation to speech recognition. From medical research, we have even learned that the ear itself produces sounds. The so-called otoacoustic emissions in the auditory canal of the inner ear generate sounds in particular when either outside stimuli are absent, or during continuous noise – or white noise.²⁰ The noise illusions which I mentioned earlier might also be explained physiologically here. We should take note then that the absence of sound as well as an excess of sound both raise the auto-activity of the ear. This suggests an explosive follow-up question – namely, whether or not this also works the other way around: if stimulation and diverse sound contours prompt our ears’ passivity, inactivity...

The determination of how heavily or weakly our ear influences what is heard,

²⁰ I have Maryanne Amacher to thank for pointing me to the phenomenon of otoacoustic emissions

how much it is to be manipulated or adjusted, is also a form of activity. First and foremost, we hear what we *want* to hear. Perceptual ‘hearing correction’ is a violence not far from not hearing, from ignoring – which is in fact the activity the hearing apparatus is busy with more than 90% of the time. Helmholtz says: “We practice observation on sensation only to the extent necessary for clearly apprehending the external world.”²¹ It is astounding however how little of the outside world we allow ourselves to take in. Not only is our auditory system *most* adept at hearing things away (selective hearing), in architecture, landscape design, and city planning, built structures of non-hearing or hearing reduction are playing an ever increasing role. In the concert hall we *pay* for sound. Outside the concert hall we pay for every small diminution of sound. Just think of all the diverse sound isolation measures taken up in city planning, the hundreds and thousands of kilometers of sound isolation corridors surrounding highways and train tracks.

In the shifting tolerance for certain intervals to the difference between Debussy and Cézanne which I’ve been tracing, we should not forget that the historical mutability of perceptual modes occurs within a spectrum of degree, that any given mode indicates a more or less. Cézanne’s ideal of correspondence between image and observation can never be reached with our perceptual apparatus, it must always remain an approximation. Debussian ignorance, on the other hand, is structurally immanent. Oversimplification is the irresolvable prerequisite of perception.

In the process of re-synthesizing environmental sounds with orchestral instruments in my own work, I observed the following: from a certain density of instruments with which I tried to approach the results of given analysis – 30 or more divisi parts, the same inaccessibility of sound which everyday urban situations can so easily take on would emerge. Only a simplification down to a few tones would lead to immediately meaningful (legible) results and musical pleasure. It became obvious that “immediacy” coincides entirely with mediation – with the selection or the reduction through which something becomes accessible to us. The shattering conclusion for my own working methods is that immediacy is a cultural product, something mediated, an illusion!

In 1850, Helmholtz measured the speed of nerve transmission and came to

²¹ Helmholtz, Contents IV

the number 27½ meters/second. What is actually being measured here is the divide between stimulus and reaction, between perception and its object! The present is that which occurred a fraction of a second before – the apparent present is actually the past.²² Helmholtz, says Crary, is more decisive than any other in his insistence that there is no direct correspondence between sensual experience and its object.²³

The Sense of Time

“Given the phenomena of the duration of a light impression on the retina, synthesis is the unavoidable result,” writes Seurat in an 1890 letter.²⁴ One should note the word ‘duration’ in connection with sight! Seurat’s images in which forms and color values from unmixed pigments are synthesized are referred to by Crary as ‘perceptual synthesis.’ Seurat didn’t paint a picture of *something*, he painted a picture of the act of perception! Even the spectral syntheses of the Parisian musical variety 100 years later are, for me, in comparison, almost never posed as questions of *perception* itself (though that doesn’t necessarily mean there is nothing to perceive in them). By the way, however: my own re-synthesis works are not spectral syntheses, but rather first and foremost temporal syntheses – a re-synthesis of time!

Yesterday, Klaus Lang offered an attractive formula: “Music is time perceived through sound.” And indeed: one can hear time! The sense of temporality in hearing trumps all else by far. In comparison, the spectral sense is rudimentary. An instrumental sound without transient, that is, without its temporal envelope, is no longer identifiable. What we identify as an acoustic sense of color might prove to be no better than an illusion. On the other hand, we can hear the temporal difference between two impulses in the millisecond range – far below and up to the size of an individual sample, approximately 1/40th of a millisecond – and in that range even as color!

What I’m claiming here is based on experiential data and self-tests, which I’d like to demonstrate in closing. Readers can find these tests at

http://ablinger.mur.at/zettel_sample.html

There, one can hear the difference between a millisecond, half a millisecond, a quarter of a millisecond, an eighth, a sixteenth, all the way down to the

²² Crary, p. 309-310

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 319-320

²⁴ Crary, p. 152

difference between one sample and another (0,00227ms).

There are no digital artifacts! You might recognize comparable characteristics in Lachenmann's 'Ein Kinderspiel.'²⁵ The basic principle can be demonstrated *even* simpler than *child's play*²⁶ by repeatedly and 'simultaneously' tapping two fingernails on a table-top... The higher the audible 'overtones,' the more simultaneous the attack.

Finally then, what is *really* at stake in hearing is *time*!

Also for Jonathan Crary, time would play a key role in counteracting 'deficiencies of attention.' As he puts it, our (visually dominated) culture is founded upon insulating people from the experience of time, thereby rendering us disempowered.²⁷ And perhaps that is indeed precisely the purpose of visual dominance, to quash the influence of the *sense of time*. The experience of time, of mortality, of an individual's position within a limited temporal frame is that which makes a person aware of him- or herself. The first book of Moses already told us this. On the other hand, cutting the cord to temporal consciousness is a means to incapacitation. In opposition to that incapacitation, hearing is *the* sense through which we can perceive time at its most differentiated. Of course, that's not by any means the case with EVERYTHING which we hear. Or put another way: it *is* the case for EVERYTHING which we hear, only not for that which *hinders* us from hearing EVERYTHING.

Peter Ablinger 2012/13
Translated by Bill Dietz

²⁵ Lachenmann, Ein Kinderspiel, Part 3

²⁶ Ed.: Play on the Lachenmann title

²⁷ Crary, Introduction, p. 3: "Thus, as I will argue, spectacular culture is not founded on the necessity of making a subject *see*, but rather on strategies in which individuals are isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered."

Peter Ablinger was born in 1959 in Schwanenstadt/Austria. He first studied graphic arts and became enthused by free jazz. He completed his studies in composition with Gösta Neuwirth and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati in Graz and Vienna. Since 1982 he has lived in Berlin, where he has initiated and conducted numerous festivals and concerts. In 1988 he founded the Ensemble Zwischentöne. In 1993 he was a visiting professor at the University of Music, Graz. He has been guest conductor of Klangforum Wien, United Berlin and the Insel Musik Ensemble. Since 1990 Peter Ablinger has worked as a freelance musician. Since 2013 research professor at the University Huddersfield. Festivals at which Peter Ablinger's compositions have been performed include the Berlin and Vienna Festwochen, Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, and festivals in Istanbul, Los Angeles, Oslo, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, London, New York. The Offenes Kulturhaus Linz, the Diözesanmuseum Köln, Kunsthalle Wien, Neue Galerie der Stadt Graz, the Kunsthaus Graz, the Akademie der Künste Berlin, the Haus am Waldsee Berlin, the Santa Monica Museum of the Arts have showed his installation work over the last few years. Together with Bernhard Lang, Klaus Lang and Nader Mashayekhi Ablinger founded the publisher ZEITVERTRIEB WIEN BERLIN. Since 2012 Ablinger is member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin, in the same year the Academy opened the Peter Ablinger Archives.
<http://ablinger.mur.at/>

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"Mind BAD, Body GOOD" BY AMY CIMINI & WOODY SULLENDER

Editor's note: the conversation that was the basis for this expanded transcript started in late 2013 in Brooklyn. Woody Sullender and Amy Cimini discuss listening, performance, presence, and power; Amy shares some musicological perspectives on embodiment and discusses some work she's done with Baruch Spinoza's philosophy, specifically on his Ethics (published posthumously in 1677). This exchange pushes Cimini's take on the Spinozan rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualism into dialogue with a wide range of topics, including listening at The Stone, Kanye West, and simply going to band practice.

Woody Sullender: So just for some context and background, where did your interest in looking at bodies or the musical body come from?

Amy Cimini: Well, what is now my scholarly interest in musical bodies comes from my experience as a violist. It's something of an autobiographical story, which is where so many scholarly projects begin, regardless of how well they hide it. As a conservatory student during the late 1990s, I became really interested in the sound worlds of myriad post-war European and American avant-gardes: the solo viola repertoire, chamber music, free jazz, punk, and noise musics (etc.!). I wanted to power extended techniques on the instrument with a spontaneous energy drawn from improvisation and volume, distortion, and processing that was probably more germane to rock or punk musics.

Perhaps ironically, even though I was so interested in what it was like to try to inhabit the limits of instrumental technique, it was really repetitive strain injuries (tendonitis, carpal tunnel, etc.) that pushed me toward critical and theoretical resources for thinking about the performing body – and toward musicology, more broadly. How could I talk or write the ways in which the body seemed sometimes inexplicably capacious? And could I make the ways in which it was sometimes resistant meaningful beyond my own experience? How could these detailed intensities – along with embodied activity in general – act as a locus of meaning or a form of knowledge production? I mean, these weren't (and aren't) new questions. The New Musicology had

been asking them throughout the 1990s and of course phenomenology and feminist theory before that. But it was pretty thrilling to connect with these disciplinary and intellectual histories through an idiosyncratic process of experimentation and questioning as well as a series of unexpected musico-technical successes and failures.

WS: I know you were engaging with composers like Ferneyhough...

AC: 'Engaged with' is a strong term. Maybe 'thought about sometimes' would be the better description. Actually, I wrote a little bit about his 'Time and Motion Study III' (1975) a few years ago, but I've never played his music.

WS: I was hoping that you could historicize some of this academic interest in bodies. I was wondering what sort of other cultural things were in the air to make musicologists suddenly want to talk about bodies. Also noticing that this is coming out of, say, the mid-eighties?

AC: Late eighties and early nineties.

WS: So, noticing that this would be post-New Left, once removed from all the identity politics that initially followed the class politics of the Old Left. Is this way of thinking an attempt to insert or re-insert all these identity politics of race and gender?

AC: Right, this is a great question. Thinking about bodies became a way to root the work of historical musicology in the socio-political field, which then demands methods for analyzing how music participates in the production and distribution of hierarchical constructions of difference. The demands of the New Left are definitely in play here, as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity emerge as key categories of analysis. An influx of heterogeneous theoretical models, like hermeneutics, deconstruction, theories of performativity, destabilized the authority of formal analysis and opened new paths for interpretation more sensitized to cultural concerns. Methods proliferated for undoing presumptions that music somehow transcends its social and political contexts, an inheritance from some strains of aesthetic thought surrounding so-called 'Absolute' music of the 19th century. Adorno was central, precisely because the practice of immanent critique allowed the field to uphold the centrality of certain repertoires while making them 'say' different things. I've working on an essay with Jairo Moreno, right now, that explores some such

ramifications.

Broadly, what is at stake is undoing the universalism implicit in histories of Western humanism. One of my graduate students at UCSD and I have been working with Robyn Wiegman's 2009 *Object Lessons*¹, a broad-ranging reflection on the demands disciplines oriented around identity-knowledge make on the relationship between a knowing subject and a known object. Her analysis is ultra rich, and though I can't quite summarize it here, she glosses the connection between bodies and New Left demands on the academy really wonderfully, so it comes to mind. Bodies *embody knowledge* and different bodies produce new knowledge that demand what Wiegman calls (after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) a *decolonization of the mind* that challenges official (national, disciplinary) forms of historical and cultural narration.

WS: What specific music texts were you drawn to?

AC: Susan McClary and Suzanne Cusick's work is really important in this 1990s moment. Richard Leppert and Rose Subotnick's work, specifically her engagement with Adorno. Ruth Solie's work on feminist music history. Queer theoretical interventions on music and sexuality were also crucial.

WS: Thinking of what else is concurrent at that moment, it just dawned on me that there is work like Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. There's also a lot of stuff happening around early networks coming out of the late eighties. People considering how bodies and gender work in MUDs [Multi-User Dungeon] and MOOs [MUD, object-oriented] and online communities. I'm wondering if such people engaging with the early Internet are almost physically experiencing what would be a sort of Cartesian dualism.

AC: Haraway has been very helpful to some feminist musicologists in undoing positivist epistemologies and insisting on an embodied approach to musical knowledge that acknowledges its situatedness and constitutive incompleteness. I think you're right that something *is* happening in the 1980s and 1990s that is sensitizing scholars of embodied practice to the stakes of losing interpretive and critical contact with the bodies that act as the kind of condition of possibility for their fields. But honestly I am not sure how

¹ Robyn Wiegman. *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2009.

scholars in the 80s and 90s were experiencing early networks and how that impacted their interest in bodies. That would be a really interesting micro-research project, I think. Performance Studies is also cohering as a field during this time, too. For musicology, however, this took shape not so much as an engagement with what you call 'early networks' but as an intense series of interventions in music history aimed, in part, at illuminating how music is implicated in the production and regulation of desire.

WS: Bringing us up to your project - looking at that eighties and nineties stuff as not necessarily problematic, but as maybe still premised upon this Cartesian mind-body issue. Something which you're not necessarily proposing to solve, but to complicate and challenge with the ideas of Spinoza.

AC: Really what the project is trying to do is produce new intellectual historical resources for thinking about the mind-body relationship. We don't simply have to undo or reverse Descartes' denigration of the body (on both epistemological and moral grounds) while retaining the separation of mind from body that drives Descartes' thought. I mean, inverting Descartes' hierarchy can be an important polemical tool but it can also be a blunt one, insisting contra Descartes: "mind BAD, body GOOD." I wanted to try to put something else on the table. I mean, it's not fun to read [Spinoza's] *Ethics*. [laughs] It's a difficult text. There's barely a single metaphor in there. But once you start to grasp the relationships between the proofs, it gets pretty mind-boggling.

WS: I wanted to hit upon that 'body good, mind bad' idea. Hearing versus vision can also play along those lines or even, the mind as masculine, the body feminine. These are all false dichotomies but...

AC: Definitely. The more you develop an interpretive framework that is sensitive to the propagation of dualist categories, the more these oppositions proliferate. The process of composition, the work of analysis, gets imputed to the mind. Sovereignty, also, becomes an important historical and conceptual category to address here.

WS: So, your project is basically proposing answering the mind-body problem via Spinoza's *Ethics* as a proposition for looking at musical bodies.

AC: Right, that was pretty much the game plan at the time! Ultimately, I am quite certain that I haven't really effectively 'answered' the mind-body problem, and the project ended up seeming a lot more polemic than I had intended. A question that I was asked a long time ago (and which I still haven't answered!) is, *why Spinoza now?* And yet his thought coincides with so much work right now. For example, he's really useful in thinking about ecological systems, or as a way to rethink the constitution of materiality. How do material things transmit affect? Can they transmit ideas? What kind of agency do things have? He's also been important in some aspects of feminist theory, coming from his foundational affirmation of the body's inextricability from thought.

WS: Speaking of why these issues at this moment, there is also all the hype and the money going towards neuroscience, which has the appearance of being a scientific answer to the problem. There's an underlying idea that if we could just create a map of all of the mind's parts like billiard balls, we'd solve this thing. Is there a parallel here between these projects?

AC: A handful of neuroscientists cite Spinoza as a sort of proto-thinker of the embodied mind. It is interesting that bringing him into play gives us an opportunity to reconfigure some of the relationships between the humanities and the sciences, the social sciences, and intellectual history, like early-Modern studies. I think it gives us a chance to think about the early-Modern period really differently, and to develop what someone proposed to me as not 'anachronism' but 'diachronism.' There are obliquely related kinds of thinking going on in Spinoza's Amsterdam in the late 17th century and in different areas of mind sciences in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. There are so many really interesting questions there.

WS: Coming back to this focus on bodies now and why... I can't help but think of something like hip-hop on the MTV Music Awards. In terms of production, this is a music largely without physical action, as well as what happens to the grain of the voice with current vocal production techniques like comping or even AutoTune. Live it is almost...I hate to say a presentation of simulacra or something, but...the presentation of what a music performance would or 'should' be. In some ways, physical presence is the one thing that gives this simulation something like 'authenticity' as a musical performance. My experiences now with live, performed music are probably first and foremost through Youtube, where physicality is as de-

emphasized as ever in the reception of music if not in the production as well. I recently saw Kanye West perform wearing a mask with his voice AutoTuned while using the recorded album as backing tracks. The main defining element was simply his presence.

AC: I hear what you're saying. But I also think that right now we are inundated with bodily practices through which we are supposed to 'authenticate' our corporeal selves, whether that's through cultivating healthy bodies, embracing a certain food politics, managing stress and risk, or making certain choices about reproduction. Self-control, self-care, and 'presence' are tied together in a way that's really complicated. And while I think you're right that some of our listening habits may tack toward the simulacral...and though the notion of 'presence' packs a tremendous rhetorical punch, I don't think it's an adequate category for talking about the texture of power as it works on bodies in different domains right now. There are just so many things you can do wrong as an embodied subject: You can breathe wrong, eat wrong, walk wrong, sleep wrong. Right now, I'm looking at your cookbooks over there and thinking about how our capacity to manage certain approaches to food get interpreted as a way of being attached to different kinds of life or conceptualizations of livability. The body gets constructed as much as a liability as it is a locus of what you call presence or authenticity.

Some of the ways in which we listen give us an intense, probably illusory sense of control and agency with respect to the enterprise of curating ourselves in music. Maybe this is just another way of thinking about self-management and entrepreneurial individualism.

WS: To change the focus a little bit here, I want to speak a little bit about the influence of theory on art production and music production. Historically, composers may have engaged with specific theories of tonal analysis and those kinds of things... Being you are both an academic as well as a performer who makes music, I am interested in not just how these tools of thinking about embodiment are useful for us to analyze music, but what might the ramifications be in terms of practice?

AC: This is a great, difficult question. In general, I don't think of this Spinoza research as analogous to a theory of musical construction that might operate in a prescriptive way. Because my work sometimes takes umbrage with some common ways of neutralizing dualism, it is often read as prescriptive or

polemical. That's not the intention. I want my work to be generative, and to be generative it must undergo critique which means it has to be challenged and utilized. What kind of perspectives on, say, a collaboration, or a solo project, or different disciplines of practice and rehearsal become possible when we conceptualize embodied action as a kind of thinking? I play in a rock band, where the songwriting process is super rough and kinetic. The group and its constitutive members 'think' through interlocking, heterogeneous actions that can probably best be described as working both 'in concert and conflict.' Deliberation, aggressive playing, tentative playing, argument...this list could be longer, but you probably get the gist. Now, I'm not saying that Spinoza's thought maps cleanly onto this experience. I'm not here to use theoretical systems that way (plus, Spinoza, ...and others, would probably be pretty horrified to observe these practices). But, there are tools here for reflecting on collaborative movement as a form of thinking. For Spinoza, knowledge and bodily capacities are foundationally social; they are both products *and* motors of circulation and transmission. Adequate knowledge – as well as complexification and nuance within the body – are both social, collaborative achievements, in Spinoza's thought. This is not the solitary work of Cartesian meditation.

WS: You led to my next question: talking about the place of this knowledge as being within transmission. Most of the language that we have used so far has been either thinking about the performance of music or the production of music. If we are all about this in a social context, it seems like the reception of the music is equally or more important.

AC: It is constitutive of what is happening in the scene of performance, yeah...

WS: I'm just thinking of different modes of music reception. I mean, we operate in many worlds, so you know the difference between Lincoln Center and Lightning Bolt. So, if these things are premised on different forms of knowledge, maybe you can address reception via this lens.

AC: [pause] Hmm, there's a really basic sense in which this framework doesn't really recognize a hierarchical distinction between production and reception, or how we might separate some locus of creative or composerly control from what could be construed as more passively listener position. There are so many disciplinary scenes that produce a version of the

exemplary, focused listener. That's why you can't eat gummi bears at The Stone, which inexplicably drives me crazy. What I like about thinking in this Spinozistic framework is that it recognizes listening as simultaneously an embodied and intellectual activity that participates in precisely the production *and* transmission of knowledge, like performing does, though from a different perspective. It affirms listening as a creative mobilization of bodies.

WS: The Stone example seems straight out of the classical concert hall: you are supposed to be having an idealized, dis-embodied experience, without even recognition of the other listening bodies around you.

AC: Yes, definitely. If you are attending to musical practice and you want to address how it's expressing some specific set of material constraints and possibilities, you want to experience how they are unfolding within and between other bodies. Sometimes you have to move. You have to talk. You have to move through different intensities, intensify the experience in different ways. Sometimes you listen really well when you are talking to somebody about what you are hearing. Or sometimes you listen really well from a really weird corner of the space. Or you listen really well as you are moving and as you are thinking.

WS: That relocates the site of music to the entire experience and not just acoustic phenomena. Talking to your friend and eating gummy bears in certain contexts is just as much a part of the musical experience, right?

AC: That's something I'd been thinking about before reading Spinoza. You don't need Spinoza to think about this, even though his conceptualization of mind-body parallelism gives you a pretty rich vocabulary for talking about it.

WS: [laughs] I mean, our experiences at punk shows push some of this where there are a variety of ancillary activities that are as integral as what is happening on the stage. Pre-internet, these performances were a locus of all kinds of information for a lot of us. We are both too young to have experienced venues such as Danceteria or AREA, where the reception of music was conflated with dance, video art, and sculpture, not to mention sex.

AC: Well, maybe a punk show wants us to think about how energies and ideas are transacted in these kinds of scenes...a way to talk about not just

people but also things, like, 'the viola,' 'the amplifier;' how, in different concatenations and configurations, do they become constitutive of what you can and cannot do. I'm surprised, in other words, that some theorists (particularly in recent debates about sound art) are still inclined to divorce the material of sounding from thought or critical intellectual work. There are so many interesting ways – Spinoza and his 20th and 21st century interlocutors are only one trajectory – of thinking them together.

WS: This leads to some thinking more towards theater. Brecht versus Artaud, à la Jacques Rancière, as has been so popular in the art world recently. So many people are asking what a politically activated performance space might be, or if that is even the right kind of question. If we are talking about being in a performance situation where one is aware of power being enacted upon you, what would a musical space ripe with potential be, where these sorts of power relations could be ruptured?

AC: Right, this is a great question, and points to some of the limitations of this project's intense, almost obsessive focus on bodies. A thinking of *musical spaces* and how to characterize them is not as developed as I'd like it be. Thinking about the performing body – particularly the conservatory-trained body, which is where this project began – moves subjects constituted through a number of intersecting forms of privilege to the center of the project. And perhaps it reifies a kind of individualism that ought instead to be challenged.

WS: Which is a certain historical thread....

AC: ...which helps ground a more robust thinking of power. I've been trying to take this work on embodied knowledge and parlay it into a more sophisticated thinking of power. How, in other words, does potentializing the body in different ways operate as both a form of expression and a locus of control? I mean, this is not an original question. Foucault thinks this question; so does Judith Butler, and so does Pierre Macherey, specifically through Spinoza.

WS: So, what would a musical space that refuses to moralize the failure of self-management, that refuses to optimize certain kinds of skills of attention and skills of production - what would that space look like?

AC: I don't really know, but I think those are the kinds of themes, the kinds of trajectories that it would oppose.

WS: Assuming we do to a degree already have such alternative music experiences, what are the actual ramifications of these, other than for academia?

AC: Yeah, I think that that's hard to say. It is so easy to overstate the force of the intervention that you are making.

WS: Well, for example, free jazz gets this all the time. The soloist has a "space of freedom" ... The liberation politics are really problematic.

AC: The obligation to perform a radical politics is incredibly complicated. But I have to say that I don't know that I have a good answer to your question about a performance space, scene or scenario. Thanks for pressing at some limitations.

There's a lot of great new work on so-called experimental practices in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s that is lending a lot of nuance to our understanding of the political life of some of these practice. Great stuff on Cage. Challenges to the racial politics that underlie the term 'experimental.'

WS: And the orientalist aspect...

AC: Yeah, the question then becomes how to aide in the proliferation of options or perspectives for thinking about the functioning of power without simply indicting some practices as good or bad. This is a commitment that does indeed come from my relationship to Spinoza and Descartes, I suppose.

Amy Cimini is violist and historical musicologist. Her research, teaching and performance practice engage 20th century philosophy and political thought with an emphasis on theories of the body and the ethics of experimental practice. She earned her doctorate in Historical Musicology at New York University in 2011 and she is Assistant Professor of Music at UC San Diego. She has also held a Mellon Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellowship in Music Theory at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation, "Baruch Spinoza and the Matter of Music," proposed Spinoza's ethics as a new resource for theorizing embodied musical projects and as a means of overcoming persistent constructions of Cartesian mind-body dualism in contemporary musical thought. She has published work drawn from this research in *Contemporary Music Review*, *Gamut* and a number of edited volumes. As a violist, Cimini moves fluidly between improvisatory, contemporary classical, noise and rock idioms. Recently, she has enjoyed premiering Anthony Braxton's most recent opera, *Trillium J* and preparing the third release of with improvising duo *Architeuthis Walks on Land* (with bassoonist Katherine Young) after residencies at EMPAC and the Rensing Center for the Arts. She is currently writing a book about the 20th century listening practice entitled *Listening in the Future Tense*.

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Notes on the Empire of ZAUM'

BY DIMA STRAKOVSKY



* slightly palatalizes the preceding 'M'; switches gender of the word to feminine; very counterintuitive; introduces an element of irony into interpretation of the word

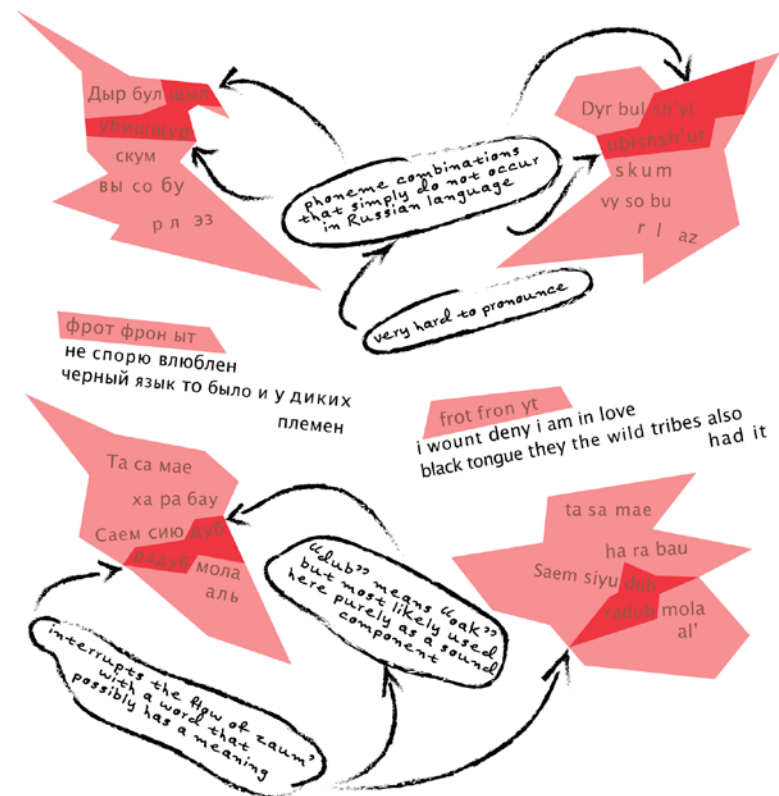
ZAUM' (audio)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/zaum.mp3>

1. ZAUM' was a form of invented language or a broad term for the particles of language floating above any clear meaning used in Russian "Futurist" poetry of the early twentieth century. This neologism formally appears in the writings of [Alekssei Kruchenykh](#) and [Velimir Khlebnikov](#) in 1913. The wordplay that defines the logic of this intentionally awkward combination of linguistic signifiers is: prefix "за" [trans, beyond, over], root "ум" [mind, rationality, thought, intelligence], and finally a soft sign "ь." The last element in particular gives us a taste for the poets' creative strategy by switching the gender of the word to feminine and bringing a hint of irony to the equation. To the Russian ear this is very counterintuitive, it is indeed highly disruptive and foreshadows further acts of "linguistic terrorism" such as switched singular and plural markers, masculine/feminine/neutral gender manipulations and elaborate verb inventions.

Unlike their Italian counterparts, who perhaps more comfortably wore the label of "Futurism", Russian poets were not interested in onomatopoeic output; mimicry of the sounds of the industrial landscape of the early 20th century cities does not factor into their production. ZAUM' is at its core a modernist undertaking, a language turned in upon itself. In their manifesto ["The Word as Such"](#) Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov state that there is more Russian character in the five lines of Khlebnikov's "Dyr Bul Shchyl" than in all of Pushkin, the most celebrated poet within the Russian Literary tradition.

A scan of the original volume with Mikhail Larionov's illustrations is available on the [Getty Research Institute site](#).



Khlebnikov's "Dyr Bul Shchyl" (Russian)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/KruchenykhRus.mp3>

Khlebnikov's "Dyr Bul Shchyl" (English)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Kruchenykh-Eng.mp3>

2. Translation of ZAUM' presents a very simple problem. To a person unfamiliar with the Russian language, ALL of the sounds are divorced from any grounding in the sphere of the semantic. It's all ZAUM'! While I am using visual devices here to try to convey the difference between "words" that loosely relate to standard Russian and purely phonetic inventions, I have to acknowledge an element of built-in failure in this project.

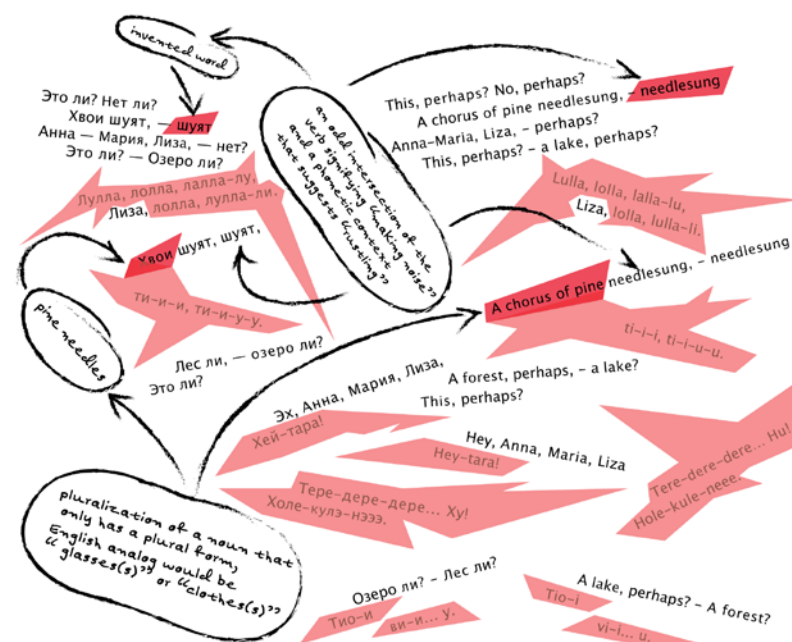
Yet it is precisely this failure that points to the greater context of production within which these poets were operating, that of a multilingual [Russian Empire](#). It was the last major autocratic power of Europe that had just completed a nearly two hundred year expansionist project; one of the most ambitious and bloody in the history of humanity. It stood as the largest contiguous country in the world. Although its populations were forced to speak Russian, their native tongues ranged from Finnish in the north to Georgian in the South, Polish in the West and Mongolian in the East. Russian native speakers of the early twentieth century encountered languages that were completely alien to them (literally hundreds of languages from a staggering variety of language groups) and in many cases this encounter forced them to reflect back upon the sound components of their own language.

3. A clear case of cross-language influence on ZAUM' is presented here in Elena Guro's 1913 poem, "Finland". It appeared alongside the writings of both Kruchenyh and Khlebnikov in a volume entitled ["The Three"](#) which was produced by Guro's husband Mikhail Matyushin (the composer behind "Victory Over the Sun") and illustrated by Kasimir Malevich. Unfortunately, 1913 was also the year of the poet's death. This event resonated in a particularly painful way in the avant-garde circles, since Elena Guro was one of the organizing forces of the fledgling experimental art and poetry scenes.

The poem, extremely interesting and innovative, is nevertheless also problematic in its Russocentrism. Guro, who was from a well-to-do family and had a summer house in the Finnish territories, was very sympathetic in her contact with the linguistic other. The work does however follow colonial patterns, underscoring and mirroring the unequal political power dynamics within the Empire. To the Russian ear, Finnish and Estonian speakers' tendency to raise the pitch of the end of sentences sounds much like a signifier of a question. Accented speech sounds like a never-ending set of questions presented as a sing-song patterns of double vowels and double

consonants (another distinguishing feature of Finno-Ugric languages).

At this point it is important to state that I am bringing up these issues in order to give the reader a glimpse into the complex cultural mix of the region informing the poem, and not to belittle the importance of a poet who has yet to get the attention deserving of her work. In this context, Elena Guro's mimicry of another language becomes a departure point for a very sophisticated sound exploration with a historical lineage all its own.



Guro's "Finland" (Russian)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GuroRus.mp3>

Guro's "Finland" (English)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GuroEng.mp3>

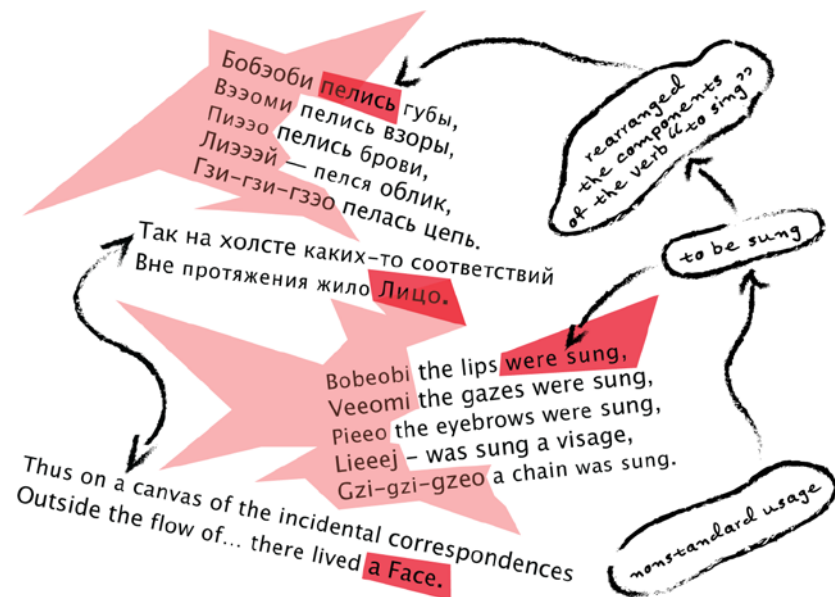
4. I was born on the 28th of October, 1885 at the encampment of the Mongolian Buddha-worshipping nomads.

(from *Autobiographical Note* [1914], Velimir Khlebnikov)

This is the admittedly rather fantastic primal scene that Khlebnikov ascribes to himself. In the Europe-facing capital of St. Petersburg (the much older Russian capital, Moscow, regains its status only after the Revolution) he is the exotic outsider from the wild frontier. Attempts at writing one's own mythology aside, his statement is indeed based on real biographical facts.

He was born in the area of southern Russia populated by Kalmyks, a nomadic group of western Mongolian people who are indeed Buddhist worshippers. Their language, Oirat (Mongolic group) is quite different from Russian (Slavic group). That, along with the fact that from an early age on, the poet moved around with his family all over South Central Russia, meant he was exposed to an amazing number of linguistic constructions from a variety of cultures and languages.

Khlebnikov's poem "Bobeobe the Lips Were Sung" offers a rather early and highly experimental usage of sound elements of language. It was written in 1908, several years before the "official birth" of ZAUM' but very much anticipates its development.



Khlebnikov's "Bobeobe the Lips Were Sung" (Russian)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/KhlebnikovRus.mp3>

Khlebnikov's "Bobeobe the Lips Were Sung" (English)

<http://earwaveevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/KhlebnikovEng.mp3>

5. The three pieces that I chose to concentrate on are fairly well known works, especially in the case of K and K, by fairly well known authors. They have definitely been translated before ("[Tango with Cows](#)" at the Getty Museum and a related collection at [PennSound](#) are particularly interesting highlights). My translations and performance approaches are, in many instances, significantly different from what I found available in English. This speaks to both the semantic polyphony that all translators have had to wrestle with and my attempt to convey the dissonance of the sound/linguistic constructions as they present themselves in Russian.

I am not trying to resurrect lost pieces or justify yet another canon. My aim is to constructively problematize and add dimension to a project that very often becomes just a footnote in the history of the Avant-Garde.

6. Rebellion against linguistic norms paralleled poets' rebellion against the political oppression of the Russian Empire. Zaum' was a natural extension of the discourse that rose up in opposition to oppressive tactics of the state.

There is a temptation to view the poetic productions of this group purely as innovations within a greater formal progression of Modernist narrative. This viewpoint however, robs the project of its radical political potential.

7. Writing about historical events is often complicated by the need to limit the scope of a project. In some ways, Kruchenyh's later contact with Georgian and Armenian experimental poets and Khlebnikov's journeys to Persia could suggest even more exciting cases for the conversation about inter-language exchange. By that point however, the Russian Empire was no more and the promise of a beautiful new day, mixed with the murderous acts of the "Red Terror," would provide a very different backdrop.

8. Special thanks goes out to [Marina Balina](#) for invaluable advice on the translation and [Gerald Janacek](#) for being the most amazing guide to Zaum' that anyone could wish for.

Dmitry "Dima" Strakovsky was born in St.Petersburg, Russia in 1976 and has lived in the United States since 1988. Dima completed his MFA degree at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Department of Art and Technology and stayed in Chicago for several years producing art and working for various companies in the toy invention industry. Following his work in the commercial sector, Dima joined the faculty at the University of Kentucky and currently lives in reasonably urban parts of USA with occasional time off in reasonably rural parts of Japan. Dima's practice spans diverse media and conceptual interests: collaborative performances, media installations, drawing and sculptural works are just some of the examples of different modalities that define his output.

Selected Sites and Projects:

<http://www.shiftingplanes.org/>

<http://www.facebookportrait.com/>

<http://lprt.shiftingplanes.org/>

<https://vimeo.com/shiftingplanes>

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Drone of Invisible Ink: Susan Silton's "In everything there is the trace," and the Collective Typing of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* BY SEAN GRIFFIN

It is easy to imagine ourselves through literature. It speaks to us like a voice in our heads, showing us things and directing our thoughts as it proceeds. It is equally easy to imagine ourselves through drone music because it occupies the periphery of our minds with a receding, unnerving sameness that alters the way we hear. Sculptures and installations can evoke spatial languages both real and imaginary through the material and social contexts in which they exist; however, not many artists engage and orchestrate all of these dimensional relationships into effective, sustained counterpoint.

How often do we see a good installation accompanied by some badly executed loudspeaker situation, or overly simple, multi-channel sound? Some element or reference will seem pixilated, too oblique to parse and thereby submerged into a surreal, pop media cliché or anonymously mixed into the general media din of its sonic desktop. We are spectators of these sounds; we are rarely, if ever, impelled to engage with our active audio imagination. There is simply too much processing of sound as an uninflected, semantic importation of someone else's pre-existing music recordings.

Susan Silton's installation "In everything there is the trace,"¹ presented as part of the Fisher Museum of Art's "Drawn To Language" exhibition, brings together performance, sculpture, literature, as well as socially and sonically conscious forms into a taught, poetic geometry. Her social constructions are panoramic in their attention to relational, interdisciplinary details. The sonic

¹ Editor's note: a short video documenting the work is viewable here - <https://vimeo.com/83804388#at=0>

aspect of her work is just as compelling as the sculptural because it transmits its message from a socially-embedded, pedestrian construction. For a full hour, twice a week, her installation becomes a wall of vintage typing machine sound that seems to manually electrify and animate the air as it echoes into the surrounding galleries, halls, and office spaces. This deceptively complex installation blows through that drafty, cavernous, blank, “culture-free” space of arch-minimalism and conceptual art with something like an echo of a call to historical communitarian action.

Volunteers are invited to retype a section from John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* and when the collective performance starts, it is like a sudden rain of hail in crisp metal slapping on paper that lasts for a full hour without any change. Sounding throughout the galleries and halls, it is strangely reminiscent of the granularity of Iannis Xenakis’s delicate entrance/exit musique concrète piece for the Philips Pavilion *Concret PH* (1958). But Siltan’s sonic construction is sparsely accented by end-of-the-line dings from the ten, oddly tuned, high-pitched metal bells inside the machines, and that unmistakable muted, rotary-gear, roll-clap of the carriage return mechanisms. In movies, a room full of typing noise like this evokes something like old-fashioned, unstoppable, American progress.

Over the course of the installation, a seemingly endless line of volunteers (that included many well-known artists) filed in and retyped a section of the book on old, handsomely designed vintage manual typewriters with no ink in them. The metal letters imprint a faint textured surface that you can still read if you look close enough and catch the embossed text in shadowed relief. Examples of it hang along the walls in vitrines like specimens. These examples are not Steinbeck’s depictions of abject poverty which the volunteers have typed, but instead working-class poems embossed on million-dollar art appraisals transgressing the arbitrarily bloated and impoverished economies of visual art.

In performance, conceptually terse minimalism can impart very simple gestures with an austere elegance. Any perversely simplistic structure, contrived of basic phenomenon and fixed or frozen in time or space, is engaging because it solicits our perceptual investigations. We must move around or within them to hear them or see them because they are from a radically different type of temporality.

This notion of inspection, receptivity and basic phenomenon relates directly to the Derrida quote that Siltan includes in the actual title of her installation performance, “In everything there is the trace,”

In everything there is the trace, the experience of a return to something else of being returned to another past, present, future, a different type of temporality that’s even older than the past and that is beyond the future.²

Encountering this reference after experiencing the performance of the work, I began thinking about duration, labor, and value as associated with minimalist performance. Discussions of these works are often louder and more interdisciplinary than the pieces themselves. They form implied narratives disavowed by their reductionist, anti-narrative techniques. This seems especially true with Cage’s *4’33”* which is, like Siltan’s seemingly blank pages typed up in an hour, nothing but an arbitrary duration.

I struggle with my feelings about avant-garde master works that seek to somehow obscure their own cultural embeddedness. Even though I have no problem with meditation and the physical experience of long durations or deep listening, I admit that sometimes I get twitchy during performances of John Cage’s silent *4’33”* (1952) and some other works like it.

4’33” can alternately feel like a breath of fresh air, in which there always appears a magical moment of silence that produces sonic epiphanies through an intensified sensitivity to ambience, but it can also resemble a forced prayer. This particular blank, arbitrary duration demonstrates something important that not much of Cage’s other works seem to address in the same way; there is always a “somethingness” in art.

Listening in social space with this kind of anticipation is a loaded, unique, and very often philosophical experience. Indeterminacy feels like an inaccurate label for this. Appreciating art, especially art music, requires something akin to devotion. Living Art that starts and does not change much until it ends is compositionally and poetically like a territorial inundation, a saturation of singularity that fills a narrow bandwidth. Simultaneously, its polarity can be manifest as evacuation or cancellation. It can be an awe-inspiring experience

² The quote is taken from an outtake of the 2002 documentary film, *Derrida*, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, as translated into an English subtitle from its original French

because of the simple fact that if you listen or look at anything intently for a long duration, the way that you hear or see it changes drastically.

Some artists have associated this with political sentiments. It crosses a wide bridge from art to dance, performance, sculpture and film. For instance, if a group of dancers stands totally still for an extended duration, let us say, four and a half minutes, their subtle breathing movements become larger-than-life gestures. An artist can sit in a chair doing nothing, but by means of sheer duration, appear to fill people's heads with answers to their unasked questions.

The confounding pleasure of these, primarily modernist works is the basic, realist, material fact that we "find" ourselves and the other people around us as being deeply, viscerally present within these empty structures. They bring us into a different set of spatial rhythms. This anomaly is something the work of Pauline Oliveros has addressed for decades. Like composer Julius Eastman's political minimalism, Siltan "peoples" abstract, extended durations with complex ideas about very real issues that are artistically expressed, in part, by the compelling granularity of its live sound.

Because she coats the entire gallery in Yves Klein's signature hue, I must mention a similar experience found in his *Symphony Monotone* (1947-9). Much like this cobalt blue, radioactive pigment he claims as his "International Klein Blue" with which he covered surfaces, objects, and women, Siltan's collective typing manifests as a drone-like, monochromatic field that draws our attention to other contours. *Symphony Monotone* predates both La Monte Young's infamous sustained drones and Cage's structured-silence just as Kasimir Malevitch predates those blank, white, Black Mountain College canvasses. These kinds of pieces employ the shifting sensations we feel, and the inevitable, pressing questions about value we ask ourselves when presented with nothing but a blank sameness as an expensive, classical, fine arts, object in time or space.

In contrast to Cage and Young, Klein's work is a single, intense sonic event that is perceptually defined by its sudden, equal absence. We hear 587.3 Hz played fortissimo by an orchestra for 20 minutes and then we are plunged into the blank space of its afterglow for another full 20 minutes. If Cage and Young intend to impregnate our expectations of silence and sameness with optimistic discovery; with Klein, we are experiencing an alarming, sonic death

of a sound that we've grown into, and somehow this shrill sense of absence is how it manages to retain a vestige of its social dissonance. It's like an imprint burned onto our perceptual retina that we only see when the lights are suddenly turned out.

Siltan's installation occupies this kind of conceptual single inundation, but it pivots via its interdisciplinarity into something more poetic. A constellation of interdependent references to performative action, social sculpture, textuality, and austere formality, impart this work with a self-reflective, historical contemplation that classical minimalism seems, in contrast, to vacate, or label indeterminate.

While her work is not authored as a musical form at all, it is much like Cage, Young, or Klein in that its vibrant sonic life is secondary to its taught conceptual social poetry. Employing a literary consciousness by evoking American Social Realism, labor tropes, poetic futility, and durational minimalism, a musical statement resonates from the social structure of the piece as a whole. Each element in the work, from the historical references to its hexagonal desk-sculpture seems to inflect the other in a transfigured light that coalesces into a suite of puzzle-piece references.

The show is dimly lit with soft spotlighting that contours the International Klein Blue walls which seem to recede from us. Normally, this expensive paint is over-lit to exploit its signature ultramarine, mineral under-glow, but here, the color seems to absorb light away from the space. At the center is a ten-seated hexagonal sculpture of interwoven, three-legged desks that both provide and borrow support for their missing fourth leg from their neighbor, like an inward-facing buffalo stance. It is surrounded on adjacent walls by the metal framed works holding examples of the "un-typed" poetry on painfully obvious, inflated Phillips de Pury art auction estimates.

Typing these texts onto value-confirming documents defaces these appraisals with a free poem. This resonates with the Steinbeck reference and gives form to a textual pivot. Carol Steinbeck came up with the title, *Grapes of Wrath*. It derives from a biblical passage in the apocalypse of the Book of Revelations. An archangel wielding a sickle scoops up hoards of people as the harvest of god's human vineyard, and casts them into the "great winepress of the wrath of God" squeezing blood, like grape juice, from their bodies (Moloch!). In Steinbeck's novel, this image is evoked as a labor

metaphor in relation to the practice of artificially inflating the cost of food goods by means of crop destruction quotas in order to secure a desperate, hungry labor base for profitable exploitation.

Because there is no ink, participants are typing some kind of invisible, white painting of their own. The redundant labor of untyping a book about American poverty and exploitation underscores its political allegory in nostalgic futility. The process is a veneration of the text, but refracted through a poetic of loss and forgetting. The inescapable nostalgia of the actual transcribing of this stark, depression era, overly punctuated, vernacular text, creates an interdisciplinary feedback loop that leads us reluctantly back into the present moment.

This communitarian project began with a solo piece. Her inkless typing of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2006) was a protest against George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, drawing a bold, anti-colonialist line straight through the concept. The typewriters reminded me of many things that are no longer here but continue to resonate in the present. I think of early, cosmopolitan feminism, capitalist absolutism, Social Realism, Socialist Realism, Social Darwinists, labor struggles, the Depression, western droughts, transience, questions of authorship and relentless journalism.

The experience instrumentalizes a complex of sentimentalities about vintage technology and culture. Plenty of art, especially sound art, fetishizes the pedigree of its machines. Audio production is a tantalizing intersection between the economies of sound production and commercial and professional design. Sometimes, an "in the know" one-upmanship can also give these obsolete-technology-art-works the feeling of decade nostalgia.

Silton's work merges humanitarian literary affinities with classic Social Realism through spatial sound and performance sculpture that reaches out to us to connect with our present in multidimensional ways, confronting us with downward mobility, obsolescence, and unemployment, while invigorating the power of poetry. It is an effective example of well-conceived, publicly engaged social performance because, instead of dramatizing or demonstrating inequity, its inclusive simplicity of gesture gives further dimensions to its complex and compelling message, and we find ourselves parts of an interesting counter public.

Much like an earlier work of hers called, *Who's In a Name?*, Silton poetically hijacks a famous artist's name and power structure. Retooling and animating its premise with searing content, she transforms it into a platform for urgent political questioning. John Baldassari's 100-foot LED light sculpture *Your Name in Lights* was installed on the facade of Sydney's Australian Museum. The public was invited to type their names into a website and those names would be displayed for fifteen seconds, like Warhol's fifteen minutes, but adjusted for inflation.

Silton solicited artist friends to instead register the name of an artist who had committed suicide. These names she culled from a Wikipedia list she'd discovered and been moved by a few years prior. Silton randomly assigned names from the cross-generational, cross-cultural list to artists who agreed to participate. In the process, she converts the ironic, celebratory structure into a temporary act of media subversion permeated with loss. The names of hundreds of artists who, for the most part, suffered in intolerable economic, cultural isolation or depression are shown in lights. Baldassari's work reaches out to the public via its semantic spiral between the public desire, celebrity and access. Silton turns this one-liner in on itself, asking difficult questions that point back to the arts institutions that seem to feed on inequity, exclusivity, art labor, star suicides and celebrity. By concocting thoughtful collisions like this, she liberates vulnerable, softer-spoken voices of lost artists. Her *Who's In a Name* intervention eclipses, but simultaneously invigorates Baldassari's gesture.

When I asked her about performing collective typing, she discussed its refracted, activist sentiments and described how the silence, when the group stops typing, is totally deafening. Data used to be analog and quite loud. As a performing participant, the experience is of a deceptively casual form of social isolation of the kind that anyone working in data entry before the advent of office computing and scanning might have encountered, a form of semi-disposable, primarily female labor, i.e. the steno pool.

I spoke with my grandmother who was a steno pool typist and worked during WWII and through the 1950s about Silton's installation. She described her own steno pools as large, open floor plans of about 10 typewriting women overseen by two or three men in window offices situated one floor above. While typing collectively, we were surrounded by the sound of other people's machines and you would have to speak loudly if you were going to be heard

at all. In this sonic field, any attempt to communicate with your coworkers necessitates a ruckus. It made me think that the silence of computers eventually required the installation of cubicles to preserve this strategic isolation of individuals within a group.

As your eyes scan the typists during the performance, the volunteer whose action you watch appears to emerge as sonically louder through the collective noise because their movements seem to punctuate and accent their sounds. Our eyes and ears work together and create a dimensional experience of shifting spatial relationships that form and separate over a long duration as our attentions dissipate.

The vernacular style of the Steinbeck text requires a lot of fussy punctuation and several of these conventions required one to back up the rotor with an awkward, left-pointing arrow key in order to type twice into the same spot. For instance, an exclamation point required a line, a backspace, and then a period would finish the glyph. This kind of typing requires concentration and commitment that felt like a piano teacher's fingering markings of densely contrapuntal music. It reminded me of the poet Lorine Niedecker's ultra-fussy typing-up of the male Objectivist poets' texts for them, with its complex spacing and odd conjunctions, sometimes from their scribbled shorthand and verbal directions.

I volunteered to type for the piece and was assigned a chapter in which an Oklahoma patriarch, Grandpa Joad, is given final say about the desperate purchase of a family car even though he knows nothing about them. He does not want to vacate his failed farm and so his family drugs him and he dies the next day. I subtly inserted a few words of my own, totally against the premise of the work that implied an erotic tryst between grandpa and the salesman as they inspected the interior of the car while the family waited. I felt liberated to grope the text in this way because I seemed to be typing something away from itself into a permanent void and it felt like white-on-white graffiti. There is something queer about the way so many of Silton's contrapuntal games play out just under the table of an illusory, generalized sameness.

Silton's sounds, sculptures and actions call out to us about America's transient labor history and activates a self-questioning, without forcing meaning, of a set of historically leftist affinities that, like manual technologies,

evaporated into an un-inked, unprinted purgatory but are still embossed on our contemporary, vacated notions of power. However, you do not have to see it this way because it is also just an hour of typing.

Sean Griffin was born in Los Angeles where he currently lives. His works manifests as music, new opera projects, collaborative installations and historically weighted performance works. He received an MFA from CalArts and a Ph.D. from the University of California, San Diego. He studied with Mel Powell, Chaya Czernowin, and George Lewis, and is the Director of Opera Povera.

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The Trouble with Sounding: Sympathetic Vibrations and Ethical Relations in “Soundings: A Contemporary Score” at the Museum of Modern Art BY JESSICA FELDMAN

I am watching people listen.

At first, they do it quickly, in passing, moving through the hallway of MoMA on their way to the *Soundings* show. Tristan Perich's piece, *Microtonal Wall*, is installed in this hallway. It is flush with the wall, projecting sound outward, into the passageway. If it were a painting it would be easy to manage: you'd step back a few feet, looking over your shoulder to make sure you're not backing into someone else, and then turn to face the art, to look at it. You might move forward a little after contemplating it in all is *gestalt*-glory, then lean in to examine a detail on the canvas, wondering how it was made, and then step back again. You can't get too close because it is too precious an object for the body to touch or even breathe on. And because you'd get in trouble with the guards.

Perich's piece poses a problem. The museum visitors are not sure what to do about the fact that their ears are not in the same place as their eyes. Walking by the piece, they pause for a moment. They backtrack and turn to face the wall of speakers. But this doesn't really work, because the eyes don't hear. So then they slide up to it sideways, getting their ears as close as they can to the tiny speakers, almost like a cat rubbing against a piece of furniture. As each of the quiet, tiny speakers is playing a slightly different sound, the listeners writhe along the wall, stooping down low to catch the pitches coming from the bottom near their calves, then straining upwards on their tip-toes to hear the sounds from above their heads.



Listeners in front of Tristan Perich's Microtonal Wall. Photo by the author, 2013

Almost everyone is irreverently ignoring the line of black tape on the floor in front of the piece, meant to mark off the area across which you cannot step in order to protect the piece from being touched. Ears rub against the piece, people lean in towards wall and barely balance, strands of hair get caught by the static electricity generated by the fuzzy fabric membranes of each little speaker, and stay on the piece long after their owners have left. At this point on a busy Saturday afternoon, five people are leaning up against the piece, while a handful more cluster around them, waiting for their turn. A guard walks by, looks at the listeners, and throws his hands in the air. He shakes his head and keeps walking.

I am starting this article with Perich's piece because I think its reception simultaneously articulates the strength and the problem of sound-as-art. This work, and sound in general, activates, problematizes, and obviates the black line on the floor. *Microtonal Wall* probably wasn't conceived to address the breaking of institutional boundaries, but by virtue of the phenomenological operations of sound and its placement in a museum setting, it starts to ask questions it might never have meant to ask. Questions about language, politics, money, and ethics. I will address these questions in this article and attempt to explain why I think they were mishandled by the show. My main argument is that sound is an inherently, and especially, unwieldy medium for the gallery space, both technically and ideologically. Because it radiates out through space, and draws in bodies, it's hard to hold in a cordoned-off

commodity-form. Furthermore, and even more exciting, it is very often a transmitter of language, ideas, and feelings. It puts people in relation to each other's thoughts by vibrating their bodies. One would hope a show of soundings would be largely about connections and conversations.

Perich's piece is about resolution, in the digital sense of the term. The piece consists of 1500 tiny speakers, each of which is connected to its own simple microchip, which generates rapid electrical pulses that we humans hear as pitches when sent through a speaker. Each circuit pulses at a slightly different speed, generating microtonal variations in the pitches that are heard from adjacent speakers. By drawing the ear close to the wall (zooming in, if you will) the listener is able to hear these discreet tones. In the middle ground we hear dense discordant harmonies, and white noise when we stand farther back. The piece demonstrates to us the thresholds at which our listening apparatus slides from understanding a signal to apprehending noise, and points to the fact that these classifications are subjective, personal, and embodied. As with much work in the minimalist tradition, the listener turns back on herself to appreciate the piece: the work is felt by delighting in and analyzing its phenomenological and somatic operations in the body and brain. You can spend a lot of time reveling in these operations.¹

This is fascinating, and a great lesson is psychoacoustics. But, to me, the best part of the whole thing was what happened around the tape on the floor. This line of tape is the only symbolic gesture in the piece – and, admittedly, it's not part of the piece, but part of the museum institution. The black line is language: it has a clear meaning, it has a specific history, it has a politics and power implicit in its inscription on the floor. We know what it's trying to say to us and have to decide whether to listen and how to respond.

The piece – and the show, and sound art in a gallery – poses a problem for the gallery institution, not just for the listeners. The fact that our ears don't work like our eyes becomes a political-economic issue. That issue is a fertile, powerful one worth addressing through sound. In fact, it might be one that

¹ It's worth noting that Perich is not the first one to make work in this vein. His piece bears striking resemblance Peter Ablinger's [white noise installations](#), Hans Koch's [Circle of Fifths](#), and Bernhard Leitner's [Wall Grid](#). Perich's innovation in this tradition is that he made a tiny oscillator circuit for each pitch/speaker, allowing his 1500 channels to be held in one discrete wall hanging, without any patch cords. His work is less an installation and more a sculpture.

can be addressed particularly well though sound, as it is a medium that carries through walls, moves bodies, and is not easily fixed in a plastic, solid, saleable form. Instead however of embracing this latent social power characteristic of sound, a lot of the work in the MoMA show was happy to stop with a demonstration of the medium's acoustic and bodily operations. As such, the show missed a vital opportunity to connect the magic of the phenomenology of sound with the problem of the politics and economics of listening and sounding.

Sound art reiterates a problem that the museum institution has been turning over for decades now: What if a work of art is made of something that can't be owned? What if it is made of something that is about movement and relationships? What does that say about what the art is there to do? What does it say about the physical and economic context in which this art can do what it does? Can sound do its thing in a gallery? Can a gallery hold art that isn't an object? Can the art institution provide for work that doesn't care whether it makes for good currency?² I think the MoMA show struggled with these questions, and I think that the longing towards commodities is part of the reason that the show leaned so heavily on the physicality of sound. Sound-as-object got privileged over sound-as-language, stopping short of the very politics and relationality opened up by such physicality.

Perich's piece is an example of this. Carsten Nicolai's kinetic sculpture, *Wellenwanne Ifo*, used water, mirrors, and light to give visible and plastic form to subharmonic sound waves³, creating an almost psychedelic, strobing, radiating object, which visually stimulated the viewer. The piece embodies inaudible vibrations and transmits them through other media to affect the viewer's neurology. Similarly, if more personally, Luke Fowler & Toshiya Tsunoda's *Ridges on the Horizontal Plane* used sound for its physical operations: a fan blowing towards a projection screen caused the screen to

² Video art, performance art, participatory art, relational aesthetics, etc. all have struggled with these questions and their role in the art institution for decades now. [Tino Sehgal's work](#) is, perhaps, the example *par excellence* of artwork that succeeds at entering the marketplace and engaging the art institution without taking on material form. Sound art is a little late to the game, yet the questions still remain salient and unresolved. And sound, unlike performance, can be made more object-like. Unlike videos, sound art objects can be made un-reproduce-able and unique. Sound art sits at tricky nexus in the economy of artifacts.

³ Alvin Lucier's much earlier work, [The Queen of the South](#) (1972), does almost exactly the same thing, but with sometimes-audible frequencies.

touch off a taut piano string, which then resonated through the room, vibrating the air further, and disrupting the projected visuals. According to the wall text, the work explored the "mechanics of perception."⁴ This description is accurate, if reductive. The piece used the vibrating string and delicate screens to draw a metaphorical line from the operations of sound to those of vision, reminding us that fluctuations in air pressure affect the skins of the eye as well as the membranes in the ear. The piece opened up the delicate dynamics of perception to reveal a more holistic model of the sensing body.



Carsten Nicolai, *Wellenwanne Ifo* (2012). Water tank, water, mirror, audio equipment, stroboscope, display screen. Photo by Osamu Nakamura

Christine Sun Kim's and Sergei Tcherepnin's works also deal with the body, but in ways that move closer to thinking about how sound can get us out of our own heads and in relation to others. Tcherepnin converted a used wooden subway bench into a speaker by mounting transducers underneath the seats. Listeners could experience the sounds with their whole body, by sitting on the humming, resonating bench and feeling their bodies move in sympathetic vibration. It is a simultaneously pleasurable and awkward experience to sit in a foyer MoMA, next to a total stranger, and have your ass vibrated. The piece was more than an edgy massage chair, however. The

⁴ Wall text, *Ridges on the Horizontal Plane*, New York, NY, Museum of Modern Art, October 26, 2013.

sounds were composed and the spatialization of the sound through the body was deliberate and crafted. The work drives home the point that objects, like the body and the bench, resonate with and are activated by sound. The dividers in the subway bench, which are designed to partition off private spaces for the sitters and to keep homeless people from sleeping on the bench, also vibrated. In a way, they failed to do their socially assigned job just like the tape failed to keep listeners from rubbing up against Perich's piece. Tcherepnin's work takes responsibility for this quality of sound. The piece is about the way that sound breaks down the barriers between mediums, between objects and bodies, between one body and another. It facilitated a kind of *physical* intimacy between people and things, evoking the possibility of queering hearing: of perceiving sound and feeling intimacies in non-normative spots and sites, subverting public structures for private pleasure. It would be easy to move from this physical experience to a more social or political proposition about the vibratory, pervasive nature of being and the necessity of feeling each other as related "bodies without organs."⁵ I'm not sure the piece fully took me here, however, because it wasn't facilitating expression or communication for the listeners, only sympathy of feeling. Sun Kim's drawings deliberately foreclose vibration. The works capitalize on her hearing disability and depict her inner life in visual form. As a Deaf person, Sun Kim experiences sounds based on the way they vibrate and inhabit parts of her body other than her ears. Her drawings use a range of languages to articulate her experiences and imaginations of sound, or its lack. *All. Day.* displays a large black arch, which traces the sign language gesture for "all day," coupled with the musical sign for a long rest, which signals to musicians that they must be silent for a specified duration. She touches on the gnostic qualities of language – symbols that hold secret meaning for the initiated groups, juxtaposing the Deaf and classical musicians.

From a disability studies perspective, I was torn about this work. It appears scrawled and raw, and clearly was made in real-time through the performance of the brief gesture. While this testifies to the fleeting and visceral nature of motion, I think it does a disservice to Sun Kim's capacity for

⁵ Very briefly: Antonin Artaud's "Body-without-Organs" is a concept deployed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe a way of being in the world in which we are not conceived as discrete and stable entities bound by our skin, but as slow-moving and vibrating flows, who communicate with and activate each other through resonance. See section six of their text *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (as translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

creating more wrought or crafted work using and about sound, which constitutes a large part of her activity as a composer and sound artist. However, in their sparseness, her drawings accomplish something. The viewer is asked to imagine Sun Kim's experience of sound and silence, and to recreate this experience in their ear's and mind's eye. At first, I resented this. I felt deliberately "left out" of the artist's experience of all-day silence, and felt she should have tried harder to share this in the piece. The valences of disability flipped as I became aware that I was the one lacking in the capacity to perceive this sound-world as Sun-Kim does. The piece felt like it sat on the cusp of hostility and empathy. By presenting a visual depiction of a (lack of) sounding I could never know, the piece made a point of excluding me. It stubbornly situated itself across two mutually-exclusive languages, and refused to provide a visceral translation for the illiterate viewers. This generated in me a deep sense of ignorance and frustration, and an awareness of the inescapable differences between experiences and between bodies. Communicating these feelings of incommensurability and exclusion is no small feat. Sun Kim's work gets us try to imagine the experience of someone other than ourselves. She owns her authorship, even if it is by shutting us out.



Christine Sun Kim. *All. Day.* 2012. Score, ink, pastel, and charcoal on paper (left). Discarded earplugs below drawing (right). Photos by the author, 2013

Susan Philipsz's work is one of the other pieces in the show that thinks about process and authorial intent in sounding. She does this by deploying absence. For *Study for Strings*, Philipsz made a multi-channel recording of only the viola and cello parts of an orchestral work of the same name, composed by Pavel Haas in 1943 while he was a prisoner in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Haas, along with most of the prisoners' orchestra, was executed shortly after its completion.

In Philipsz's work, each note is isolated and sent to a single speaker, so that harmonies are only possible when the speakers are positioned in audible proximity to each other. The piece was originally installed in 2012 as a public, outdoor installation at dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, Germany. The speakers were placed alongside and in between the train tracks at the Kassel Hauptbahnhof, the station from which prisoners were deported to Theresienstadt seventy years earlier. Listeners stood at the far end of a train platform, while individual pitches of the fragmented piece rose up around them, some from very close by, some from far off in the distance, barely audible.⁶ The absence of the other instrumental voices and the distribution of the viola and cello drive home the feeling of loss and fracture to which the piece is a testament. The piece juxtaposes the collaborative, live nature of performed music with recording technology to ask us to think hard about who is and isn't present, which voices survive, and what it means to make a memorial.

In the MoMA installation, eight raw speakers were mounted along a wall in a single, small room, encouraging us to take the sound as a whole. As a whole, it still sounds pretty broken: the counterpoint is lacking, we're not sure what the affect or narrative of each section is, the timing of the voices feels askew. The lack of the other players degrades the composition, and yet this lack isn't really articulated in the gallery installation as it was at the Kassel site. More importantly, we are hearing a recording of a long-form, through-composed, linear work, and we are given a place to sit and listen to it as such. A careful museum-goer, who has read the placard before entering the room, understands to listen for absence and to imagine the loss of the other voices when experiencing the piece. More likely, the visitor comes in at some point in the loop, listens for a few minutes, and leaves. Whatever relationships could have arisen in the listener's imagination of the original

⁶ Susan Philipsz, "Study for Strings," dOCUMENTA (13), <http://documenta.de/research/assets/Uploads/Studyforstrings.pdf>.

composer and players get erased and conceptualized. We think about loss, but we don't really *feel* it in this installation. This piece was a great relief to me as I wound my way through the show. Finally, I thought, here is a work about *people*. Here is a work that takes on a painful topic that needs to be sounded. I am very critical of the ways in which the move to the gallery space changed this piece, but this criticism flows at least in part from my interest in the work and its subjects.



Susan Philipsz, *Study for Strings* (2012). 8-channel Sound Installation. Photo by Eoghan McTigue

The clever move in the Kassel installation was to splay out the instrumental voices across the tracks, forcing listeners to engage with the site and to grapple with the fleeting nature of sound (and human life) as their listening through the space attempted (and failed) to bring together these recorded pitches in the same time and place. The MoMA installation negates this move: the speakers are brought close together and the sound starts to congeal. In this case, we literally can observe the ways in which the move into a gallery space can cause a piece to begin to glob into an object. The power of this work was in its *dispersion*, and the imagination that dispersion required of the listeners because of the empty holes it articulated: in time, space, ensembles, and communities.

The project of imagining others and their loss bring us in proximity to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas was a Lithuanian-French-Jewish philosopher, who spent a good part of World War II in a Jewish Prisoner-of-War camp. After the war, he developed a theory of ethics that hinges ethical relations on co-presence, using the metaphor of live, face-to-face interactions. In this kind of encounter, says Levinas, it is impossible to reduce the other to an abstraction or to sameness with the self. In fact, ethicality requires the recognition of difference and the construction of the self in relation to the other. One cannot know oneself without a contrasting other, and one cannot exist ethically or operate politically without first recognizing that there are others out there in the world whose experiences are fundamentally different from those of the subject.

I am interested in Levinas's idea of ethics as a way out of the sameness and phenomenological obsessions of sound art. As an exercise, consider a binary: juxtapose ethics with sympathy. Sympathy derives from Latin and Greek words meaning "having a fellow feeling." If we feel sympathy for someone, we claim to feel her pain. If we act to help this pain, we don't act *ethically*, we act somewhat *selfishly*, because we are feeling it ourselves. "Sympathetic vibration" is a technical term in acoustics for the phenomenon that occurs when a when a body resonates because it is exposed to sound vibrations, and therefore is moved to vibrate itself at the same pitch (or at a strong partial.) A great deal of the work in the MoMA show demonstrates sympathetic vibrations – inside the listeners' bodies, in the objects around the sound source, in the air or water nearby, etc.

This aesthetic assumes that we most convincingly attend to a piece through the sensory experience of the medium in the viewer's/listener's body, not from the hard and humble work of trying to understand and respond to the demands of another perspective. There is a thesis about humanity here: that the way we know another (person or thing) has to be fundamentally hinged on the feelings, security, and preservation of the self. The underlying idea here is sort of close to capitalism: people act as self-interested individuals, and what wins out in the end will be what benefits for the most (powerful or effective) people.

This positioning would require that something that gets *inside* the listening subject, as sound does, has to steer clear of anyone else's perspective and needs. Sound, at once a vibrating gesture and a carrier of language, *wants* to

break down the sympathy/ethics binary, even if the market would rather it didn't. This is the deeper – perhaps even unconscious – reason for the dominant aesthetic in the MoMA show. The anxiety about how to handle sound in the architectural and economic context of commodity (sympathy-as-consumption?) pushed the work to privilege the physical over the linguistic, to emphasize sympathetic vibrations at the expense of ethical relations. Very little of the work is concerned with recognizing otherness, difference, or conditions of emergence. In real, lived interpersonal experiences, both the affective and the linguistic forms of relating become important, and slide into each other. One cannot encounter the other without some sensorial experience thereof, but once this encounter occurs, questions of ethics and politics must arise. What concerned me in this show was the extent to which sound's especially strong capacity to articulate these questions of difference, history, and language was muted.⁷

Levinas's theory of ethics moves pretty easily into the terrain of sound. He focused on the *communicative power* of the face in live interactions, eventually turning to a sonic metaphor to explain the exchange:

To give meaning to one's presence is an event irreducible to evidence. It does not enter into intuition; it is a presence more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence – that of the other The eyes break through the mask – the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks.⁸

The eye speaks. The ethical, the demand to recognize another, operates according to *sonic* dynamics; more direct than the visible and at the same time remote. Doesn't Levinas actually mean the voice? To say the voice

⁷ Brandon W. Joseph, in his review of this show in *Artforum*, points to this quality in the discourse around sound and music. He writes, "... sound art's emotional impact is often understood to influence recipients without the intercession of social, historical, critical, or artistic knowledge. (This fantasy of unalloyed affectivity is itself a long-standing trope in the reception of music.)" Joseph doesn't connect this directly to the art market, but he does connect it to problems of authority and expertise, "disciplinary anxieties" and the art world's need to "shore up the independence of a category like sound art." (See Brandon W. Joseph, "Soundings: A Contemporary Score," *Artforum*, November, 2013, 282-283.)

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), trans. A. Lingis. (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 66. See also: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/emp-symp/-SH4c>.

speaks is not even metaphorical. The voice is the conveyor of language and meaning. That Enlightenment media theorist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, wrote that “speech is the first social institution.”⁹ If this is so, then it is especially suspicious that there was no speech, or even vocalization, in this show. In an allegedly definitive, comprehensive, international survey of contemporary sound art, *not a single voice was heard*.



Camille Norment, *Triplight*, 2008. Light sculpture. 1955 Shure microphone, light, electronic components. Dimensions variable. Exhibition view, MoMA, 2013. Photo by the author, 2013

And if that absence wasn't enough, Camille Norment's piece put a fine point

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Essay on the Origin of Languages in which Something is said about Melody and Musical Imitation,” in *The First and Second Discourses together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 240.

on it. Her sculpture, *Triplight*, is an old fashioned standing microphone cage in which the mic itself has been replaced by a flickering light, which casts uncanny shadows of the mic cage around the gallery. The shadows expand out on the walls surrounding the piece, and look more like a rib cage than like anything having to do with audio gear. The lack of the singing or speaking body is articulated in the shadows thrown against the walls of the gallery. The mechanism of receiving the voice is turned back outward, eschewing communication for objecthood, sound for vision. Norment points to the absence of the breath and voice in her piece, and perhaps to the way in which making something an fetish object rather than a communicative tool can foreclose liveness and humanity. I think this speaks to a larger gesture of the show in general. The voice is left out because it is so closely tied to meaning and speech, to the “social.”

Very few of the works, with a handful of exceptions, took responsibility for sound's relationship to language and its ability to communicate meanings, feelings, and other lives. Seth Kim-Cohen expressed concerns, before the show even opened, that it was going to “rest on an imagined set of laurels granted to sound as the medium par excellence of the ineffable.”¹⁰ Ineffable means “unutterable,” unable to be articulated with language. Indeed, sound certainly has effects that are beyond words. But that is not all it is, or can be. For Barthes, *sounding* (“the injunction to listen”) has to be an act of intersubjectivity.

The injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another: it places above everything else the quasi-physical contact of these subjects (by voice and ear): it creates transference: “*listen to me*” means “*touch me, know that I exist*.”¹¹

Put Barthes and Levinas together and it seems like you can't have a show of soundings without having some ethical and political relationships rising up in the rooms. Yet the MoMA show seems largely to miss the opportunity. After the death of the author, we don't know what to do, except to vibrate each other's bodies with machines.

¹⁰ Seth Kim-Cohen, “Precepts – Concepts - Precepts,” *Voice of Broken Neck*, June 17, 2013, <http://voiceofbrokenneck.blogspot.ca/2013/06/percepts-concepts-precepts.html>.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, “Listening,” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, Trans. Richard Howard. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 251.

Hong-Kai Wang's work is a strong exception to my complaints. *Music While We Work* lets us watch people listen, as I was inclined to do with Perich's piece. In Wang's piece, the conditions and agents of production are on the surface. *Music While We Work* takes form as a two-channel video and sound installation, which is really documentation of a more complex process. To make the work, Wang collaborated with Taiwanese political activist and composer Chen Bo-Wei and "a group of retired workers from a sugar refinery in the small industrial town of her childhood."¹² The workers and their families were asked to make audio recordings of the refinery that would "paint a world composed by their listening."¹³ The videos document their recording processes from different camera views/perspectives.¹⁴ At the same time, we hear their recordings playing in the gallery space. There is a gap here: there is a slight distance between what the camera operator would hear and what the audio recording shows. Experiencing the piece, you feel multiple perspectives happening at the same time. The listener is implicated in this realization, as she is reminded of the difference between her situation as a museum visitor in NYC and the situation of the workers in the video. The audio in the installation is both noisy and referential, documenting the industrial sounds that these workers experienced daily for decades of their lives. What sounds like noise to the uninitiated likely has specific and nuanced meanings to those who have lived with these sounds on a regular basis for years. In listening and watching, the museum-goer recognizes that she is outside of the site. The layers of documentation point to the differences in perspective and understanding of the sounds. Wang's piece was my favorite of the bunch. The concept gave way to content that I felt I could learn from: I had the feeling that if I looked and listened harder and longer, someone else's life and aesthetic experience of the world would open up to me a bit, even though my situation as an outsider was solidly accounted for. Yet, to do this, Wang needed to use video. There must be ways to do this with sound alone? If so, why did so few of the works in this show dare to approach topics of labor, otherness, and the maker's and audience's perspective? Instead of edging towards politics, participation, and relations, MoMA makes it look like sound got stuck once it got in the gallery. I wonder if the movement into the gallery space, particularly as it is folded

¹² Wall text, *Music While We Work*, New York, NY, Museum of Modern Art, October 26, 2013.

¹³ Wall text, *Music While We Work*.

¹⁴ Phill Niblock's film series, *The Movement of People Working*, explores similar themes and imagery, but uses sound quite differently.

into the commercial practice of buying and selling discrete art objects, is pushing sound art (or sound art curating) towards a type of product that denies the intersubjectivity inherent in the phenomenon of sounding.

I am not sure that the show's predominant aesthetic is only a result of the architecture of the gallery space. It's certainly logistically easier to put a bunch of paintings in a room than it is to put a bunch of soundings in a room. The more sculptures and drawings included in the show, the more pieces could fit in the space. So the push towards objecthood makes sense for this reason alone. However, an effort was made in this show to give the pieces some space to sound, to carve out mini-galleries, hallways, stairwells, and other interstitial spaces in which each sounding piece could live. The spacious nature of sound was acknowledged to a certain extent. Yet even those works that broke across the line of tape rarely addressed what it meant, politically or economically, to make a piece that wasn't an object.

Pointedly in contrast, Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* was hung just outside the *Soundings* show: a moving and gorgeous series of images about labor, the place of art in the workplace, shipping and commodities and commerce, war, poverty, the (unequal) distribution of resources, power and pollution. Why then, if such a work could indeed be housed in the museum, was *Soundings* so lacking in voices, politics, and critique? My thesis is that the combination of sound's nature as a potent communicative tool and its tendency to not stay in its place, physically or metaphorically, was enough to push the people and their voices out of the sound art show. It's one thing to make an image that addresses the question of the commodification of art, the relationship with the other, or political action. It's quite another thing to make an artwork that, by the nature of the medium, can't be easily owned, actually moves another's body, and can speak literally, rather than symbolically. Such a work would be potent and dangerous, and wouldn't work very well as an investment or piece of currency, because, both physically and thematically, it would resist commodification and would interpellate its owner.

The MoMA show made me worried about sound-as-art and its future in the gallery. The show seemed to presume that, in order to make sound into something that can live comfortably in a collection, language and politics have to be dumped out of it. In the effort to embrace the way sound is spatial and sculptural, or can be translated to a visual realm, the "plastic" and physical qualities of sound are isolated and depoliticized. The pieces that did move the

body *didn't* move the body to action. But they did cross that line that separates the art object from the viewer.

I think sound art can do more than this. It has the powerful possibility to break down the barriers between art and self because of the way sound works on the body, while also carrying messages and perspectives that originate somewhere other. There do exist spaces and curators who value this quality of sound.¹⁵ If sound art is going to break out of the “phenomenological cul-de-sac,”¹⁶ it needs the space to be about something more than its own psychophysics. It needs permission to take ownership for its operations on others as psychic and political subjects, not simply as resonating bodies, and to take on authorship, perspective, and voice. The next wave of artists, curators, and institution-builders will have to think critically and proactively about what kinds of physical and economic structures need to be in place in order for “soundings” to take on the fullness of their medium’s potential.

¹⁵ AVA (New York), Arika (Glasgow), Carsten Seiffarth (Berlin), Sonic Acts (Amsterdam), Michael Schumacher (New York), and SARC (Belfast) are perhaps some hints in the right direction.

¹⁶ Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), xix.

Jessica Feldman is New York-based intermedia artist with a background in sound, sculpture, and installation. She moves among the worlds of new media art, electronic music, academia, and activism. Her works include sculptures, performances, interventions, installations, videos, and compositions. Many are site-specific, public, participatory, and/or interactive, and deal with the relationships among the body, technology, (the) media, and intimate psychological and communal social dynamics revealed by contemporary systems of control. Pieces have been performed, installed and exhibited internationally at art galleries, museums, concert halls, public parks, city streets, tiny closets, boats, the New York City subways, and the internet. New York venues include Socrates Sculpture Park, White Box, The Kitchen, LMAKProjects, Roulette, The Stone, and many outdoor locations. Her work has received awards from NYSCA, the LMCC, the Max Kade Foundation, Columbia University, Meet the Composer, and the Experimental Television Center, among others. She teaches sound art, physical computing, and interactive technologies in the Graduate Media Studies program at The New School and previously taught in the sculpture department at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University. She received an MFA in Intermedia Art from Bard (2007), an MA in Experimental Music from Wesleyan (2005), and a BA in Music from Columbia (2001) and currently is completing a PhD in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at NYU.

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“Hearing Things Through Things”: Hong-Kai Wang’s *Music While We Work*

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LODHIE

Introduction

Displayed on adjacent video projections are two perspectives of a sugar factory in Huwei, a small industrial town found in present-day Taiwan. On the left screen an initial long shot renders a mostly-cleared sugar cane field. A large harvesting vehicle drives slowly across the daylight-filled horizon extracting still-standing cane husks. The other screen shows a large factory warehouse from which a set of train tracks emerges. The opening scene begins as a factory transport train shuttles toward the camera; the engine crescendos as several train cars shuffle across the screen. After the locomotive clears from view, the scene cuts to a distant shot of a Taiwanese woman standing in the field not far from the harvesting area. Facing the approaching harvesting vehicle while wearing a pair of headphones, the woman holds out a portable sound-recording device with an attached microphone.

The preceding description comes from Hong-Kai Wang’s *Music While We Work* (2011), a two-channel video and sound installation included in MoMA’s 2013 exhibition *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*. The 39-minute work follows a group of retired Taiwanese sugar factory workers and their spouses through a factory owned by Taiwan Sugar Corporation as they execute a series of listening and recording exercises devised by the artist. Wang began initial work for the project in January 2011 by conducting interviews with a group of five of the workers and their families assisted by her collaborator, Taiwanese musician and political organizer Bo-Wei Chen. “Are you retired?” Chen asks Kun-Shan, the husband of the woman seen during the opening sequence of the video. “He used to work at the Railway Section of the department of transportation,” notes an offscreen voice. Chen

introduces himself to the families and Wang explains to them the premise of the project. “I am interested in sound,” Wang begins, “because I am drawn to the people, and to the history of the social relations behind sounds that we hear and listen to.” She continues, speaking to the entire group: “This project aims,” Wang asserts, “to paint a world composed by your own listening.”¹ In her concise formulation, Wang brings together both active and passive modes of sound production while synaesthetically conflating the visual and the aural. This irresolute “split” between the visual and aural—Wang’s formal separation of the video into two channels subtly mirrors the “stereoscopic” nature of hearing—becomes complicated, in our analysis, through further bifurcations of sense and metaphor, fact and ideology. The crux of this article concerns the respective philosophical valences of the visible and audible registers in Wang’s rendering of laboring subjects.

Music While We Work speaks to the emergence of a contemporary desire for mediatized depictions of bodies engaged in industrial labor processes. Themes of pastness, obsolescence, and historicity coalesce around a gesture of *return* in Wang’s intervention: through her invitation to revisit the factory, Wang brings the retired workers back to the site of a subjectivizing and ritualized trauma; for viewers, she stages an encounter with the real of an “anachronistic” form of labor in an era in which, while intrinsic to the reproduction of capital, the body of the industrial worker is increasingly made invisible, moved off-site, or “offscreen.”² While referring to historical representations of industrial work in film, we intend to situate Wang’s *Music While We Work* in relation to philosophical debates around sound and music, and recent appearances of film/video in contemporary art.

Wang’s project frames sound reproduction technics through the lens of moving image technology, while placing historical and philosophical terms of film and photography in dialogue and conflict with those of music and sound. In terms of sound, Wang’s project stretches the notion of “field recording” from its early application in ethnomusicology—the recordings by Alan Lomax, for instance, which link the emergence of American blues to the

forced labor, segregation, and racism suffered by black Americans during the first half of the 20th Century—to the term’s more recent appearance in experimental music and sound art. With respect to the visual, Wang’s *Music While We Work* can be thought to share in the twofold gesture of a cinematic medium self-reflexivity which implicates the technics of both labor and its representations. Examples of the latter can be found in Vertov’s canonical film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and more recently in Tacita Dean’s 2006 work *Kodak*, a film which consists of footage of a soon-to-close Kodak film factory in Chalon-sur-Saône, France, offering a self-referential statement on technological obsolescence and its requisite material labor support. In Wang’s work, however, the focus is notably displaced from that of framing the apparatus of ocular representation to the inscription of a socio-acoustic topology of laboring bodies through participatory field recording.

The important consequences of Wang’s intervention, we want to argue, lie beyond isolated concerns with form, medium, or even “materiality” (a term referred to over 20 times in the *Soundings* exhibition catalogue), but rather extend to engage with the recent re-emergence of philosophical materialism within contemporary art. *Music While We Work*, more specifically, invites a reconsideration of the model of ideology in which the perception of real “material conditions”—human material production in the broad sense—is inverted through the optical device of the *camera obscura*. In short, as opposed to Marx’s original metaphor of retinal inversion central to his and Engel’s materialism, what would it mean to derive a conception of ideology (or its potential displacement) based on acoustic inscription or musical organization? While alluding briefly to the music-derived philosophical materialism and political economy of Adorno and Attali, this article attempts to position the Marxian conception of ideology and Rancière’s subsequent critique in an intervention intended to challenge the philosophical frameworks undergirding the recent reception of sound in contemporary art.

Reworking Ideology: Ocular Obscura or Acoustic Lucida?

During the onset of industrialization in Europe, Marx and Engels launched a scathing polemic against the Young Hegelian idealist philosophers—the German “ideologists” Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner, and Bruno Bauer—in their famous deployment of a radical materialist philosophy based on human production. As already suggested by the primary opposition between idealism and materialism, antinomic operations such as

¹ “Music While We Work (documentary of Recording Workshops).” <https://vimeo.com/43627255>

² Michel Chion’s conception of offscreen sound, closely linked to his notion of the *acousmètre*, is a noteworthy reference given Wang’s foregrounding of audio recording. See Michel Chion. *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*. Trans. Claudia Gorbman. Ed. Walter Murch. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print.

inversion, substitution, ascension/descension, replacement, revolution, flipping, and turning form primary tropes in the Marx-Engels text. Specifically, it is the image of the camera obscura and its inversional function upon which their conception of ideology apparently hinges. “If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*,” begins the well-known passage, “this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (14). This upside-down flipping/turning process alludes simultaneously, it would seem, both to basic human perception—naked retinal seeing—as well as to technologized ocularity, scientific or artistic imaging.

And yet, while the ocular is primary in Marx and Engel’s formulation of ideological inversion, there is nevertheless from the outset a hint of the audible. The figure of “*echoes* of [the] life-process” (14 *emph. added*), for instance, imbricates across ideological reflections as a consequence of *actual* life. Life includes reverberations of ideology rippled across its surface. Indeed, “[t]he metaphor of reflection,” as Kofman notes, “works to convey the sense that the autonomy of ideology is illusory” (3); the stronghold of ideology is supposedly only temporary or partial. In Marx and Engel’s account, it is not art per se, though, in which we find the possibility of piercing through the prism of ideology to reveal a *camera lucida* view. Rather, the savior is science: “where speculation ends,” they argue, “real, positive science begins” (15). The “dark passage” marking the origins of photographic inscription (Barthes 106) and ideological delusion alike has a corrective. In his critique of *The German Ideology*, however, Rancière provocatively asks, “what makes it possible for science to tear the tissue of the production of material life as well?” (*The Philosopher and His Poor* 76)—what gives “science” this penetrating and incisive power?³

Rancière, moreover, rejects altogether the very notion of ideology *tout court*, replacing it with his conception of the “distribution of the sensible.” The philosopher defines the latter as the

system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common [...]. This

³ For a comprehensive engagement with the relationships between Marx, Marxism, and science, and their historical ramifications, see Paul Thomas, *Marxism and Scientific Socialism: From Engels to Althusser*. London: Routledge, 2008.

apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the [...] way various individuals have a part in this distribution. (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 12)

For Rancière, the difference between ideology and the distribution of the sensible lies in the contention that the latter is not a matter of illusion or knowledge, but rather of consensus and dissensus. “A belief is not an illusion to be replaced by knowledge,” Rancière explains, “it’s a consensus: a way of seeing and saying, of being and doing in accordance with a distribution of the position that puts you at your place.”⁴ There is no “inversion” for Rancière because belief in a heaven or hell is not an illusory distortion of a hierarchy to be overcome, but merely one component of a broader topology arranged, in a sense, horizontally. Contrary to the vertical orientation of the viewer required for the flipping function of Marxian ideology—“*vom Kopf auf die Füße stellen*” requires *standing*, however oscillatory—sound is orientation-independent: whether standing on one’s head or not, factory noise sounds pretty much the same. Is it possible then that in Wang’s work we witness an attempt to render a “distribution” of acoustic “facts of sense perception”? Sidelining the *distortion* of ideological optics, in the acoustic domain, if we follow this line of thought, “signal” is a function of *noise*. The opticality of ideology is counterposed by the signal-to-noise ratio of the sensible.

Our aim, however, is neither to resort to a simplistic privileging of sound on the one hand, nor to repeat on the other the well-rehearsed tropes of “anti-ocularcentrism,” the variously conceived criticisms of vision’s alleged dominance found throughout Western thought. Martin Jay traces a broader history of these “downcast eyes” critiques of visibility, including the “antivisual” French Marxist thinkers of the ‘60s and ‘70s such as Althusser. Is not the *Apparatus*—a term encompassing juridical, military, technological,⁵ and aesthetic connotations—of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses, however, a kind of techno-perceptual metaphor (think “recording apparatus”) ultimately not unlike the camera obscura?

⁴ “Revising ‘Nights of Labour’: Talk by Jacques Rancière.” Feb. 2009. Web. 22 Mar. 2014.

⁵ Drawing upon Foucault’s discussion of the French term *dispositif*, Giorgio Agamben derives these categories from the common French dictionary definition in his recent essay “What is an Apparatus?” in *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009), p. 7.



Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)



Hong-Kai Wang, *Music While We Work* (2011), Video still, Courtesy of the artist

“Hearing Things Through Things”: Music with a Video Camera

A fruitful comparison can be drawn between Wang’s *Music While We Work* and Vertov’s watershed 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera*. The latter presents the self-reflexive framing of cinematic capture through a

virtuosic rendering of the totality of activities of an imaginary Soviet city (amalgamated from actual 1920s Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa) by collapsing the breadth of industry occurring during the working day into the length of a single film. While diverging in various ways, both works can be said to contain technological encodings of labor processes, while also reflecting upon the functioning of the recording apparatus. Relevantly, through its insistent reference to the lens and the machinic processes of the camera, the *camera obscura* metaphor can be said to run throughout *Man with a Movie Camera*. In addition to outlining this self-referential framing of filmmaking as labor, Annette Michelson has also argued that *Man with a Movie Camera* goes so far as to form a kind of *realization* of *The German Ideology*, “for [Vertov] situates the production of film in direct and telling juxtaposition to that other particular sector, the textile industry, which was for Marx and Engels a status that is paradigmatic within the history of material production” (xxxvii-xxxviii).

Filmmaking itself is conceived as labor in *Man with a Movie Camera*, evinced by the numerous sequences representing shooting, editing, projecting, and even viewing the film. The film’s pulsing rhythmic editing structure, according to Michelson, binds “the movements of industrial labor (the work of mason, axe grinder, garment manufacturer, miner, switchboard operator, cigarette maker)” to filmmaking (xxxix). There is perhaps a similar sense in *Music While We Work* in which the task of sound recording takes on a quality of work, noting the deliberation and exertion of the retirees as they travel from site to site. In Vertov, the cameraman, comparable to the “field recorders” in Wang, leads the viewer through the city just as the recorders move through the factory. In one segment, the antiquated, primitive labor of mining with an axe is highlighted. The repetitive manual movement of the axe-wielding miner is mirrored by the cameraman’s hand-winding of the camera crank. Meanwhile, Wang’s field recorder remains patiently still, holding out her microphone as the worker fills giant bags with sugar. Further distinctions should be added regarding the types of industry referred to and their respective political-economic and historical statuses. In *Man with a Movie Camera* the optimistic focus is on textile manufacturing, in the Soviet Union of the 1920s a major staple of the economy, while *Music While We Work* stages a kind of lamentational *return* to a consideration of the sugar industry in present-day Taiwan, where the towering prominence sugar held for the Taiwanese economy for centuries has dwindled to near obsolescence.

In his own essay on Vertov, Rancière argues for a *Man with a Movie Camera* implicitly at odds with Michelson's equation of Vertov's work with *The German Ideology*. Rancière uses many of the tropes of "the distribution of the sensible" in championing Vertov. He describes one of Vertov's goals as "making community visible," a task which entails the conflicting features of showing "the relatedness of all activity to all others" on the one hand, and exhibiting their similarity on the other (*Aisthesis* 230). Rancière adds, "the sensible interconnection of activities is primarily the relation of their *visible* manifestations" (230 *emph. added*). Is there not, however, an inherent contradiction concerning Rancière's own critique of ideology and his championing of what arguably figures as the "camera obscurity" of Vertov? Interestingly, the title of Rancière's essay is "Seeing Things Through Things," a phrase borrowed from critic Imail Urazov's text which accompanied the release of Vertov's *A Sixth Part of the World*. Perhaps Wang's intervention would suggest a consideration of the variation "Hearing Things Through Things."

By isolating principal terms from the works' respective titles ("camera" and "music"), the shift from *Man with a Movie Camera* to *Music While We Work* transposes from one system of signification and its concomitant philosophical homologues to another.⁶ We proceed from the notion of the camera obscura to a network of philosophical thinking which links the economic to musical organization. Adorno's "forces of production" and "relations of production" (*Produktivkräfte, Produktionsverhältnisse*), for instance, refer not to the music industry as such, but rather to the relationships between distinct actors within the presentation of musical works; and rather than incidental, music is intrinsic to Adorno's materialist philosophy (Buck-Morss 33). Another example is located in Attali's iconoclastic *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977), where he insists the "constitution of the orchestra and its organization are also figures of power in the industrial economy" (66). He continues:

The musicians—who are anonymous and hierarchically ranked, and in general salaried, productive workers—execute an external algorithm, a 'score' [*partition*], which does what its name implies: it allocates their parts. [...] Each of them produces only a part of the whole having no value in itself. (66)

⁶ In addition, Wang's title already contains a *détournement* of *Music While You Work*, a BBC radio program that aired between 1940 and 1967 which sought to improve factory productivity. The BBC title's pronoun is met with plurality and the suggestion of collectivity as Wang replaces "You" with "We."

Yet as the synaesthetic thrust of Wang's intervention would insist, the move from one sensory-philosophical register to another is here not simply a matter of antivisuality (or pro-aurality, for that matter). Indeed we are still left with the task of theorizing the contradictions which mark out and cut across the historical-formal categories of music and the cinematic and force new philosophical thinking. If not the musical "forces of production," if not the prism of ideology, if not the sensible, then through what mechanism, what metaphor? Are we back to the proliferation of "ideologists," to philosophy simply doing what it does? Ironically, while *Music While We Work* was the ostensible centerpiece of the *Soundings* exhibition, and perhaps fittingly so, it has received little attention outside of journalistic coverage. The polemics around the *Soundings* exhibition have argued against the reductive and acritical grouping around medium and materiality, calling in the most extreme instance for "*No Medium*."⁷ The unfortunate banality of "sound art" aside, we are nevertheless left, Wang's work suggests, with the insistence of *sense*—not an autonomous sense ascribed to medium-specific art forms, but, as with the sensible/camera obscura contestation, a sense for the metaphoricity of sense itself.

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⁷ In his critique of the *Soundings* exhibition, Seth Kim-Cohen cites Craig Dworkin's recent work *No Medium* (MIT Press, 2013) in arguing against the equation of medium with material; instead Kim-Cohen insists upon medium as a "social category" if the term is to be used at all (*Against Ambience*, Bloomsbury, 2013. e-book, Location 1191).

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G Douglas Barrett is an artist and writer. Situated between the contexts of visual art and the performing arts, his work mobilizes forms of "transcription," processes that reuse existing cultural elements, writings, and artworks to produce new texts. Barrett's artistic work has been presented by Audio Visual Arts (New York), Diapason Gallery (New York), the wulf (Los Angeles), PrøveRommet (Bergen), Sonic Arts Research Centre (Belfast, UK), and Neutral Ground (Canada). His critical writing is published in the interdisciplinary literary quarterly Mosaic (U of Manitoba) and Contemporary Music Review; his essay "The Limits of Performing Cage" appears in the current issue of Postmodern Culture. In 2009 Barrett received a DAAD research grant to Berlin. He was a recent Critical Writing Fellow at Recess (New York), and the recipient of a 2013 Franklin Furnace Fund grant. <http://gdouglasbarrett.com/>

Lindsey Lodhie is a media artist and scholar whose research focuses on the history of photographic technologies and the moving image in modern and contemporary art. She holds an MFA in Media Arts from SUNY Buffalo Department of Media Study and is currently pursuing a PhD in Film and Visual Studies and Critical Media Practice at Harvard University. She is co-editor-in-chief of the online experimental media journal *Sensate*. <http://sensatejournal.com/>

EAR | WAVE | EVENT

Issue One
Spring 2014
earwaveevent.org

For the 50th anniversary of John
Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*
BY CATHERINE CHRISTER HENNIX

Editor's note: Though released by Impulse! Records in 1965, A Love Supreme was completed and recorded in late 1964.

...

Let us sing all songs to God
To whom all praise is due
... praise God

...

ELATION – ELEGANCE – EXALTATION
All from God
Thank you God. Amen.

John Coltrane, Dec. 1964
(from *A Love Supreme*)

ON

*WHEN A DIVINE NAME CONFERS A RADIANCE OF
INFINITE BLESSINGS*

DIVINE LOVE, or, the *LOVE SUPREME*, is the shortest path to monism:
the Beloved is everywhere and everything -
nothing is not the Beloved:
a blossoming of a sustained feeling of awareness of a divisionless world,
a world in which distinctions have ceased to operate,
condensing all objects into a single whole
where the self is removed from the self -
a selfless, undivided out-of-body experience,
endlessly open, its interior endlessly dense with translucent light:
another blossoming of the total unity of irreproachable existence
unfolding as annihilation in the presence of cosmic exaltation and
Divine Equilibrium – a *LOVE SUPREME*.

Al-Wadud-ul-Malik

Catherine Christer Hennix is a Berlin-based Swedish-American composer, philosopher, scientist, and visual artist associated with drone minimal music. Hennix was affiliated with MIT's AI Lab in the late 1970s and was later employed as research professor of mathematics at SUNY New Paltz. Hennix met La Monte Young and Hindustani raga master Pandit Pran Nath at the Nuits du Fondation Maeght festival in 1970 and pursued studies with both men during the 1970s. In the '70s Hennix led the just intonation live-electronic ensembles Hilbert Hotel and The Deontic Miracle. In 1978 Henry Flynt formulated what, subsequently, became known as the concept of an Illuminatory Sound Environment (ISE) on the basis of Hennix' performance of *The Electric Harpsichord* at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 1976. ISE was first realized in 1979 at the Kitchen, New York, as a joint manifestation by Flynt and Hennix. For the next 20 years Hennix devoted much of her time to mathematical research at the insistence of her late Nada Guru, Sri Faquir Pandit Pran Nath, serving as a professor of mathematics and computer science and assistant to and coauthor with A.S. Yessenin-Volpin for which she was given the Centenary Prize-fellow Award by the Clay Mathematics Institute, Cambridge, USA. In 2003 she returned to computer-generated composite sound wave forms now called Soliton(e)s of which *Soliton(e) Star* was the first result. Subsequently she formed the just intonation ensemble The Choras(s)an Time-Court Mirage which performs Blues Dhikir al- Salam.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Christer_Hennix

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Liebestod-Paraphrase Paraphrase
BY MARINA ROSENFELD

Issue One
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'WAGNER-LIZST-ROSENFELD'

Liebestraße - paraphrase - Paraphrase

cells/bars:

5 1/5

Microphones (2): ROOM + INSIDE PIANO

POST-PRODUCTION = oceanic, no event

January 2014

Re. *Liebestod-Paraphrase Paraphrase*

Alternate title: *...plays Liszt* (2014)

Materials: Sound recording (*Liebestod-Paraphrase Paraphrase*, SEE Liszt-Wagner bars 14-15, 17, 34, 37, 49, 50), loudspeakers (variable)

Courtesy of: Artist

Record of: Accumulation, chords stacked in imitation of death (SEE Rosenfeld: "Liszt ... reductionist with time to kill," Torrance Museum of Art, south Los Angeles, municipal "Civic Center Drive," white stucco-in-parking lots, sun, night)



Marina Rosenfeld is an American composer and artist based in New York. Known both as a composer of large-scale performances and an experimental turntablist working with hand-crafted dub plates, Rosenfeld has been a leading figure in the increasing hybridization between the domains of visual art and music. She has created solo, chamber and choral works, often mounted in monumental spaces, such as the Park Avenue Armory in New York and Western Australia's Midland Railway Workshops. In March 2014, the Orchestra of the Norwegian Navy premiered her first orchestral piece, distributed across the several galleries of the Bergen Kunsthall, for Norway's Borealis Festival. Recent solo projects include commissioned pieces for the Museum of Modern Art in New York; SPOR, Ultima, Wien Modern and Holland Festivals; and projects for the Liverpool, PERFORMA and Whitney Biennials. Rosenfeld studied Music at Harvard and the California Institute of the Arts. She joined the faculty of Bard College's MFA Program in Music/Sound in 2003 and has co-chaired the program since 2007. <http://www.marinarosenfeld.com/>

EAR | WAVE | EVENT

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My CD Collection BY WOODY SULLENDER

As the year 2014 marks the eclipse of compact disc sales by MP3s (not to mention 'pirated' downloads), physical audio media are increasingly conspicuous as fetish objects. Why do many of us still need to possess music as a material object?

The following videos, largely found via a [YouTube search for 'my cd collection'](#), depict large scale cataloging and sharing of individuals' compact disc collections. Who is their audience? Are these collections of objects a way to connect with others, or are they a surrogate for them? What is revealed in the details of these stockpiled cultural commodities?

This act of collecting is not about listening, as few of these videos contain the playback of music. Evan Eisenberg confesses in *the Recording Angel*, "When a ten-dollar bill leaves my right hand and a bagged record enters my left, it is the climax. The shudder and ring of the register is the true music; later I will play the record, but that will be redundant. My money has already heard it."¹

Even without a physical object, we can see this type of fetishism at work with digital media. A similar [YouTube search for 'my iTunes collection'](#) brings up a notable number of videos featuring recorded screens of "Album View" in iTunes.

Kenneth Goldsmith states:

I've got more music on my drives than I'll ever be able to listen to in the next ten lifetimes. As a matter of fact, records that I've been craving for years (such as the complete recordings of Jean Cocteau, which we just posted on Ubu) are languishing unlistened-to. I'll never get to them either, because I'm more interested in the hunt than I am in the prey. The minute I get

¹ Eisenberg, Evan, *The Recording Angel* (McGraw-Hill, 1987), 24-25

something, I just crave more. And so something has really changed – and I think this is the real epiphany: the ways in which culture is distributed have become profoundly more intriguing than the cultural artifact itself. What we’ve experienced is an inversion of consumption, one in which we’ve come to prefer the acts of acquisition over that which we are acquiring, the bottles over the wine.²

Note that many of the clips below are only single parts of multi-part series. Many of our documenters are creating their own online video collections.

The Links

“Greg’s CD Collection pt. 4” by mediocrefilms2

<http://youtu.be/1W3dDLhOkXE>

11:39

“My Cd And Poster Collection” by Raphael Angel

<http://youtu.be/lyVdDYP91v4>

15:01

“CD Boxed sets” by dereckvon

http://youtu.be/G2_p3B50Jdg

11:17

“My CD Collection” by Hopey Junior

http://youtu.be/l0uD_Bk5QkM

7:48

“My big CD collection” by TheGuillau11

<http://youtu.be/kbReXCI24WM>

9:13

“~ (ASMR) Close Up - My CD Collection ~” by MissWhisperingMe

<http://youtu.be/BGvfPhMGx0k>

21:05

“My Rock CD Collection Part 1 (150+ CD’s)” by FleegalFlargel

<http://youtu.be/2bunlh92pzg>

12:22

“My CD Collection: Reggae Part 1” by Andy Watt

<http://youtu.be/1PJS4GJDAi4>

9:36

“My Psychopathic CD Collection part 2 (ICP)” by WickedJuggalo82

<http://youtu.be/latVBTNsuel>

4:20

“My Heavy Metal and Screamo CD Collection” by Cannibal Elvis

<http://youtu.be/c5iJj5geuhU>

9:39

Here’s a similar video for a cassette collection:

“My Cassette Collection” by Adam Nicholls

<http://youtu.be/Xc94lfl4KnU>

9:56

There are even 8-track collections:

“My ENTIRE 8-Track Collection - It’s HUGE (August, 2012)” by

The8TrackChap

<http://youtu.be/wTBINyhZWGO>

1:14:04

Here’s a 30 minute tour of an MP3 collection:

“My Music Collection - Over 30,000 Songs!” by Joseph Schocker

<http://youtu.be/3AvRz0qNXM4>

29:00

² Goldsmith, Kenneth, “Epiphany No 4: As a result, just like you, I stopped buying music”, *The Wire* (#327, May 2011)

Woody Sullender is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY. His work primarily deals with the socio-political aspects of sound in various arenas such as public space, music, radio, and other media. Recent work includes a disarmed ultrasonic speaker (a technology developed by the LRAD corporation for a variety of sonic weaponry) and a collaboration with Sergei Tcherepnin attempting to push the performance space towards a state of flux, requiring improvisation to navigate social roles and create new structures. Other projects focus on the gesture of erasure as a means to empowerment in the cultural landscape. This has manifested in a range of media including a lathe-cut record of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" with most of the frequency spectrum excised and a series of illegal FM broadcasts of "erased" radio stations. Over the past decade, Sullender has also emerged as a pre-eminent experimental banjo improviser, exploring a range of identity politics while playing with and against the cultural baggage of the instrument. With technical advising from STEIM and Harvestworks, he has developed an "electro-acoustic banjo", rupturing its rustic identity. Previously, Sullender has worked with pioneering electronic composers such as Pauline Oliveros and Maryanne Amacher (incorporating his banjo recordings into Amacher's "TEO! A sonic sculpture" which won the Golden Nica prize at the 2005 Ars Electronica festival). Among other activities, he teaches new media at various New York institutions and occasionally can be heard on the airwaves at WFMU.

<http://www.woodynullender.com/>