

sonic somatic:

PERFORMANCES OF THE UNSOUND BODY

by Christof Migone



errant bodies press

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book like this does not have a single author, but is a series of conversations which the named author wrangles into a coherent whole as best as possible. The book converses with explicit sources that populate the footnotes, but also with influences and inspirations that inform the flow of these exchanges. The principal nexus of the latter is the Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University where the dissertation I completed in 2007 for the doctorate degree constitutes the bulk of this book. My years at NYU were enriched by Sara Jane Bailes, Barbara Browning, Steve Feld, May Joseph, Fred Moten, José Muñoz, Lara Nielsen, Peggy Phelan, Avital Ronell, Juan Salas, Heather Shuster, Mick Taussig, MJ Thompson, and Claude Wampler. The support of Allen S. Weiss as my advisor has been unwavering throughout and I continue to be buoyed by his endorsement and encouragement. Another prime site of my engagement with both theoretical and practical manifestations of all things sonic is Montréal where interweavings with the following persons ebb and flow as they should: Michel F. Côté, Alexandre St-Onge, Nicole Gingras, Steve Bates, Jake Moore, Lynda Gaudreau, Michèle Thériault, Jonathan Parant, Dave Bryant, Simon Brown, Raymond Gervais. Others who have influenced and inspired my thinking over the years are too numerous to mention, but there are some salient figures: Gregory Whitehead, Brandon LaBelle, Julia Loktev and Jocelyn Robert. And Marla, who unsounds me in a way that keeps me sound.

This is a compendium of research and thoughts on sound for the last sixteen years – the earliest, “Vexations”, dates to 1995 and “Pneumatics”, the most recent, was written in 2011. The book contains a significant proportion of previously published material. In most instances each text was substantially revised for this book. Many thanks to all the previous editors and publishers for their support.

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CHAPTER ONE / **SOUNDMUTESILENCE**

The sacred remains:
the assault of the real,
the dissection of fact,
the mystery of unmeaning,
the dwindling of self,
the release into motion.¹

ADRIAN PIPER

¹ Adrian Piper, *Decide Who You Are*, New York: Paula Cooper Gallery, 1992, xi.

1. HERETOFORE UNHEARD HISTORIES OF AIR DISTURBANCES

*Merdre!*²

It is undoubtedly curious to begin a book ostensibly focused on sound art by considering such an infamous ignominious moment; nevertheless, this expletive's impact is predicated precisely by the fact of having been voiced and heard – thus, I would contend that it is a significant marker in the history of the sonic arts. The shock value of the signified is not surprising, but also worthy of note is the signifier's surfeit of the letter “r”. The scandal perpetrated at the level of the whole sign introduces a soundscape where the body can be heard punctuating the language, it convokes itself as a disturbance in the linear and purposeful signification which the theater (at least, of the times) is supposed to impart. My alignment of sound art with Alfred Jarry's *Ubu* is deliberate for it signals the first in a series of theoretical historicizing moves perpetrated in this book which will place sound art in a panoply of disparate and paradoxical contexts. In other words, given sound's physical diffuseness, this text will adopt a similar aposition (or pluriposition). The intent is tactical, as we shall see below sound art has a propensity to not know itself, in other words, its very constitution is up for debate and continual reconsideration. This limbo is welcome, it unmarks the territory, de-

² Alfred Jarry, *Ubu*, Paris: Gallimard, 1978 [1896]. The correct spelling for the word ‘shit’ in French is ‘merde.’ A number of items of interest: (1) the whole series of suppressions of the word suggested by Jarry in his dialogue with the representative of the *Censure théâtrale*: from *Merdre* to *Sangsurde* to *Gigouille* to *Dre* to nothing at all (453–454). (2) The various ways the words have been translated, for instance, *Pshitt!* and *Schittr* (Simon Watson Taylor and Barbara Wright respectively). (3) Links with other scatological moments of the avant-garde: namely Beckett's *Krapp* and Artaud's predilection for the letter “k”, the latter as noted by Allen S. Weiss in the essay titled “K”, *Art & Text*, No. 37, 1990, 56–59. (4) The audience's reactions at the infamous premiere of *Ubu*, as reported by Georges Rémond, eg. *Vous avez sifflé Wagner!*, *C'est sublime!*, *C'est plus fort qu'Eschyle!*, *mangre crochon!*, *sigre trrourr du crull*, etc. (435).

territorializes it, and as such it enables the theoretical discussion to be focused on an art form that is provisionally framed, and therefore resolutely open, and whose fundamental characteristic is *unsound*. Unsound, in the sense that silence and noise are key concepts which are operative within the realm of sound art (and yet simultaneously exceed it). In other words, there is a theoretical component of sound art that this book will address and make moves to include; the realm of what cannot necessarily be heard, and what is left unsaid still belong nervously, tenuously, longingly to the territory of sound, even if it has crossed a border we would have heretofore considered beyond return. Given all this, to speak of an art *form* is perhaps a misnomer, we should instead be referring to sound as an art *informe*, as per Bataille's definition.³

Returning to the scatological utterance, there is also an ontological stake to consider in this moment, for *Merdre!* is performed and rhymed with an absentee partner, *être* (*to be* or *being*). Thus, a verb is sounded, activated and conjugated. Thus, a body is sounded, unveiled and unrepentant. The sonorous body occupies a central role in the avant-garde's deployment tactics. Père Ubu's opening salvo finds amplification and echo in avant-garde activities which persistently eschew the normative and homogenous pull which effects erasures upon the sonorous body. Significantly, the first word uttered by a phonograph – the one developed by Cros – was “Merde!”⁴ ... this time sans solecism. In the spirit of Père Ubu, as the history of sound is currently being demarcated and written by various theorists, historians, curators and practitioners, this book will try to undermine, or at least point to the undertow or undertone of any such historicization, albeit with the realization that such institutionalization is inevitable. In other words, the attempt here will to be pluralize the inevitable – towards *histories* of sound, some disparate, others overlapping, all *sound*, but only contingently.

Contemporaneous with the historical utterance, *Merdre!*, telephony and phonography effected spatial and temporal displacement of voice and sound. Both technological advents were of unsurpassed import to the field for

³ The definition of Georges Bataille's *informe* (formless) is provided on p. 107 where it is discussed in more depth.

⁴ Charles Grivel, “The Phonograph's Horned Mouth” in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, 56.

they actualized what was heretofore the realm of conjecture and imaginings.⁵ These prefigurings were conceived by sound artists *avant la lettre*. This kind of paradoxical and proleptic formulation speaks to the methodological quandary faced by those with the task of historicizing sound art, myself included. In other words, via orality, sound art precedes itself, as R. Murray Schafer stated about radio: “It existed long before it was invented.”⁶ The kind of history that is active here, therefore, can be likened to an aural palimpsest which circumvents etiological and teleological pursuits and finds affinities with interdisciplinary, or better yet, *indisciplinary* practices.⁷ In other words, noise here is a leakage occurring at various levels, from material infestation of the airwaves (e.g. Artaud’s scatological radio work) to resistant strain opposing the propensity of historicization to linearize genealogies and only permit through traffic in delineated intersections. Sound art is a territory exceeding itself, one that contaminates neighboring practices. Sound art is, with respect to its own history, dispersed.

Sound reproduction technologies were part of a formidable explosion of electrical, mechanical, combustive, magnetic apparatuses. The shift from that lone extra *r* in Jarry to Marinetti’s “vibbrrrrrrrrrrrrrrre”⁸ exemplifies a concomitant acceleration and intensification of performed disturbances to language’s strictures – now with a machinic body aiding the corporeal. This technologized insurgence often coincided with a utopic synesthetic drive which Futurism typified (but is not alone in pursuing: Schwitters’s *Merz*, Artaud’s *Theater of Cruelty* are two examples of note that come to mind). Luigi Russolo’s articulation of an art of noise enabled a rupture through the confines of musical composition and

⁵ Some of the key texts which track this period where the imaginary and the technological entwine are: Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Oxford University Press, 2000; Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford University Press, 1999; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and The Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

⁶ R. Murray Schafer, “Radical Radio” in *Radiotext(e)*, ed. Neil Strauss, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, 291.

⁷ Quebec artist duo, Doyon/Demers (Jean-Pierre Demers et Hélène Doyon), have dubbed their practice *indisciplinary* as an intervention on the accepted term: *interdisciplinary*. <<http://www.cam.org/~doydem/textes.html>>, accessed 19/06/11. Fuller quote: *Since 1993, we utilize the neologism indisciplinary to define ourselves as being without fixed discipline (sans discipline fixe) and undisciplined.*

⁸ F.T. Marinetti, in Gérard-Georges Lemaire, *Les mots futuristes en liberté*, Paris: Jacques Damasse, 1986, 40. The are a few variant spellings presented in the text: *vibbrrrrrrrrrrrrrare*, *vibbrrrrrrrrrrre*, and *vibbrrrr*.

instrumentation, but F. T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata's *La Radia* seemed to go further, it espoused a far and wide reaching palette of advances. In this manifesto, Futurist activities ranging from tactilism ("perfect spiritual communication between human beings through the epidermis"⁹), to typographical experiments (*Parole in Libertà* as noise on the page¹⁰), to gastronomy, were declared to reach synthesis via *La Radia*, via radiophony. Thus, not just an expanded musical palette but a project of life, with *La Radia* "the stage becomes universal and cosmic."¹¹ The Futurists can be said to have modernized (and mechanized) the Pythagorean conceptualization of the music of the spheres, the vibratory nature of life.¹² In the aforementioned (*radio existed long before it was invented*), Schafer was referring to the inherent radiophony in what could be termed *religious broadcasting* – ie. the manifestations of the Gods via the wind, thunder, dream, divine voices.¹³ This is a utopic drive similar to the Futurists, here however, it reaches different conclusions in its deployment. As radiophony became radio (became secularized in a sense), Schafer laments the ensuing excess and incessant human din (the voices in this context become *schizophonic*), longs for the symphonious pre-technological era, and imperatively (one might be tempted to add, imperiously) requests for us to "Listen ..."¹⁴ With this ideology in mind, Attali is correct in framing *noise* as a transgressive agent engaged with the power grid, an agent in conflict with music's ability to "make people Forget, make them Believe, Silence them."¹⁵ Schafer states unequivocally that there are "unwanted sounds"¹⁶ and this is the impetus for a pedagogical and political platform aiming to depopulate the soundscape and "let the phenomena of the world speak for themselves."¹⁷

⁹ F. T. Marinetti, "Tactilism" in Christiana J. Taylor, *Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1979, 93.

¹⁰ One should also note here Mallarmé's *Un coup de dès* as important antecedent.

¹¹ F. T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata, "La Radia" in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992, 267.

¹² This topic is discussed in greater depth in Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 201–2.

¹³ R. Murray Schafer, "Radical Radio" in *Radiotext(e)*, ed. Neil Strauss, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, 291.

¹⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, Indian River: Arcana Editions, 1998, 2.

¹⁵ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 19.

¹⁶ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment And The Tuning Of The World*, Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994, 183. This is the title for the new edition of *The Tuning of the World*.

1.1 SOUND ITSELF

Now, in order to begin the endeavor of tracing a history of sound art, albeit a *theoretical* one – in other words, to shift again from that surfeiting *r* and *vibbbrrrrrrrrrrrrrrre*, now to Estragon’s disdainful *critic!*¹⁸ – it could be sufficient to pronounce one word, one name: Cage. A comment of such pithiness, of course, is limiting, Cage as cage. This artificial conjuring of a cage, this artifice, might however be useful for us in order to consider the history of a field which often wishes to claim a certain ahistoricity, to wit Morton Feldman: “We were concerned with sound itself. And sound does not know its history.”¹⁹ This *itself-ness* which does-not-know-itself is indicative of an epistemological and ontological noise made audible via the theoretical trajectory of sound art, and thus, is to be a palpable thread throughout this book. Cage as cage shall serve here as cue, as point of return, and also as implicit reference to the famed experience by Cage in the anechoic (cage) chamber where, expecting to hear absolute silence, he is able to discern two sounds: one his blood circulating and the other his nervous system operating. This event thus constitutes a moment and place where silence and emptiness became noise and plenitude, despite itself (and himself). Despite itself, the event contained a body. Of added significance is the third sound source that Douglas Kahn discerns as present in this scene, present but not reverberating in the anechoic cage: “the inner speech interrogating the two.”²⁰ The heretofore inaudible sound of inner speech is useful to consider as a reformulation of the *itself-ness* which *does-not-know-itself*; here it characterizes a solipsistic turn in Cage.

In the book *Silence*, Cage follows one of his comments about the anechoic chamber with his infamous quip, “I have nothing to say and I am saying it.”²¹ This oft-quoted Zen-inspired sentence is a kind of short-circuited Austinian

¹⁷ R. Murray Schafer, “Radical Radio”, 297.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, “Waiting for Godot” in *A Samuel Beckett Reader: I can’t go on, I must go on*, ed. Richard W. Seaver, New York: Grove, 1976, 452.

¹⁹ Morton Feldman, “The Anxiety of Art” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000, 22.

²⁰ Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 236.

²¹ John Cage, *Silence*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, 51.

performative; Austin would undoubtedly consider it parasitic, noisy.²² In the amplified reading of sound art – via its noise bent – that I have attempted to sketch thus far, it performs a parasitical disturbance. Here, as opposed to with Austin, the utterance does not trigger exclusionary reaction but constitutive action. *I have nothing to say and I am saying it*. This enactment of Cage as both caged and cager with respect to his own thinking-speaking circuitry is emblematic of the solipsistic paradigm sound art revels in. This is an *itself-ness* which *does-not-know-itself* and yet insists on talking, on emitting, on transmitting – feedback: literally, metaphorically, conceptually. Allen S. Weiss defines *cacophony* as: “The ultimate paradigm of sound art, determined by sound production as a dialogical activity, a manifestation of social relations, even when it arises from the most seemingly irrevocable solipsism.”²³ We turn now to the pantheon of minimalist sculpture to find two fitting conversants in the trajectory suggested by Weiss of a paradigmatic solipsism. The two sculptures not only converse with sound but with each other. Robert Morris’ *The Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961) is an *itself-ness* that documents-itself; while self-contained, the piece allows us to be aurally privy to the process involved in its own genesis. That point of entry is the *even when* that Weiss indicates, and indeed social relations are put in play here through the inclusion of the performative in the stillness and finality of the box. The movement is from *making* to *made*, but the verb is kept active from within the word (box, cage) that was borne out of that very verb.

The second conversant presents a muffled scream, its volume literally concretized. It is a response to Morris flavored with a Beckettian failure aesthetic. The matter-of-factness of both titles *Concrete Tape Recorder Piece* and its alternate *Tape Recorder with a Tape Loop of a Scream Wrapped in Plastic Bag and Cast into the Center of a Block of Concrete* (1968) does not minimize (on

22 J.L. Austin, *How to do Things With Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975, 22. Given Cage’s voice, one would, in another context, also want to pay attention to Austin’s location of the parasitic within the “etoliations of language” (22), since “etoliations” refers to a certain “effete” disposition in one of its definitions. For a fascinating exploration of this see Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 3–8.

23 Allen S. Weiss, “Fourteen and a Half Words to Bespeak the Migone” in *Christof Migone – Sound Voice Perform*, ed. Brandon LaBelle, Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2005, 28.

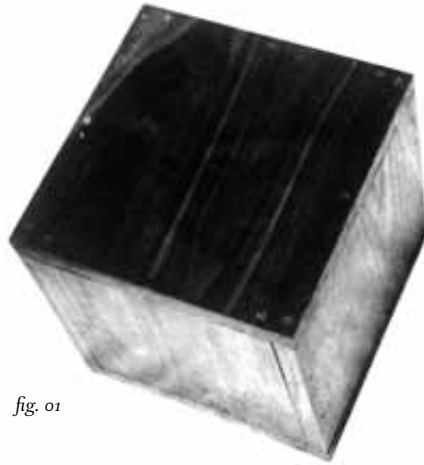


fig. 01



fig. 02

fig. 01 Robert Morris, *The Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, 1961.

Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright. Photo: Paul Macapia.

fig. 02 Bruce Nauman, *Concrete Tape Recorder Piece*, 1968. Photo credit: Stefan Altenburger, Zürich.

Courtesy of Friedrich Christian Flick Collection in Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.

© Bruce Nauman/SODRAC (2011).

the contrary) the suggested violence of the silenced scream, silenced by the concreteness of concrete. Bruce Nauman's piece certainly seems imbued by irrevocability, yet the fact that the tape recorder is plugged in and thus presumed to be sounding is indicative of the generative potential of such *un-sound* strategies.

Consider another staging of failure in the following imaginary dialogue which could be read as improvisations on Cage's theme encapsulated in *I have nothing to say and I am saying it* (with no implication that the theme originates with him). The dialogue develops further the paradox of a language that sounds, but does not necessarily signify anything beyond the fact of its utterance; as per Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but framed as a question: if sound is full of fury and of itself, what does it signify, if anything?²⁴

Abramovic & Ulay: *I have nothing to say, ask anyone.*²⁵

Martin Creed: *I want what I want to say to go without saying.*²⁶

Michael Snow: *I feel like talking but I have nothing to say.*²⁷

Antonin Artaud: *I started out in literature by writing books in order to say that I could not write anything at all.*²⁸

Santiago Sierra: *I am being paid to say something, the meaning of which I do not know.*²⁹

Leif Elggren: *I'm talking about if only I could talk.*³⁰

²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, London: Longman, 1996, 219. Act V Scene V: *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more: it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.*

²⁵ Marina Abramovic & Ulay, *Kaiserschnitt* (1978) in *A Performance Anthology* vol. 3 (VHS), Amsterdam: MonteVideo, 1996.

²⁶ Martin Creed, *I Don't Know*, <<http://www.martincreed.com/site/words/i-dont-know-what-i-want-to-say>>, accessed 19/06/11. Creed is a British artist who won the prestigious Turner prize in 2003. The entire text piece from 2001: *I don't know what I want to say, but, to try to say something, I think I want to try to think. I want to try to see what I think. I think trying is a big part of it, I think thinking is a big part of it, and I think wanting is a big part of it, but saying it is difficult, and I find saying trying and nearly always wanting. I want what I want to say to go without saying.* The sentence quoted in the body of the text appeared in "The Music of Chance," a collection of comments by artists and composers in homage of John Cage (The Guardian, Friday January 16, 2004, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/jan/16/classicalmusicandopera1>>, accessed 19/06/11.

By virtue of the auto-referentiality of these utterances, they open toward silence to that impossible state of stillness. But the silence materializes as a silencing, which is to say there is no peace here, it performs a constant muzzling. The most explicit illustration of this is *11 People paid to learn a phrase* (2001) where Sierra orchestrates eleven Tzotzil Indian women in an auditorium to be taught to repeat the phrase, *I am being paid to say something, the meaning of which I do not know, in a language they do not speak* (Spanish). Sierra's work often delves into the coercive nature of wage labor, in this particular piece language plays a central role and in one single sentence we can hear the decimating effects of colonization.

The aforementioned Cagean variations are encapsulated by Cage's "Making language saying nothing at all,"³¹ for in this statement from *Empty Words*, Cage makes clear that the turning of language onto itself exhibited in the staged conversation point towards a structural collapse of language, at least of the communicative properties normally attached to it. Cage sought a "language free of syntax: demilitarization of language,"³² and *Empty Words* presents a fruitful example of how one may map the resultant demilitarized zone emerging out of this staged collapse. Allen Weiss maintains that *Empty Words* "does not generate a destitution of meaning, but rather a new complexity, a new lyricism where musication becomes indissociable from music."³³ What results are words emptied of their load of syntactical signification and opened in the direction of prosody; in other words, poetry stripped of referential constraints

27 Michael Snow, *Rameau's Nephew By Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) By Wilma Schoen* (VHS), Paris: Re:VoiR, 2002. The sentence is performed by Vivian (filmmaker Helen Kaplan) and it occurs during the Embassy section (which also stars Annette Michelson and Nam June Paik).

28 Antonin Artaud in Maurice Blanchot, "Artaud," *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael Holland, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 131.

29 Santiago Sierra, "11 PEOPLE PAID TO LEARN A PHRASE" (2001) in *Santiago Sierra—Spanish Pavilion*, 50th Venice Biennale, Madrid: Turner Libros, 2003, 139.

30 Leif Elggren, *Genealogy*, Stockholm: Firework Edition, 2005, 30. In view of the awkward grammar there is the added possibility that the phrase has been subject to a mistranslation from the original Swedish. Here is some context for the phrase: The New Immortality [title of a 7" vinyl single] was cut with a drypoint needle and a record player. I was shouting loudly, again and again, the words: I'm talking about if I only could talk! The needle, resting on the wax in my gentle hand, has hopefully registered something of the vibrations of my voice.

31 John Cage, *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979, 51.

32 Cage, 11.

33 Allen S. Weiss in John Cage, *Empty Words (Part III)* (CD), Chicago: Ampersand, 2000.



fig. 03

fig. 03 Santiago Sierra, *11 People Paid To Learn A Phrase*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist.

and allowed to wallow in sonorities. *Empty Words*' path towards *musication* progresses in four parts, the first part is without sentences, the second without phrases, the third without words, the fourth without syllables. A recording of Cage performing Part III in Milan in 1977 demonstrates that attempts in freeing language do not necessarily solicit the expected exalted response. The riot that ensues speaks to the fact that sound itself, bare, unadorned, might not be, to put it simply, ready to be heard.

Now consider Leif Elggren, the last entrant of this staged dialogue, a Swedish conceptual sound artist who has developed mythomaniac strategies of presentation which propose that it is neither listening or sounding that we are interested in, per se, rather it is the presentation of a conceptual framework designed to engage with our phenomenological models for listening and sounding. The liner notes to Elggren's *Extraction* CD demonstrate the nature of his oblique strategies:

This basic sound material was recorded in my biological mother's uterus with my not yet developed teeth used as a fundamental and simple recording device a few days before my birth. This sound material was kept recorded and hidden until recently inside one of my wisdom teeth, but has now been brought to daylight and exposure. Digitally mastered, reproduced and sent out into the room which we all mutually share and which we usually call reality, the world. Sent out with the main purpose to change that room.

You do not necessarily have to listen to this CD, the sound material should be considered more as a tool, a tool with a special purpose, favourable but dangerous.

For best results: load this CD in your CD player, confirm that sound is coming out through the speakers, and then just leave the room. When you come back everything will be totally changed.³⁴

34 Leif Elggren, *Extraction* (CD), Stockholm: Firework Edition Records, 2002.

It is rather uncommon for an artist to advise us not to listen to their CD, and no less than in the back cover of the CD itself. Furthering this self-effacement, the accompanying audio is effective in being unremarkable, inconspicuous in contrast with the phantasmagorical style of the text. In effect, the sound occurs only in the text quoted above, it is chimerical sound art.

Elggren advised the listener to leave the room but the solipsistic statements we have been tracking might not allow for anything other than entrapment. As Pascal Quignard states, “sound is the country which one does not contemplate. It is the country with no countryside.”³⁵ We are not at its side but inside, in a vistaless vista onto ourselves, performing the art of the *mise en abîme* (ie. literal, metaphorical, and conceptual feedback). My contention is that the immersion Quignard is alluding to is double, in other words, sound’s capacity to fill a space is operative in both the physical and the psychic dimensions. Samuel Beckett’s rendition of the latter is evocative for its use of ellipses as much as for the words: “... what?...the buzzing?...yes...all the time the buzzing...so-called...in the ears...though of course actually...not in the ears at all...in the skull...dull roar in the skull...”³⁶ The implication of a sound which does not sound (does not move molecules of air) on the act of listening are significant, and Gregory Whitehead’s approach to radio has long sought to shift the attention from an ear-listening (just another hole in the head) to, following Beckett, a *skull-listening*:

Radio happens in sound, but I don’t believe that sound is what matters about radio, or any of the acoustic media. What does matter is the play among relationships: between bodies and antibodies, hosts and parasites, pure noise and irresistible fact, all in a strange parade, destination unknown, fragile, uncertain.³⁷

This interest in the space of the relation and the notion of play is how one contends with the constraints of the *always already* of representation, the call is to play with the play of difference – within the circuitous circuitry and

³⁵ Pascal Quignard, *La haine de la musique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, 110. Translation mine. Original: *Le sonore est le pays qui ne se contemple pas. Le pays sans paysage.*

³⁶ Samuel Beckett, “Not I” in *The Collected Shorter Plays*, New York: Grove Press, 1984, 218.

without the bearings of the communicative apparatus and its directional and linear imperative. As with Artaud's "I am theater's enemy (*Je suis l'ennemi du théâtre*),"³⁸ Whitehead is sound art's foe; his allegiances are with the material of play. Play: in the court of language, sound is like a court jester, it is able to, as Barthes maintains, "cheat with language, and cheat language."³⁹ Play operates by distraction and by sidestepping signification. As marker of resistance and opposition to the Law, play is audible, but not necessarily with ears. Sound art à la Whitehead indicates a flight into thinking which should not be mistaken as a retraction into the safe confines of the cogito.⁴⁰ There is an embodiment ever present in this unsound art, this thinking art.

1.2 UNHEARD OF

As explicated so far, in this book, and especially the introductory chapter, we shall trace not only the territory of sound art but also pay attention to the volume of the unheard, the volume which activates the synaptic, the insidious volume of grey matter, the realm of the unsound. A proximate program is outlined by Beckett in a remarkable letter to Axel Kaun dated July 9, 1937 where it is ultimately a question of, as he states, "a literature of the *unword*."⁴¹

³⁷ Gregory Whitehead, "Radio Play Is No Place, a conversation between Jérôme Noetinger and Gregory Whitehead" in *Experimental Sound & Radio*, ed. Allen S. Weiss, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 89. A very similar iteration occurs in "Radio Silence, Allen S. Weiss in conversation with Gregory Whitehead" in *Merge*, No. 4, Spring 99, 41:

Radio art is too often conceived as some variation on an art of sound, which to me is a fundamental mistake, or at least a missed chance. Radio happens in sound, obviously, but sound is not the material [...] the material is rooted in relationships: living and dead, present and removed, outcast and audience. The play, if it happens at all is not among sounds, but among these relations, whether thematic, conceptual, linguistic or even based in some sort of circuit event.

³⁸ Antonin Artaud in Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 366.

³⁹ Roland Barthes in Antoine Compagnon, "Lequel est le vrai?" in *Magazine littéraire*, No. 314, Octobre 1993, 28. Translation mine. Original: *la littérature [...], qui triche avec la langue, qui triche la langue*.

⁴⁰ A flight into thinking is a reversal (out of context and only grammatically) of Heidegger's phrase: "Man today is in flight from thinking" by Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 45.

⁴¹ Samuel Beckett, "German Letter of 1937" in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, New York: Grove, 1984, 173. Emphasis added.

As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. [...] Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence? [...] Of course for the time being we must be satisfied with little. At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All.⁴²

The annihilation of language so desired by Beckett is procured by a silence, be it empty or full, which has the capacity to engulf all that has the temerity of foregrounding itself atop of such incommensurable depths. But this silence is merely invoked, it is gestured, it cannot be actualized or made present for the invocation itself dissolves the quietude sought. Bruce Nauman's terse and categorical statement succinctly dissolves the misperception: "There is no silence. Your mind makes noise."⁴³ Such impasses are recurrent and merit further examination for they constitute a prime manifestation of the art of the unsound. An art, which is steeped in contradiction from its onset, its continual insistence in performing with nothing is its *modus operandi*. In a miniature story, "The Secret of the Ancient Music" which Villiers de l'Isle-Adam dedicated to Richard Wagner, de l'Isle-Adam relates the story of a masterful conductor guiding the orchestra through a passage composed exclusively of silences. The conductor's performance was so virtuosic that "at moments, it seemed that

⁴² Samuel Beckett, 172.

⁴³ Bruce Nauman, *Raw Materials*, London: Tate, 2004, 12.

⁴⁴ Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "Le secret de l'ancienne musique" in *Contes cruels*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, 182.

we heard him!”⁴⁴ The conductor’s actions structure silence and suggest a taxonomy of silence.

These measures of silence are attempts at mapping a boundless territory. Hence the seeming absurdity of Murke’s hobby in another fictional moment:

“One more thing,” Humkoke said, “What’s this crap you got here?”

Murke colored. “It’s ...” he stammered, “I collect a certain kind of leftovers.”

“What kind of leftovers?” asked Humkoke.

“Silences,” said Murke. “I collect silences.”⁴⁵

In Heinrich Böll’s short story the refuse of broadcasting is treasured by Murke, an eccentric broadcaster whose unusual penchant could even be considered to turn into fetish. He subjects his love interest to recording sessions where she is told to be silent, and when she pouts due to the oddity of the task, he declares: “Oh, Rina, if you only knew how precious your silence is to me. In the evening, when I’m tired, when I’m sitting here alone, I play back your silence.”⁴⁶ The *unword* is perhaps akin to this type of silence, one governed by desire; for Beckett a desire to undo language, for Murke a desire born of his capability to hear the presence and embodiment of silence. In her allegorical tale of words as they are inhabited by us and how we are inhabited by them in turn, Peggy Phelan portrays words in a similar manner, as unpinned and unpinnable entities which are inclined to play with our compasses:

We had made the mistake of loving them the way teenagers love music: not for the sound itself but for the postures the music allowed us to take under its cover: the slouch, the wriggle, the scream, the ache, the joy, the question. We forgot to love the words the harder way: not “for themselves,” since they were supremely for us, but for the more-in-them-than-themselves that made it possible for them to create something we

⁴⁵ Heinrich Böll, “Murke’s Collected Silences” in *The Stories of Heinrich Böll*, trans. Leila Vennewitz, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987, 495–514.

⁴⁶ Böll, 511.

⁴⁷ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*, New York: Routledge, 1997, 7.

could never control, the more-in-them that made it possible for them to travel to places whose topography we could never map.⁴⁷

The inability to map is perhaps due to the immersive nature of language, it brings to the fore our inability to stand outside of language, the ageless problematic endeavor of discussing language from within language (reminiscent of the *country with no countryside* evoked by Quignard earlier). Sound is subject to the same paradox, especially as a consequence of my expansion of the term to include an *unsound*. The *topography we could never map* is an apt phrase for a study of an art form that remains ungraspable, that speaks but remains unspeakable. Sound blurs boundaries, its frontiers are arbitrary and shifting. Any art form that has a living tradition necessarily displays the same fluidity, but sound art is peculiar in that it is intimately entwined with its antithesis: silence. Yet Cage taught us that silence is chimerical. Its purity is conceptual, it is an impossibility. As such, silence haunts all creative acts, its negation provides the constitutive ground for these acts. Silence is the empty vessel, the syncopal agent that rhythms the foreground which sound inhabits. Silence and sound add up to a beat, they drive the pulse, they are inextricable within the rhythmic.

Silence, sound, noise, radio; slippages between these terms have been continual and deliberate throughout – methodology appropriate and central to this diffused history. A different slippage which has had wide repercussion and is, I think, less generative, has been the subsumption of sound into music. As with the Futurists (especially Russolo), Cage espoused this emancipatory, colonizing thrust. This *folding into* worked for Cage in tandem with *indeterminacy*. In this supposed ego-less system, the work of chance had to have free reign – as Nyman points out this is a *natura naturans* which denies agency and is thus politically dangerous.⁴⁸ The important nuances which distinguish Cage from Boulez with respect to chance are fully explored by Allen Weiss in *Phantasmic Radio*, where the former's position can be summarized by the

⁴⁸ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1974], 26.

⁴⁹ John Cage and Pierre Boulez in Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*, Durham, nc: Duke University Press, 1995, 51 and 45 respectively.

phrase “a purposeful purposelessness” and the latter’s quest to organize delirium means that one would be foolish to “believe only in the vertigo of improvisation and the powers of ‘elementary’ sacralization.”⁴⁹ Although referencing Artaud in this last statement, Boulez’s divergence with Cage occurs along the same lines. While Cage is clearly resisting any strategy of containment, Weiss is correct in pointing out that: “Ironically, the ego returns through the institution of this style as a coherent deformation of the modern musical field.”⁵⁰ The result: an (over)determined indeterminacy; we end up with a coherent system (however deformed) and this entails patrols guarding the borders. Thus, Boulez and Cage fall into structures which only more subtly perform what Schafer does quite bluntly, as we saw earlier, for him *noise* is simply *unwanted sound* and legislation driven by public opinion should be instituted in order to ensure that we hear only a wanted, willed, soundscape.

Contrast the aforementioned attempts at authoritative delimitation with statements much more openly, clearly, willfully steeped in paradox. The first by Anthony Braxton: “[Music] is the sonic fabric, the vibrational fabric even going past sound, that holds it all together, that unifies materialistic experience.”⁵¹ The statement seems to rekindle the music versus sound debate and indeed it delves in it, but it also veers past, for it seems to posit a sonic fabric that goes beyond sound. This contradictory assertion echoes the second declaration, one by Jocelyn Robert, Quebec-based sound artist, who ups the ante with the provocation: “In sound art, sound is secondary.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Weiss, 52.

⁵¹ Anthony Braxton in Steve Koenig, “Anthony Braxton: Between the Quadrants” in *All About Jazz*, June 2002, 9.

⁵² Jocelyn Robert in Louise Provencher, “Jocelyn Robert entretien avec Louise Provencher,” *Espace*, No. 59, Printemps 2002, 7. Robert follows by stating that “in music the primary interest is the sound, whereas in sound art it might be the action of the artist, the site, the historical reference, the objects utilized, the moment chosen, rather than the resulting sound in and of itself.” Translation mine. Original: *dans l’art audio, le son est secondaire*.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, “Lacan, le «libérateur» de la psychanalyse” in *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, vol. IV 1980–1988, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 205.

1.3 BREAKDOWN

Foucault spoke of Lacan's textual hermeticism as a deliberate plan of action, one which obliges the reader to realize that the work necessary to comprehend the text would be the work one would have to realize on oneself.⁵³ This kind of supplementary requirement is similarly impelled by the theorization of sound art I am expositing, which could be summarized, colloquially, as *a sound art for the hard of hearing*. Chapter 1 puts into practice the strategy of displaying a certain opacity, a certain resistance to linearized coherence. This tactic will be operative throughout the book, in Chapter 1 it is put in service of an exposition of certain key terms, namely *unsound*, *unword*, *taciturntablism*. The intent is less to make a case for them, than to put them into play, to observe how they move, how they propel themselves with a kind of *idiorhythm*.⁵⁴ It is an investigation which combines discerning moves with opposite movements of deterritorialization, or lines of flight (staking out the territory in order to be better able to leave it).

Following the brief and polemic overview mixing historical, theoretical and critical components (plus this chapter breakdown), this introductory chapter delves into various manifestations of silence. In fact, it becomes necessary to speak of silences, plural; Barthes, for instance, distinguishes between *tacere* and *silere*, the first indicates a mutism in the context of speech and hence is imbedded in a power equation, the second points to the quietude of nature and the divine.⁵⁵ Lisa Schwartz marks a similar cleavage, differentiating between a Larundic silence and a Harpocratic one. Zeus had torn the tongue out of the goddess Larunda and henceforth Hermes had learnt to interpret her silence. Thus a Larundic silence is one interpretable and meaningful. Harpocrates was a god who displayed enigmatic silence according to the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, thus Harpocratic silence is the empty silence of reflection and meditation.⁵⁶ These distinctions are useful but they

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, 47. Neologism by which Barthes means a system in which everyone should be able to find, impose and preserve their own rhythm of life.

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Le Neutre*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, 50.

⁵⁶ Lisa Schwartz, "Understanding Silence: Meaning and Interpretation" in *Performance Research*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1999, 8.

can also be blurred, especially in circumstances where the parameters of the self are put into question. For instance, consider Jonty Semper's archival project entitled *Kenotaphion*, which assembles the BBC recordings of the silences commemorated on Armistice and Remembrance Days every year between 1929 and 2000. Over and above the obvious social function of these broadcasted silences, the liner notes propose an astonishing role for them: "to reduce all local noises to the right proportions, so that silence may be heard for what it really is, a solvent which destroys personality and gives us leave to be great and universal."⁵⁷ This evocatively echoes Barbara Browning's description of an anonymous silence, one that also wishes to remain *unwritten* and *unrecorded*.⁵⁸ The contexts differ but both rest on the somatic, both manifest bodies which *remain* – despite themselves. The airwaves are embodied by our breaths – current, past and future. The *communicability* of the disease tracked by Browning is manifest in the book in the form of a generalized and dissipated (but potent nonetheless) condition. One primarily situated in Western postmodern late capitalism and animating from within it, as Lyotard states, a "monster of ambivalence, [...] an 'I' without a self (*Je-sans-moi*)."⁵⁹ My interest all through Chapter 1 is in exploring and deploying the ingredients and user manual of the solvent as it acts upon the "I" in various sites and situations. The intent is to trace the trajectory of the (de)construction of the subject as it manifests itself through sound and silence, and the language which is the oscillating rhythm between the two.

The implicit teratology of the first chapter continues in the following one, where at first, mouths, shut and agape, fleshy and formless, find their place. Then the discussion migrates south, where windy orifices operate, before

⁵⁷ Adrian Gregory, "The Silence and the History," liner notes accompanying Jonty Semper, *Kenotaphion* (CD), Newcastle upon Tyne: Locus +, 2001. The text I quote is actually presented as a citation but an uncredited one, this would seem appropriate for a project whose title refers to a cenotaph. I did, however, subsequently find that the second part of the quote (*Silence is a solvent that destroys personality, and gives us leave to be great and universal*) can be attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson Vol. II*, New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1903, 343.

⁵⁸ Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1998, 11 and 175.

⁵⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Soundproof Room: Malraux's Anti-Aesthetics*, trans. Robert Harvey, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, 68.

returning to the intricacies of the split between spit and saliva. Underlying the bulk of the discussion in this chapter where the body is omnipresent, is an interest in those involuntary and incomprehensible movements which seem to fall into a nether of behavior all too often summarily dubbed: madness. Madness, as in the panoply of “twitches, tics, swellings, and contractions that do not seem to express meaning or that cannot be performed at will.”⁶⁰ Madness disrupts, it is the nonsequitur par excellence, or the ultimate ellipse: “the ellipsis eclipses the apparent movement of meaning and its support, the ego.”⁶¹ Further articulating the nature of this compromised self, Jonathan Strauss adds: “[The mad self] is unspeakable and unspeaking, existing elsewhere than in its expression. It expresses itself only as a gap or an interruption. [...] The mad self is, in short, a refusal of sublimation. It is for this reason that Hegel speaks of it as an obstruction to totalization.”⁶² The incapacity to assimilate everything renders any utopic project moot, it creates an outside (not matter how small) which constantly jars any attempt to universalize. The relish in noise, actual and metaphoric, activates and operates this resistance to totalization. A necessarily provisional undertaking, but one which is constantly in renewal and replenishment.

A beyond language, or a language beyond meaning – these two states (to be more precise, states of statelessness), both impossible, both recurring in this book, find a kind of embodiment in the stutter. The attention of the first section of Chapter 3 centers on this speech *impedance*.⁶³ The first two chapters stuck the sonic in questions of subjecthood/objecthood/abjecthood, here the “wavering emission of the voice, [the] marvelous buccal undulation,”⁶⁴ as Lorca described the stutter, is our entry point to a discussion of the rhythmic

⁶⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, “Toward a Universal Language of Motion: Reflections on a Seventeenth-Century Muscle Man” in *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster, Indiana University Press, 1995, 30.

⁶¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 62.

⁶² Jonathan Strauss, *Subjects of Terror: Nerval, Hegel, and the Modern Self*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 84.

⁶³ I have recruited this term from the domain of electronics where, as with “impediment”, it also refers to a “hindrance or obstruction”. But *impedance* has a supplemental poetic and, therefore, generative force; it moves, it *dances*.

⁶⁴ Federico García Lorca, *In Search of Duende*, trans. Christopher Maurer, New York: New Directions, 1998, 3.

and arrhythmic, the fluent and dysfluent. These pairings are examined in the context of community and the relational, followed by the temporal and later (by Chapter 4) these expand to include spatial considerations. The stutter appears in certain key theoretical texts as the deployment and eruption of the foreign and the somatic upon language; with this frame of reference the 1841 diagnosis by the appropriately named Dr. Malebouche (*badmouth*) that stutters suffered from a tongue which lacked “contractile power,”⁶⁵ becomes, metaphorically, a sign of the stutter’s ability to disrupt the habitual restraints and confines in benefit of an ethos of extensibility. That is, a state whereby a tongue, by reaching out and letting loose, blurs the delineating lines of the *I*. Language is bypassed in favor of rhythmic and sonic play – an *impedance*.

The mischievousness of the stutter is amplified by the fact that it hinges on unpredictable and always differentiable repetition. Satie in composing *Vexations* undoubtedly did not follow such theoretical agenda, but the legacy of his composition on theoretical and conceptual strategies around repetition, endurance, and time is significant. The second section of Chapter 3 fully delves into *Vexations* and examples post hoc. The manner by which works such as *Vexations* bend, stretch, mutate time convincingly counter statements such as the following made by American sound artist Stephen Vitiello: “I always come back to this definition, which works for me: Music can be defined by sound in time, while sound art may be defined by sound in space.”⁶⁶ In fact, time and space become indistinguishable (or at least imbricated) when either of those parameters are nudged beyond accepted limits, such is the case for *Vexations* and its ilk. At those moments, at those points, the opposition between sound art and music becomes counterproductive (hence my accent on the usage of *rhythm* in its broadest sense). Territorial disputes and desires to subsume the other are non-generative endgames, especially as it pertains to

⁶⁵ F. Malebouche, *Précis sur les causes du Bégaiement, et sur les moyens de le guérir*, Paris: Fortin, Masson et Cie, 1841, 16.

⁶⁶ Stephen Vitiello in *Sound Art Now: A Symposium*, an online roundtable for Artforum moderated by Christoph Cox in April of 2004. Around the virtual table were art historian Branden W. Joseph, composer and author David Toop, curators Anthony Huberman and Debra Singer, and sound artists Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Steve Roden, Marina Rosenfeld, and Stephen Vitiello. The discussion is archived here: <http://www.artforum.com/symposium/id=6682&page_id=2>, accessed 19/06/11.

performative manifestations that epitomize fluidity and insist on porosity.

Max Neuhaus defines a sound installation as “an anonymous performance that’s constant,”⁶⁷ this enigmatic denotation is an apt one for the fourth and concluding chapter, for here the gallery space (the visual stage) is investigated for its performative qualities through a reflection on the polysemy of *volume* and further development of the term *unsound*. Here sites embody performance, they breathe and reverberate it. From the visual stage we move to include the musical stage, as well as the stage of the shot in the ethnographic encounter. The shock of the shot provides a uniquely potent crystallization of space and time; José Muñoz vividly illustrates the stakes of such violence: “Minoritarian subjects do not always dance because they are happy; sometimes they dance because their feet are being shot at.”⁶⁸ The urgency of such debacles is addressed here and percolates across the spectrum of sites examined in this chapter, be they a prison cell block converted into a Museum, a prankish recording project, or rifle shots in a deserted Wall Street. The concluding section of the chapter, titled *As It Empties Out*, moves through a series of somewhat enigmatic scenes which tune the discussion further into the morbid tone that had seeped through the chapter – sound amongst the *living impaired*.

Finally, finality is of the order, the moment of death, when the music stops, but the coda flirts with infinity and articulates a desire to go beyond itself, to resist its fate, leave the door open and persist. The coda impersonates a glissando, a sonic wave which does not easily accommodate delimitation even when placing the *unsound* on the electromagnetic spectrum (after all, when would we pinpoint the before and after of a continuous fade?). The intent here is to suggest that my tactical approach in this culminating moment, indeed through the entire book, is not to present a definitive history *of*, nor even an alternative one, but an intervention, a commentary, a *crritical* one. This strategy

⁶⁷ Max Neuhaus in Steve Roden, [email to the author], March 14, 2006. Responding to a query for bibliographic info regarding the Neuhaus quote, sound artist Roden states: *I’m working with the Jean Brown Archives at the Getty In Los Angeles which contains massive amounts of loose papers. The folder I found the interview in was simply labeled “Max Neuhaus” and had mostly exhibition announcements and newspaper clippings and the interview is a typed xerox with no date and no name for the interviewer, it might be unpublished – a great quote from an anonymous source?*

⁶⁸ José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 189.

engenders trajectories replete with unresolved and inconclusive arguments. This deliberate open-endedness came as a response to the material and as evidence of an alignment with the notion that *unsound* is fundamentally of sound but also simultaneously fully other, fully foreign – unstable, fluctuating, multifarious. To illustrate, consider the curious plethora of synonymous scientific terms for microsound:

Acoustic quantum, sonal atom, grain, glisson, grainlet, trainlet, Gaussian elementary signal, Gaussian pulse, short-time segment, sliding window, microarc, voicel, Coiflet, symmlet, Gabor atom, gaborette, wavelet, chirplet, Liénard atom, FOF, FOG, wave packet, Vosim pulse, time-frequency atom, pulsar, waveset, impulse, toneburst, tone pip, acoustic pixel, window function pulse, kernel, logon, frame.⁶⁹

Each is assuredly accompanied by its own provenance, but each also contains an infinite metaphoric potential. Each embodies its own point of departure, its own tangent. The ensuing multivalence corresponds to Deleuze's outline of Jarry's approach to language: "[He] works with two languages, activating a dead language within a living language, [...] the affect [this] produces in the current language is a kind of foot stomping, a stammering, an obsessional tom-tom, like a repetition that *never ceases to create something new*."⁷⁰

To close, it should be noted that Jarry was reported to speak in a rapid staccato-like manner.⁷¹ Appropriately, a similar tempo and temperament befalls the style and pace of this book. It constantly and wantonly performs a breakdown. The pace of the text may be rapid but it performs in a variety of modes or densities; in parts a profusion of aperçus scroll through, in others, in-depth analyses are indulged. The to and fro between these modes, both

⁶⁹ Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 21.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 98. Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, New York: Grove Press, 1969, 86. Full quote: *Jarry had a high, rapid, staccato manner of speech that made his conversation hard to understand. A similar description appears in Alfred Jarry, Ubu, Paris: Gallimard, 1978, 507 n.7. Translation mine: We know that Jarry used and exploited a very peculiar pronunciation, which was both rapid and almost impersonal. Original: On sait que Jarry usa et abusa d'une prononciation très spéciale, à la fois rapide et presque impersonnelle, détachant nettement les mots.*

meticulous in their own manner, is representative of the methodology employed in the research and writing process. The method could be described as one where topics are developed and scrutinized with the intent to present arguments in an expansive manner and to pay particular attention to the paradoxes that have a propensity to ensue from a field that does not know itself.

2. TACITURNTABLISM

2.1 REDUCTIO

Silence epitomizes the prescriptive. Once silence is beckoned by sound, it is deneutralized and split into the silencer and the silenced. This cleavage enables us to consider mutism as that paradoxical state where silence amplifies the volume of the relation: *Shut up*. Mutism speaks silence full blast; it adjoins Morton Feldman with Merzbow, Beckett with Busta Rhymes. *Honk if you love silence*. Mutism is silence's honk, it tailgates silence. *I wish I would shut up* – a terse and acerbic performative, a reduction, a silencing, but one that does not concern you, at least not directly. Here the silencer is also the silenced. This is certainly less brash, less oppressive and violent than the more often heard *Shut up!* Emphasis there is on the imperative muzzle. When I wish it upon myself as a call for self-restraint, self-censorship, I perform a voicing that seeks to shut itself. Oftentimes this self-admonishment is heard only internally, just as *Shut up!* is probably secretly desired infinitely more often than it is verbalized. To posit taciturnity as a tactical wedge between the silencer and the silenced is not to increase the distance between the two but to activate their entwining, to accent the turn in taciturn.

In this context, the figure of the taciturntablist that I shall depict and develop in this section is of an agent who posits the taciturn in its active mode. This being a space that turns on itself, a space that revolves and convolutes. A state of spin where one can turn the table and disturb, however meekly, the parameters of a given discourse, instilling epistemic shifts at the level of hairline fractures. Reticent revolutionaries, taciturntablists are more tinycore than hardcore, they make their mark by erasing themselves, they never have to tell themselves to shut up. For us to hear the merest diminutive peep, they have to tell themselves to *Speak up!* The taciturn individual not only keeps silent but keeps silence, that is, instills the space of the relation with a silence that must be kept. Bartleby's *I would prefer not to* delineates a space of repeated refusal, which, among other things, negates defining the space of work to



fig. 04

fig. 04 Philip Von Zweck, *Honk If You Love Silence*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Lars Söderkvist.

accommodate his employer's agenda or tune. The form of the utterance is of import in Melville's short story, its parsimonious politeness jars by embedding the absoluteness of the refusal in a phrase that eschews confrontation. This is the mark of the taciturn: indifferent stealth counters the affront. The story concludes with an articulation about what intertwines the effaced Bartleby, former subordinate clerk at the Dead Letter Office, with the imperative faces in his face: "On errands of life these letters speed to death."⁷² These letters are sent, but miss their mark. Their death is not on arrival, they never arrive. They communicate their failure to communicate. As Giorgio Agamben observes through Bartleby, "What hampers communication is communicability itself; humans are separated by what unites them."⁷³ Bartleby's errand is to speed to death, and any obstruction that would slow him down in the process is met with a fate worse than *Return to Sender*. Bartleby not only bypasses the communicative act; he also neutralizes the attempts of the characters around him to communicate. His failure to perform and to communicate is the recurring topic of discussion, his speed up into separateness the unifying premise of Melville's narrative.

In a comparative register, Jean-Pierre's mutism in Nathalie Sarraute's play *Silence* becomes the object of consternation for the other four characters. They cannot accommodate the contrarian and contradictory presence that separates and unites them as embodied by Jean-Pierre. His interventions towards the end of the play further accentuate an aspect of the laconic temperament that Bartleby exemplified: impassivity. Jean-Pierre's two lone entries in the conversation relish in the perfunctory: "By Labovic?" and shortly after "Labovic, you said? Who's the publisher?"⁷⁴ These retorts are witty in their

⁷² Herman Melville, "Bartleby" in *Billy Budd and Other Stories*, New York: Penguin, 1986, 46. A pertinent work that does not refer to Bartleby explicitly, although created by an avowed Melville aficionado, is Gregory Whitehead's audio piece *Dead Letters* (1985). This work will be discussed later in this section.

⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 82. The almost identical formulation can be found in Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 84. It is also useful to think of the double-sidedness of the word "we" in Spanish, it can be read as "nosotros" (we) or, once split, as "nos otros" (our others).

⁷⁴ Nathalie Sarraute, "Silence" in *Collected Plays*, trans. Maria Jolas and Barbara Wright, New York: George Braziller, 1981, 106–107.

insignificance and they show that the taciturn is not necessarily malicious, but simply... *prefers not to*. In this case, he prefers to ignore the play's entire focus on his mutism by waiting for the final moments to nonchalantly interject a mundane question. His participation is akin to the rather impossible scene of a parked car honking at another parked car; idleness in action.

A site of predilection for these displays of laconic exchange is the table. In Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*, there is a syncope of knocks on the table, the Listener interrupts the Reader with a knock at seemingly random intervals, but the Reader continues, moving forward but also returning to the phrase "Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words."⁷⁵ We could conceive of this Listener as a proto-DJ, with the rudimentary technique of knocking the needle off the record and interrupting the play of the reading (or the reading of the recording). And in this repetitive hearing of *unspoken* words, we can discern a turntablism *avant la lettre*, one that portmanteaus itself with *taciturn*, one that also echoes Burroughs's proposition that the *cut*, the *edit* has the potentiality to leak the future.⁷⁶ A taciturntablism in which the act of taciturning turns the unspoken words into ones heard, though still skipping the stage of them being spoken – for presence here is not consequent of liveness, but symptomatic of deadness. Beckett's plays often seem to be transmissions from a post-mortem space, or a space where time is at a standstill. In *Ohio Impromptu*, the cut is stuck, what it leaks has no tense. A recording is precisely the instantiation of this temporal quagmire – its supposed fixity is pure fabrication. In fact, the recorded object, in its capacity to always become a playable object, to be played back, is continually re-quoting the past and thereby resituating it in a future that becomes present when the needle drops and finds the groove.

This potentiality, this becoming, culminates in the well known tense scrambler uttered by Poe's M. Valdemar: "I am dead."⁷⁷ As Allen S. Weiss eluci-

⁷⁵ Samuel Beckett, "Ohio Impromptu" in *The Collected Shorter Plays*, New York: Grove Press, 1984, 285.

⁷⁶ William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*, New York: Grove Press, 1962, 213. Full quote: [...] listen to your present time tapes and you will begin to see who you are and what you are doing here mix yesterday in with today and hear tomorrow your future rising out of old recording you are a programmed tape recorder set to record and play back (213). Earlier in the same volume, Burroughs also famously stated: Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk (49). This quote comes back into play on p. 74.

dates in *Breathless*, this enunciation's inconceivability is double, first, to be blunt, the dead do not speak. Secondly, it is uttered by an airless voice: it is not produced by a set of lungs.⁷⁸ Jean-François Lyotard's notion of a "mutic beneath music" is a useful theoretical term at this juncture.⁷⁹ Lyotard speaks of a sonorous gesture, an unheard sound which, "having no teeth, it has neither vocal chords nor phonatory activity [...] this breath does not speak, it moans [...] though inaudible, this breath still makes a sound. It sounds deafly [...] The breath is a wind, a flatus, of terror: one is going to be no more."⁸⁰ For Beckett it was the hearing of unspoken words, for Lyotard it is the unheard breath one hears within and through music, it is "the sound death makes in the living body."⁸¹ In other words, a death rattle is the soundtrack, or more fittingly, the *unsoundtrack*; and the taciturntablist's headphones are jacked in on this tuneless tune. *I am dead* is the moment where the record stays stuck and still, and the only thing alive is the machine, the turning table, electricity juicing it up, spindling its mutic rendition of a post-mortem ontology.⁸²

In the audio piece *The structural analysis or playing methods of a recording based on the difference between movement and continuation of the needle as an observation point* (1993), Jio Schimizu contrives the taciturntablist act par excellence. Intervening in the manufacturing process (the cutting of the actual vinyl), he restricts the needle of the cutting machine, which usually inscribes a continuous groove from outer edge to centre, to a single point: "with this record, the cutting machine was not rotated, but rather the cutting needle was left in one place, recording for several minutes. Accordingly, the grooves of this

⁷⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York: Vintage 1975, 101.

⁷⁸ Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and The Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002, 42–43 and passim throughout the "Death's Murmur" chapter.

⁷⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 226. Lyotard comes to this term through a close reading of Pascal Quignard's concept of a *language beneath languages*, which Quignard develops in the *Petits traités I* (vol. IV, XXe traité), Paris: Gallimard, 1998.

⁸⁰ Lyotard, 224–226. Flatus will be extensively discussed in Chapter 2.

⁸¹ Lyotard, 231.

⁸² Interestingly, the technical terminology for a lathe echoes the ontological for a lathe comprises a part that rotates called the *live* spindle, and one that does not rotate, the *dead* spindle.

record, making a continuous sound, exist as a point (dot)."⁸³ When the resulting vinyl is played, the turntable reverts to a mere table, as if on idle, at zero RPM (revolutions per minute). On CD, the recording of the nonturningtable with the needle boring into that single recorded point, once magnified, once stretched, becomes nonetheless a line that circles – the point unfolds and acquires duration. In this instance the point extends to 4'33"; for this duration, Schimizu's piece spins in my CD player, taciturning, and thoroughly unchallenging my speakers – they are not impressed. Nothing is heard, or almost nothing, the record player with the needle on that persistent point emits the barest presence, it is on but has nothing to say. I hear a faint hum, the feeblest rumble, my ears seem to recognize the air the turntable plate barely disturbs. The duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds should not surprise, since Cage this has become the default duration of silence. On this CD collection of works in honor of Cage's 4'33" titled 45'18", Schimizu degrooves the record to further reduce Cage's 4'33", he manages to reduce from nothing, towards further nothings, a contracted contraction.⁸⁴

Schimizu is one of several conceptual artists who focus on the taciturntable – the turntable at its degree zero: Christian Marclay, Joseph Beuys, Janek Schaeffer, Martin Tétrault, Raymond Gervais, Paul de Marinis, Otomo Yoshihide, Jonathan Monk, Milan Knizak (several of whom participated in the ground breaking *Broken Music* exhibition in 1989)⁸⁵ have all spun the table around an axis of empty. In an essay on Marclay, Douglas Kahn speaks of Marclay's objects as containing residual sounds, "a residual sound may be incredibly raucous but no actual vibrations will occur."⁸⁶ The taciturn's range of reticence, from mute to sotto voce, resides in this residual. These taciturntablists amplify the idled speech of silent machines. In their hands, turntables are sorting machines for the Dead Letter Office; they circulate

⁸³ Jio Schimizu, "The structural analysis or playing methods of a recording based on the difference between movement and continuation of the needle as an observation point" on 45'18" (CD), Amsterdam: Korm Plastics, 2002.

⁸⁴ Schimizu's piece could also said to be a sideways contraction from Christian Marclay's *Untitled (record without a groove)* (LP), Geneva: Écart Editions, 1987.

⁸⁵ Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier (eds.), *Broken Music: Artists' Recordworks*, Berlin: DAAD, 1989.

⁸⁶ Douglas Kahn, "Marclay's Lucretian Acoustics," *Parachute*, No. 74, 1994, 19.

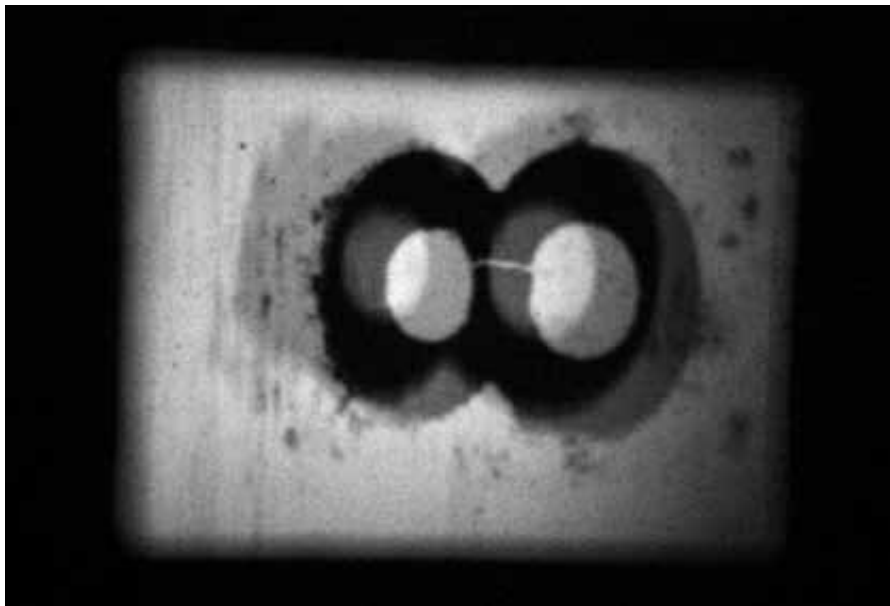


fig. 05

fig. 05 Dave Dymont and Roula Partheniou, *Super Infinity*, 2002. Courtesy of the artists.

fig. 06



fig. 07

fig. 06–07 Claude Wampler, *Knitease: Ms. Lefarge Give Another Historical Performance*, 1996.
Courtesy of the artist.

rather than communicate. Now as refuse, they refuse as a matter of preference, they become Bartleby turntables.

Granted, most turntablists are anything but reticent, after all, dexterity is the skill primed for display. But remember musicians are not the topic of discussion here, it is *muticians* – to continue with Lyotard's term, and therefore: *taciturntablists*, not turntablists. Not the finite parameters of a DJ set, but the endless machinations of artists bent on erasure, effacement, disappearance. That being said, the taciturntablist does not eschew turntables, rather is likely to divert them from their usual usage or refer to them in oblique ways. An instance of the latter is *Super Infinity* (2002) by Dave Dyment and Roula Partheniou. In this short film, sideways letraset number 8s are adhered to Super 8 leader tape; leader tape is the place and moment in a film where one usually sees a countdown and by definition, a precursor to the actual content. Here the leader is an end(less) in itself. Its letraset infinity 8s are jagged, fragile, ephemeral and prone to breakage, and the countdown is a constant addition of infinities, they perform their overstatement of an infinity in excess of itself. These sideways 8s also uncannily resemble the standard DJ setup – two turntables side-by-side ready to be mixed. In essence, the additive principle of a mix is to mark an infinite set of possibilities. By mixing, the DJ can seamlessly stitch time and conceivably produce not only a continuous soundtrack, but an infinite one. In other words, it is a loop, less in the sense of repetition than of a non-teleological machine: *It never began and will never end*. We are stuck in a priori territory, before sound, before image, before language: inchoate, looped and immersed in the silence before words, a space that recurs and haunts once words are uttered in the gap between signs, a super space, whose emptiness is charged with the weight of its incommensurability.

Another loop of note, this one more cheeky, foregrounds the epitome of what emerges in a space beyond/beneath/between words: a body. The loop is a performance by Claude Wampler, *Knit Tease*, in which she knits a dress out of the dress she is wearing, while a 7"45rpm version of Danny Rose's *The Stripper* plays repetitively on a turntable beside her. The knitting results in a dress while it simultaneously performs an undress. Four hours later the

new dress is ready to be worn, replacing the dress that is no longer. And it is ready to be unknitted in turn. And so on. With this loop, the knitting needles and the hands guiding them collapse the erase, record and playback functions into one action. There is a strict economy in this seemingly purposeless copying, such is the tease of endlessness, which by definition is not linear, but moves straightforward (in all directions). The action remains subtle, understated, taciturn, but the tease is never in doubt.

Abbé Dinouart's 1771 treatise *L'art de se taire* (The Art of Shutting Up) culminates with a wish that his advice will be heeded by philosophers, for what is at stake is no less than "the glory of God, the tranquility of the State, the good of society and the purity of mores."⁸⁷ His principles of reticence are fuelled by a deep suspicion of all forms of incontinence, "It is in silence that Man is most strongly in possession of himself. Outside of it, he seems to spread outside of himself and dissipate in discourse, so that he is less to himself than to others."⁸⁸ The wanton expenditure of verbiage is to be averted because it causes inconsistencies, in the somatic sense. Silence is equated with containment, restraint – leakage is to be avoided. Porosity is denied to ensure the valence of *glory, tranquility, good, purity*. Plutarch seems to suggest the same in his recounting of Heraclitus's foray into performance art: when the citizens asked Heraclitus to speak on the subject of harmony, he stepped onto the podium, took a glass of cold water, sprinkled it with flour, stirred it with a mint leaf, drank it and left.⁸⁹ Concord, it seems, is best served by silence; disagreement only arises out of attempts to agree, cohabitation is more likely to succeed when the conversation is kept to a minimum. Heraclitus deadens the addressed letter; perhaps the most apt response to the citizenry's koan. The question, of course, is whether one can conceive of cohabitation without conversation. "Our conversations are articulated on the outside, on rupture," Chantal Thomas states in her introduction to 18th century texts on conversation, this time those by Swift and Morellet, "they integrate the misspoken, the un-

⁸⁷ Abbé Dinouart, *L'art de se taire*, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1987 [1771], 94. Translation mine. Original: *la gloire de Dieu, la tranquillité de l'Etat, le bien de la société et la pureté des moeurs*.

⁸⁸ Dinouart, 40.

⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Bavards et curieux*, trans. Gabriel Blok, Paris: L'Arche, 2001, 29.

said, the mistake, not in order to elide them but in order to mould them into springboards.”⁹⁰ Thomas goes on to speak of the rhythm that is born out of the vertiginous leap off the springboard and into the sharing of words that “constitutes one of the strong moments of existence.”⁹¹ Thus the condition of possibility for this ebullience, this liveliness, is that series of disarticulations and inarticulations, which do not undermine but underpin the articulations that aggregate into conversation.

In this catapult mode where one is thrust to the outside while anticipating a recoil, we find the taciturntablist immersed in the conversation’s contraption, inducing a blockage or at least a stutter in the machine’s proper propulsive functioning. Bergman’s 1963 film *The Silence* can be viewed as a cinematic treatise on blockage of the voice apparatus. Here conversations are more than clipped by silence, they exude a mute rhythm and mutate into syncopated silences: “Esther puts her hand to her mouth as if to stifle a scream,” she works as a translator, she is impervious to the heat, in fact, she’s cold, dying, she moans and whimpers.⁹² Her burning is inside, the bite of frost. Anna, her sister, on the other hand, is sweltering, she is carnal, “she sits with sweating thighs wide apart,” she cannot bear being inside.⁹³ From a stifling train compartment bringing them home, to a stopover in the hotel room of an unknown town with an unknown language (significantly, a language Esther cannot translate), the outside in the film is experienced through the intermediary of windows. The window keeps out and translates. Anna leaves the hotel for some air, and in a nearby cinema, she observes a couple having sex in a back corner, “the [man’s] throat [is] extended and the big Adam’s apple raises itself in a lump, as if it was about to burst through the thin tegument of skin.”⁹⁴ The tension between the two sisters is intensely sexual; it remains largely unspoken,

⁹⁰ Chantal Thomas, in preface to André Morellet, *De la conversation*, Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1995 [1812], 21. Translation mine. Original: *Elles intègrent le mal-dit, le non-dit, la faute, non pour s’y enliser, mais pour les muer en tremplins.*

⁹¹ Thomas, 20.

⁹² Ingmar Bergman, “The Silence” in *A Film Trilogy*, trans. Paul Britten Austin, New York: Marion Boyars, 1989, 117.

⁹³ Bergman, 107.

⁹⁴ Bergman, 122.

enclosed, and unresolved. They personify both ends of the taciturntablist's palette, they are the sexualized staging of *Ohio Impromptu*.

Probing the same vein, Plutarch speaks of a certain Anacharsis who would sleep with his left hand protecting his sex, and the right over his mouth, he estimated that the tongue needed a more solid censor, lock, cover. The adage *Know Thyself* fails in the face of what we might do, of instances where action precedes knowledge. Words escape, they act up and out, and most often their means of escape is through the hands; as Freud's memorable remark attests: "If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingers; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."⁹⁵ The fingers can *hold back*, *hold on*, *hold out* but they would much rather *reach out*, *reach in*, *reach for*. Appropriately, Esther, upon arriving in this country with a foreign language, decides the first thing she should learn is the word for *hand* (*Kasi*). What the sisters in *The Silence* would probably tell Anacharsis is that one needs both hands in both places if one wishes success in continence. The impossibility of this scenario is supported by the following anecdote: Bergman had originally planned to title the film *Timoka*, an Estonian word he had seen in a book and thought sounded good. Later he found out that the word means *slated for execution* – no doubt, in retribution for deeds committed by hands.

With this we return to our funereal post office, site of all those arrested missives, dead ends and blind spots. The censoring drive is no match for the lascivious impulse. Eros and Thanatos subsume stasis at every turn. In this condition, the taciturntablist would seem to fall on the side of the censor, the silencer. But the taciturntablist is primarily an agent who operates in that undertow of the relation, who converses through silence as opposed to against it. That is to say, the taciturntablist dwells in that dead zone where we are separated by what unites us (Agamben again). This dead zone functions like a blind spot, *l'angle mort*. The blind spot, *punctum caesura*, is the point where the retina does not transmit any sensation, the point where the optic nerve enters the eyeball.⁹⁶ One could thus posit that seeing through the blind spot bypasses the eye, immerses seeing within a spatio-temporal relationship. In other words, the pointing that the point performs responds to an ontological

⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, New York: Collier, 1963, 69.

question, to a desire to see beyond, or in spite of it. David Wojnarowicz's disintegration narrative metaphorically places the blind spot in a situation where corporeality and ontology are conjointly approaching this dead center:

I'm a blank spot in a hectic civilization. *I am shouting my invisible words.* I am getting so weary. I am waving to you from here. I am crawling and looking for the aperture of complete and final emptiness. I am vibrating in isolation among you. I am screaming but it comes out like pieces of clear ice. I am signaling that the volume of all this is too high. I am waving. I am waving my hands. I am disappearing. I am disappearing but not fast enough.⁹⁷

Tom Friedman's disappearance is more literal, more playful, yet makes explicit the *shouting of invisible words* as one approaches the dead center. When Friedman embarked upon signing his name with a pen until the ink ran out in *Untitled* (1990), he could have opted to follow any form or direction, but he went inward in circles, thereby effectively inscribing his name as a recording (and indeed, as a record), as grooves that eventually fade as the pen dries out and the recording of his name approaches the centre. Tom Friedman is less and less Tom Friedman as the grooves of signatures fade, as his volume depletes, as his meticulous perseverance is confronted by the finitude of his recording device. In other words, Tom Friedman dies out. A certain morbidity, *I am dead*, returns and is now a matter of record. By way of this inscription, the signatory paradoxically achieves immortality.

⁹⁶ In fact, the entry for *punctum* in the *Trésor de la langue française; dictionnaire de la langue du XIXe et du XXe siècle, 1789–1960* (vol. XIV) is replete with evocative meanings (ed. Paul Imbs, Paris: CNRS/Gallimard, 1990). One of which is *punctum métaphysique* which is illustrated by the following extraordinary literary reference:

From this nothing, from this rudimentary embryo that is the first idea of a book, extract the *punctum saliens*, life from the egg, pull out from its head, one by one, the limbs of a phrase, the outline of the characters, the plot, the knot, all this animated little world comes from you, sprung up from your insides, a novel – what a feat! Goncourt, *Journal*, 1862, 1100. Translation mine.

By contrast in the Littré, *punctum* does not merit its own entry, it is merely listed in the entry for *puncticulaire*: from Latin *puncticulum*, diminutive of *punctum*: point.

⁹⁷ David Wojnarowicz, *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline*, San Francisco: Artspace, 1992, 60–61. Emphasis added.

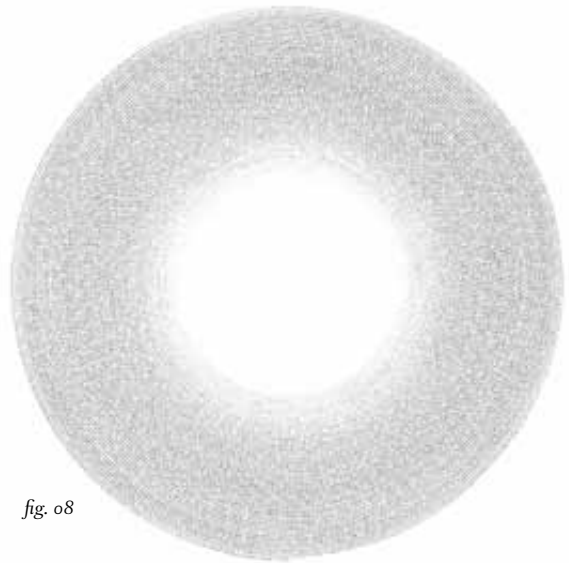


fig. 08



fig. 09

fig. 08 Tom Friedman, *untitled*, 1990. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

fig. 09 Tom Friedman, *untitled* (detail), 1990.

Another trait of the taciturntablist manifests itself in Friedman's act: patience. Or what I would call, a certain weight of presence. A weight, a wait, await – not for Godot, but merely for the passing of the needle, in other words, the passing of the present. *Nightsea Crossing* is another instance of amplified patience, it is a performance which Abramovic and Ulay performed for sixty-nine days over the course of six years (1981–1987). Each of those days consisted in sitting motionless and mute for seven hours, facing each other at either end of a rectangular table. Here the taciturn table is still, imperturbable, the circulation occurs in a different register:

Being present, over long stretches of time,
Until presence rises and falls, from
Material to immaterial, from
Form to formless, from
Instrumental to mental, from
Time to timeless.⁹⁸

The taciturntablist's tactic that emerges here is a fade from known to unknown, a slippage to the outside, which is focused yet remains indiscernible, a sketch of infinitesimal infinity. In some respects *Nightsea Crossing* could be viewed as the paragon of silence rendered as contemporary art form, a framing by which presence is writ large onto an empty, meditative, and infinite space.

2.2 MOOT MUTE

The attempt to memorize and recite the entirety of Homer's *Iliad*, the peculiar exploit of a "retired businessman" featured in Gregory Whitehead's radio piece *Dead Letters* (1985) is pertinent here. The work does not refer to *Bartleby* explicitly, although Whitehead is an avowed Melville aficionado, but the absolutist engagement with quotation by the "retired businessman" resembles

⁹⁸ Marina Abramovic and Ulay, "Nightsea Crossing" in Marina Abramovic, *Artist Body: Performances 1969–1998*, Milano: Charta, 1998, 258. This piece is an important precursor to Abramovic's highly mediatized *The Artist is Present* performed at MoMa, March 14–May 31, 2010.

Bartleby's steadfast renditions of what Deleuze dubs *the formula*. The scrivener reduces himself to his own quote, *I prefer not to*, and for Deleuze, Bartleby's otherwise silent demeanor is "as if he said everything and exhausted language at the same time."⁹⁹ This paradoxical state of excess is echoed by the project of the "retired businessman": "That's my means of achieving immortality: attaching myself to a vehicle which is in itself immortal."¹⁰⁰ The immortality of Homer's text rubs off on the one who quotes it; and this taciturn tablist undertakes – literally, *takes under* – an endeavor that consists in letting himself be swallowed up by the *Iliad*'s current. This is a project of transgressive circulation not of communication (unless one includes communication with death *and* with the dead), an attempt to reach immortality by way of rote. In the case of the "retired businessman", the arduousness of the task causes him to falter not only during the enterprise itself (understandably), but it also seems that his capacity to speak at all is being eroded and subsumed into this mnemonics of immortality:¹⁰¹

Well, the *Iliad* has twenty-four books. And memorizing them is like filling twenty-four buckets with water. Buckets which have many holes in the bottom, like a strainer or a colander. You fill book bucket number one, then you go to book bucket number two, and the water starts flowing out a little more slowly than you put it in out of book bucket one. You finish bucket two and you go on to bucket three, then you look back and bucket one is almost empty, so you have to go back and fill it up again. Then the same with book bucket two, and, and, and then you go on to three and four. Now each time you go back and fill up a bucket, you plug one of the holes, in effect. So that thereafter the water flows out a little

⁹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula" in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 70.

¹⁰⁰ A "retired businessman" in Gregory Whitehead, *Dead Letters* (CD). Amsterdam: Staalplaat, 1994 [1985].

¹⁰¹ The second case of faltering, of stuttering, by the "retired businessman" is particularly noticeable in the section of the piece that precedes the one quoted in the body of the text:

I have to keep in the – in my, uh, my mind those thirty-three names [of the sea nymphs who accompany Thetis, the mother of Achilles], all the time. This I do by, uh, by notice – noticing the relationships, uh, buh, be-between the names, uh, noticing – noticing various peculiarities that they have, and I – I attach the names to those pec – pecu – peculiarities.

more slowly. Finally when you've been back many, many times, you've plugged up all the holes, but there's still a little seepage, and you will constantly have to repair that, repair those plugged holes to prevent seepage.¹⁰²

Continuously disoriented, endlessly remixed; myriad passages leak out of the buckets, out of memory, back onto the page. As Benjamin comments on the subject of citations, they contain not "the strength to preserve but to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy."¹⁰³ A violent cleansing; one predicated by destruction, in constant need of repair, irreparable. Always taking in water, always sinking *and* swimming. Such an immortal tome, as arguably one of those *strong moments of existence* mentioned earlier, is able to produce an undertow that not only drives existence, but also arrests it, crashes down on it. The formidable verbiage that these recordings produce would seem antithetical to the sensibility of the taciturn; however, we are referring neither to a sensibility nor a symptomatology, but rather to a technique, a tactic, a subterfuge.

In the drawing *Circulating Corridor* (1970) Nauman's tactic of never-ending circulation bespeaks the condition of the taciturntablist, it delineates movement as a limited range, inching, idling, ultimately bound to stillness, and by extension, to silence. Given Nauman's penchant for Beckett, the drawing could also be read as a simplified sketch for Beckett's *Quad*, where the four players pace around a square.¹⁰⁴ In *Quad* they do enter and exit, which is not an apparent choice in the drawing as the four marked positions have arrows pointed straight ahead to an end soon thereafter. Once the end of the corridor is hit, a ninety degree turn towards the right and the process begins anew, and so on, stuck on the same groove. The four players are mute throughout.

The turntable spins forward, the needle reads *I wish I would shut up*, then the record is spun backwards and *Shut up!* is heard. The reverse is not quite faithful, it cheats and inserts the imperative muzzle. At least now on this

102 A "retired businessman" in Gregory Whitehead, *Dead Letters* (CD).

103 Walter Benjamin in Hannah Arendt, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940" in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 39.

104 Samuel Beckett, "Quad" in *The Collected Shorter Plays*, New York: Grove, 1984, 289–294.

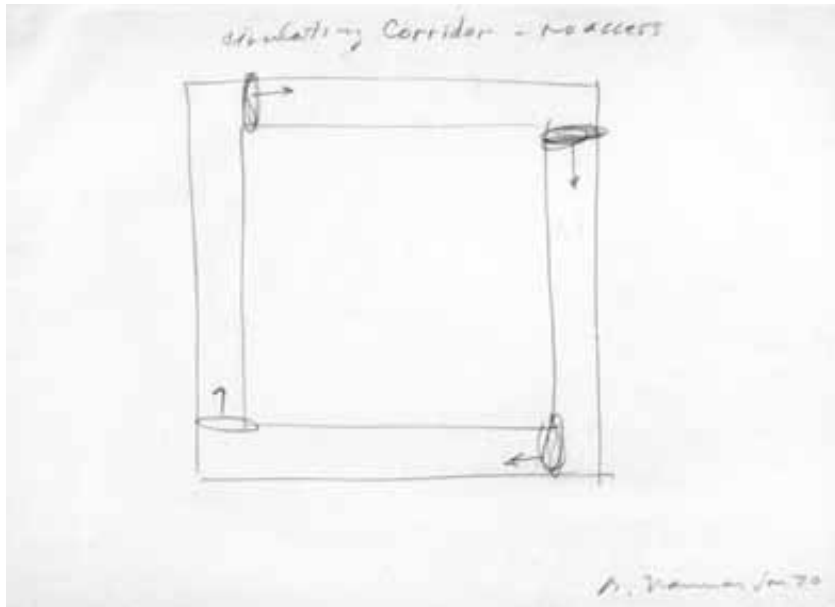


fig. 10

fig. 10 Bruce Nauman, *Circulating corridor – No access*, 1970. © Bruce Nauman/SODRAC (2011).

table that turns, we have our mix, a deceptively simple one, a mix of singularity. That single moment in which silence is beckoned by sound, in which the silencer and the silenced are thrust into conversation is an impossible scene which enables us to consider mutism for its lowercase power. Agamben, in true taciturntablist form, quoting from Bloch who transcribed it from Benjamin who heard it from Scholem, speaks of the “tiny displacement” that is going to be the marker of the world to come in comparison to the present one.¹⁰⁵ If the shift occurs not in things but in “their sense and their limits”¹⁰⁶ as he states, then we may think of the taciturntablist as the agent that inches inside the tininess of this displacement and lays it bare, barely there, but inevitable and, once spinning, unstoppable. Pascal Quignard’s version of the *tiny displacement*: shifts a bit (*bascule un peu*), is embedded in a characterization of silence as an active agent in the visual register:

The introduction of silence introduces the invisible in the visible. [W]hen there is silence, the visible cannot stand properly [...] the taciturn is prone to dizzy spells; his ankles, his thoracic cage, his neck are subject to the instability of an unbearable vertigo; Aristotle maintains that then the healthy ear hurls out a long noise in the fashion of one produced by a seashell; the world succumbs, *shifts a bit*, a second invisibility takes place.¹⁰⁷

As a coda to this section let us investigate two homages to Bergman’s *The Silence*. Both undertake to out-silence *The Silence*. First, let us listen to *Kasi Naigo* by Alexandre St-Onge, a recorded work in which St-Onge took the soundtrack to Bergman’s *The Silence* and utilized only the silences of the film. To be more precise, he excised all the words that can be found in a dictionary – thus,

¹⁰⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Agamben, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Pascal Quignard, *Petits traités I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1998, 99–100. Emphasis and translation mine. Original: *Mais aussi, quand il y a silence, le visible ne tient plus très bien debout, [...] le taciturne est pris d'un étourdissement ; ses mollets, sa cage thoracique, sa nuque sont soumis à l'instabilité d'un insupportable vertige; Aristote soutient qu'alors l'oreille saine jette un long bruit à l'instar de celui que produit une corne de mer; le monde s'affaïse, bascule un peu ; une seconde invisibilité a lieu.*

only utterances from imaginary languages were retained along with all the wordless passages. What results from this ultra-taciturntablist project, this amalgam of silences, to employ Quignard's notion of an invisibility activated by silence, is an invisible soundtrack.¹⁰⁸ In St-Onge's *Kasi Naigo* we hear room-tones, movements, breaths; we hear the spatial and temporal architecture of the film. Second homage, Joseph Beuys, took the five reels of Bergman's film and coated them with zinc, thereby rendering the film viewable thereafter only as a sculptural object, and hearable only as a referential memory marker. These two examples of reductions bring to the fore formal and literal facets of silence resulting in an amplification of silence from which a kind of *surplus* silence emerges. They, in effect, yield the result of "redundantly forbidding even silence to speak."¹⁰⁹

108 Alexandre St-Onge, *Kasi Naigo* (CD), Montréal: squintfuckerpess, 2001. As we saw earlier (p. 38), *kasi* is the word for "hand" in the unknown language that Esther in Bergman's *The Silence* learns; *naigo* is the one other word she learns, it means "face".

109 Scott Watson, "The Wound and the Instrument" in *Vanguard*, Summer 1988, 18–23.

110 Sophie Duplaix (curator). *Sons et Lumières: Une histoire du son dans l'art du XX siècle*. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2004, 348. The same page which includes the image relates an anecdote which links Duchamp to Bergman via Beuys (in his own words):

Several persons have told me (though I do not know if it's really true), that Duchamp once declared: 'Someone in Germany has said that my silence is overrated. What does this mean?' I seriously believe that he knew very well what it meant. If he had a doubt, he could have written to me and asked me. [...] This was in 1964. He could have said: 'I've read that my silence is overrated. Could you tell me what this means?' This would have been better. For some time now I have been working on a new idea: *The Silence* of Bergman is not overrated. We do not overestimate the value of Bergman's silence. [In 1964 Beuys did an "action-manifest" titled *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated*].



fig. 11

fig. 11 Joseph Beuys, *Das Schweigen*, 1973. © Estate of Joseph Beuys/SODRAC (2011).¹¹⁰

3. DISQUIETUDE

The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.

PASCAL¹¹¹

3.1 THIS DISQUIET

In one of his short stories, Borges describes a peculiar labyrinth “consisting of a single line which is invisible and unceasing.”¹¹² An infinite line, an infinity of lines. The catalog of the exhibition *Disquiet* (2005) held in Kingston, Ontario contained a work not presented in the gallery. By way of this (non)presentation tactic, Robert Bean’s *Silenzio* extends the line out the gallery. The piece is never heard in the gallery space, and *Silenzio* is silent as long as you do not put it in a CD player and press play. The muteness of the recorded object is a material rendition of the silence of sound. *You are kindly requested to remain silent*, the message one hears on the CD asking for silence is not itself silent, a recurring paradox with any representation and consideration of silence. In this instance, the pronouncement’s directives are repeated seven times, in seven languages, for seven populations admonished to let the Sistine Chapel reverberate without the disruptive addition of their mere mortals’ murmur. Babel be quiet. The guards precede the recording with some shushing but to no avail, only the disembodied announcement’s sheer volume is able to subside the din, but just temporarily. The teeming masses keep streaming through and need to be constantly retold. We cannot not talk, we are rote players, the needle is always on the record.

The Disquiet exhibit opens with three works by Dave Dyment which pay homage to The Beatles. *Silent Revolution* consists of small black & white

¹¹¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Roger Ariew, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 2005, 64 [S233/L201].

¹¹² Jorge Luis Borges, “Death and the Compass” in *Labyrinths*, New York: New Directions, 1964, 87.

TV showing a pixelated image of a turntable playing a copy of The Beatles' *Revolution*, the video's mute rendition of the song amplifies the ambiguity of the political message, *We all want to change the world/ But when you talk about destruction/ Don't you know you can count me out in*. It also focuses our attention on the revolutions of *Revolution*, this reduction encapsulates the legacy of inefficacy of those utopian times, *We all want to ... But*. Out in, in out, we make but a brief appearance along the infinite line. In Dymont's *Untitled (Help)*, the lyrics of The Beatles' *Help* are presented in Braille. The title brackets the plea, and so does the Braille, which, even if we could read it, is not accessible to our fingertips (it is framed and behind glass). Only our memory is able to hear ... *Help me, get my feet back on the ground ...* the mute image thereby sounds through the percipient, the turntable is now in your head. In the third work by this Toronto-based artist, *White Noise*, he superimposed (via silkscreen in white ink on black background) the scores for all the songs from *The White Album* (a double album) on the same single surface. What results is an additive palimpsest and another entry into the subset of artists (alongside Christian Marclay and Martin Tétreault) working with The Beatles who pay particular attention to *The White Album*. Both *White Noise* and Richard Hamilton's white monochrome cover for the original album, which Hamilton viewed as "so pure and reticent",¹¹³ could be considered as a blur or cloud, as per Saussure: "In itself, thought is like a swirling cloud, where no shape is intrinsically determinate. No ideas are established in advance, and nothing is distinct, before the introduction of linguistic structure."¹¹⁴

"For me the formation of thought is already a sculpture,"¹¹⁵ via Beuys' enigmatic assertion we reconjure Saussure's swirling cloud. A nebulous sculpture? Certainly contemporary sculpture is now rarely monolithic and more often provisional and relational, even ethereal. Beuys' notion of social sculpture should be kept in mind as we consider another piece presented in

¹¹³ Richard Hamilton in Christian Marclay, *Christian Marclay*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Los Angeles: UCLA Hammer Museum, 2003, 31.

¹¹⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986, 110. See ch. 3 p. 134 for a reappearance of the swirling cloud.

¹¹⁵ Joseph Beuys in Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, University of California Press, 1997, 122.

Disquiet, Matt Rogalsky's *Ellipsis*. An ellipse ... a space in the line, a movement of silence within a line of text. It is not just a space, but a marked one, one defined by its inbetweenness, a fault line (the definition of a geometrical ellipse is: to fall short of a perfect circle). *Ellipsis* uses software custom-made by the artist to extract the inbetweens of words from the realtime feed of a radio station; lines of code made to interrupt lines of speech, programming to disrupt radio programming. Rogalsky views this intervention as being "a good way of taking some control of things," and of obtaining "all the 'scenery' with none of the actors."¹¹⁶ Thus, power relations are momentarily inversed and ambience is foregrounded, the spaces that surround utterances are amplified to be heard. Could *Ellipsis* enable a listening to thought? With this installation, heretofore silent silences are heard, they acquire a lead role, they exhibit their liveness and demonstrate the acuity of Cage's observation that "silence is not silent – it is full of activity."¹¹⁷ In other words, a full silence, in contradistinction with the customary equation of silence with emptiness. *Ellipsis* hollows (sculpts) out radio's programming to reveal a certain corporeality of the air, it is now weighted – as evidenced by the projection of the cumulative counter which accompanies the piece. Ordinarily, radio silence, *dead air*, is eschewed by radio programmers, often its accidental occurrence triggers a recording to *fill* the space. *Ellipsis* demonstrates that dead air is always being broadcast, and the airwaves in and of themselves are already full.

3.2 RESISTING ARREST: THE SPEECHLESS BODY IN MOTION

The panopticon is the classic model of a restraining and repressive power exerted by a centralized authority, usually one predicated on the scopic. But the sonic is also implicated in this contraption armed with an arresting power, a force that stills, for Bentham also imagined a network of pipes that

¹¹⁶ Matt Rogalsky in Julian Cowley, "Matt Rogalsky: Silent Resistance," *The Wire* 239, January 2004, 12. Regarding the second quotation, Rogalsky makes this statement with respect to how his piece affects radio dramas but I would contend the observation can be generalized.

¹¹⁷ John Cage in Michele Porzio, "A White Cage Inside Four Walls," *Musicworks*, No. 52, Spring 1992, 29

would ensure “acoustic surveillance.”¹¹⁸ Interestingly, Leibnitz theorizes a strikingly similar model, one of mirrors and pipes which would ensure anonymity of the center and be “a most important thing for the State and a kind of political confessional.”¹¹⁹ Bentham could not ensure disymmetry (something feasible now with the most basic microphone technology) and thus this added sensory surveillance was not pursued. The inclusion of the aural in what is usually discussed strictly as a function of the scopic register is recalled here in order to point towards a broader definition of both the sonic and the scopic, one focused on the general sensory apparatus of the beholder operative in the act of beholding, of holding within a range or scope. The wielding of a privileged position which presumes that seeing is knowing, that the observer is a beholder that beholds (keeps hold), that the distance between subject and object is coherent and never proximate, and that the object is transparent (and thereby fixed, passive and consumable) summarizes the Greenberg-Fried paradigm. It is a position which Rosalind Krauss depicts as “achieving the pulverization or extreme attenuation of matter.”¹²⁰ This disembodied, transcendental approach, operating securely in that trough which is normative centrality, is what the body begins to displace – once it starts moving (in all directions, and even within stillness as we shall see later), talking (back), and refusing to be *held*.

Within this context of resistance, the body in its status as object finds itself in a state akin to the ambassadors Francis Ponge describes as his ilk, which is to say in his case, poets:

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Random House, 1995, 317 fn.3. Here is the entire passage:

In his first version of the Panopticon, Bentham has also imagined an acoustic surveillance, operated by means of pipes leading from the cells to the central tower. In the Postscript he abandoned the idea, perhaps because he could not introduce into it the principle of disymmetry and prevent the prisoners from hearing the inspector as well as the inspector hearing them.

¹¹⁹ Leibniz in Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 7. The full passage Attali cites from Leibniz’s “Palace of Marvels” is as follows:

These buildings will be constructed in such a way that the master of the house will be able to hear and see everything that is said and done without himself being perceived, by means of mirrors and pipes, which will be a most important thing for the State, and a kind of political confessional.

¹²⁰ Rosalind Krauss, “Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop” in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Seattle: Bay Press, 1987, 60.

They are the ambassadors of the mute world. They stammer, they murmur, they ensconce themselves in the night of the logos – until they finally find themselves at the root level where things and formulations are indistinguishable.¹²¹

Here we are faced with the quandary (a recurrent one) of utilizing the graspability of language to describe and extol the ungraspability of a somatic language. Appropriately, Derrida describes Bataille's and Artaud's texts as those which "operate, in their very deployment, the manifestation and (simultaneously) the deconstruction of representation."¹²² We find the staging of these textual performances to be the moment where the unnamable (ie. sonic but speechless) body intervenes in critical theory and serves as both reminder and remainder. It reminds theory of the untranslatability of the other, as with the *objet a*, which Lacan depicts as a foreign protuberance within the soma: "object that cannot be swallowed, [...] which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier."¹²³ In the same vein, Judith Butler's "I bracket this 'I' in quotation marks, but I am still here"¹²⁴ begs the following questions: Could the I sans quotation marks which enacts the bracketing and is *still here* be the body present in the text? Could this be an "irruption of the referent" as Denis Hollier formulates it?¹²⁵ And where else could Butler's *here* be but everywhere? A heterotopic multiplication erupts: space of the author, of

121 Francis Ponge in Michel Thévoz, *Le langage de la rupture*, Paris: PUF, 1978, 151. Translation mine. Original: *ils sont les ambassadeurs du monde muet. Comme tels, ils balbutient, ils murmurent, ils s'enfoncent dans la nuit du logos – jusqu'à ce qu'enfin ils se retrouvent au niveau des RACINES, où se confondent les choses et les formulations*

122 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, 93. Derrida names Mallarmé and Sollers within this same list of authors. Translation mine. Original: [...] *ces textes opèrent, dans leur mouvement même, la manifestation et la déconstruction pratique de la représentation.*

123 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton 1981, 270; *Le Séminaire livre XI*, Éditions du Seuil, coll. Points, 1973, 301. Original: *l'objet inavalable, si l'on peut dire, qui reste en travers de la gorge du signifiant.* It terms of sonicity it is of import to read the metaphor literally (thereby somatically) and in all its violence, ie. to *hear* the choking.

124 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 123.

125 Denis Hollier, "The Use-Value of the Impossible" in *October*, No. 60, Spring 1992, 16. At this point in the essay, Hollier is working through the performative aspect of the writing in *Documents* through a discussion of Michel Leiris.

the reader, of the book; Hollier continues: “something bites into the very page that wanted to appropriate it [...] something heterogenous.” Butler adds:¹²⁶

The “I” is thus a citation of the place of the “I” in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak.¹²⁷

Nonetheless, do these instances confirm that we are, to be blunt, stuck in, with, and within methods of representation? We might, but from Plato’s *chora*, to Benjamin’s *auratic*, to Barthes’s *punctum*, to Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*, to Freud’s *uncanny*, to Bataille’s *formless*, to Derrida and Artaud’s *subjectile*, to Kristeva’s *abject* there seems to be a continual drive to incorporate (political) strategies with the very processes they choke on.¹²⁸ In other words, one cannot deploy these strategies for they are inextricably accidental. They function as foreigners; they are only, as Kristeva would say, “present in abeyance.”¹²⁹ Any control we may wield over them is temporary at best, and ultimately illusory. Gina Pane describes the several performances where she would cut herself with razor blades as situational attempts staged precisely in that arena where the body is devised simultaneously as and *against* language.¹³⁰ “my real problem was in constructing a language through this wound, which became a sign. [...] Physical suffering isn’t a mere personal problem to me but a problem of language.”¹³¹ There is a sense that, once concretized into

¹²⁶ Hollier, 16.

¹²⁷ Butler, 266.

¹²⁸ The list is not exhaustive, by naming them, the intention is not to collapse each term, each is undeniably *sui generis* (although, each process cannot be said necessarily to have one progenitor). Further study would explore the compelling convergent and divergent dialogues between them (which the list seeks to evoke).

¹²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 7. Fuller quote: *Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance.*

¹³⁰ I am making an allusion here to the subtitle of Lea Vergine’s seminal anthology of body art: *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*, Milano: Skira, 2000 [1974].

¹³¹ Gina Pane in *Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, London: Thames and Hudson, 99. More on Pane in Vergine, 196–199 and in Kathy O’Dell, *Contract With The Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, *passim*.

flesh, the problem is further problematized. This property of concretizing and embodying failure can be harnessed as a generative force, in “Body Noise”, Christine Ross builds on Butler’s theory of normative bodies to describe Kiki Smith’s sculptural bodies as ones that “reproduce the norm, but fail to reproduce it fully. This failure is productive, in that it indicates that the individual can be something other than the norm.”¹³²

That something other than the norm, in short, that *noise* is what bodies produce even when idle, on their feet and “so still and silent that they clash with the crowd in their very immobility; standing noisy in their very silence.”¹³³ Bodies are never more idle than when framed by a photograph, in an exemplary agglomerate of cases, the bodies in *Out of Actions* are under repair, under view, under examination, under the weight of the exhibition and accompanying catalog’s subtitle, *between performance and the object 1949–1979*.¹³⁴ Pinned down by museum and historicification. Yet the bodies also broadcast an array of tangibles and intangibles, and emit *signs that say what they want to say and not signs that say what someone else wants them to say*.¹³⁵ The action leaking out of the inaction of *Out of Actions* is the body voicing its remainder, reminder, *I am still here*. This is a lowercase kind of power, a weak power, one that often derails, even crumbles. It has a frail constitution, and fears border crossings; the following instances of bodies *standing noisy in their very silence* shall serve as sites for the continuation of this thread.

132 Christine Ross, “Body Noise” in *Kiki Smith*, Montréal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1996, 35. Ross precedes that statement by writing: *As feminist theorist Judith Butler states, the body is the materialization of a norm. It is a performance designed to reproduce a normative construction [...] But as Butler also notes, the individual never really succeeds in complying with the norm he or she is supposed to incarnate.*

133 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage 1995, 440. An anecdotal, yet pertinent quip by Eldridge Cleaver: “And although he [James Baldwin] was so full of sound, he was not a noisy writer like Ralph Ellison.” Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York: Dell, 1968, 98.

134 Paul Schimmel (ed.), *Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949–1979*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998.

135 Alternate version of a title of a photographic series and catalog by Gillian Wearing. Gillian Wearing, *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say*, London: Interim Art, 1997. In this series, the artist asked strangers in the street to write something, anything, on a cardboard sign and be photographed with it. Wearing says that with this method the subjects were able to “engineer their own representations” (p.3).

In Marina Abramovic's performance *Rhythm 0* (1974) a muting occurs through radical objectification, and Abramovic's passivity is tactical, so it does not counter this, rather it permits and even heightens it. Here is the succinct text provided as accompaniment to the piece:

Instructions.

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance.

I am the object.

During this period I take full responsibility.

Duration: 6 hours (8 pm–2 am)

1974

Studio Morra, Naples.¹³⁶

Considering the objects at the public's disposal, ranging from feather and perfume to knife, gun and bullet, the potential for disaster, over the six hours of the performance, was not negligible. The fact that at the end of the performance she found herself with a loaded gun in her hand, finger on the trigger and pointed at herself, and finally had to be rescued forms part of the lore of early 70s performance art.¹³⁷ My interest here is how this performance embodies a degree zero of somatic rhythmicity. Abramovic's supine body speaks back in so far as it hosts and displays the traces of objectifications, it provides a scene for it. Through this kind of body-mirror, or better, of Phelan's *flesh-speech*, where the body becomes reflector and vessel, the somatic utterance is radically exteriorized.¹³⁸ The

¹³⁶ Marina Abramovic, *Artist Body: Performances 1969–1998*, Milano: Charta, 1998, 80. The layout of the original is reproduced.

¹³⁷ Paul Schimmel, "Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object" in *Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949–1979*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 101. For an extensive discussion of the shock of the shot see ch. 4 pp. 205–220.

¹³⁸ Peggy Phelan, "Performing Talking Cures" in *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production*, eds. Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy Vickers, New York: Routledge, 1997, 244. Emphasis added. Full quote:

Sophisticated concepts of voice note that sound becomes incorporeal at the moment it exits the body. But such notions implicitly participate in the severing the body into parts and blessing the mouth as the source of bodily utterance. Artaud encourages us to hear a more dramatic body-voice, to listen to the sounds that emanate from the entire body, a *flesh-speech* that hears the voice that emanate from the mouth as just one source of somatic utterance.

resoluteness of her staging, how the performance is literally in the hands of the audience, finds a match in how Proust depicts the room of the uncanny he craves:

I feel alive and in thought only in a room where everything is the creation and the language of lives deeply different from mine, a taste opposite of mine, where I do not find any of my conscious thoughts, where my imagination is exalted by the feeling of diving at the heart of the *non-I* (au sein du non-moi).¹³⁹

We do not hear (from) the performer, but (from) the audience *playing* the performer. The setup of the piece instantly creates a room filled with the *non-I* of the performer, the suffusion is so complete that the notion of audience is no longer apt. They may be divided between participants and observers, but both are players, both have acquired stakes in the unfolding of the performance. As suggested by the title, Abramovic, in fact, is not just object, but simultaneously the embodiment of various components of musical performance. She becomes part-instrument, part-note, part-score, and entirely body concrète. *Rhythm 0* is an encounter between objects, animate and inanimate, featuring the interplay between passivity and activity. Its reversal of the form action assumes in performance places emphasis on the ethics of performance. She assumes full responsibility, but she concurrently relinquishes it fully; she is conjuring an auto-destruction performative, as per Blanchot's: "To destroy [...] A word – an infinitive marked by the infinite – without a subject; a work – destruction – which is accomplished by the word itself."¹⁴⁰ Opting for speechlessness, *Rhythm 0*, speaks as one of Ponge's *ambassadors of the mute world*, where the diplomatic act is an effacement which indeed masks a confrontation (we shall reprise the diplomatic corps with Adrian Piper momentarily).

139 Marcel Proust, *Sur la lecture*, Paris: Jacques Antoine, coll. le vice impuni, 1985 [1905], 26. Proust's reappearance in the final section of the final chapter (ch. 4 pp. 221–222) eerily replays this articulation of an embedded foreignness. Emphasis and translation mine. Original: *Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vies profondément différentes de la mienne, d'un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente, où mon imagination s'exalte en se sentant plongée au sein du non-moi.*

140 Maurice Blanchot, "Destroy" in *Marguerite Duras by Marguerite Duras*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1987, 130.



fig. 12



fig. 13

fig. 12 Marina Abramovic, *Rhythm 0*, 1974.

© Marina Abramovic / SODRAC (2011). Courtesy: Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

fig. 13 Joseph Beuys, *Infiltration homogen für Konzertflügel*, 1966.

© Estate of Joseph Beuys / SODRAC (2011).

In a discussion on painting Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of “a movement with no displacement, via vibration or radiance.”¹⁴¹ One could assign this description to *Rhythm 0*, although she was certainly moved, she did not move herself, her self. There was no self to move. Continuing with the atypical staging and performance of a musical instrument, Joseph Beuys presents us with a petrified performance, an oscillating object, or to follow his own terminology, a social sculpture (as discussed briefly in the preceding section):

The sound of the piano is trapped inside the felt skin. Normally, a piano is an instrument used to produce sounds. When it is not in use, it retains its sonorous potential. Here, no sound is possible and the piano is condemned to silence. *Infiltration homogen für Konzertflügel* [Homogenous infiltration for grand piano] expresses the nature and structure of the felt; the piano is therefore a homogenous deposit of sound [...] Human relation is indicated by the two red crosses, which signify urgency: the danger we face if we remain silent and if we fail to engage in the next stage of evolution.¹⁴²

Piano as ambulance, muted keys as the emergency response team to aid against the danger of silence, its force, its infinite rhythm. The potential sonorities of the piano as with the *flesh-speech* of the artist's body are not only countering the formalist biases of the art world but mark the site of a deeper struggle (which is nonetheless operative in the Greenberg-Fried axis), one where the strategic aim for those invested in the possibilities of the noisy body is to have body and its representations, as Taussig states, “interpenetrate so that revolutionary tensions becomes bodily innervation.”¹⁴³ In other words, a state of

141 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, 77. Merleau-Ponty is specifically addressing the paintings of Klee and Matisse. Translation mine. Original: *un mouvement sans déplacement, par vibration ou rayonnement*

142 Joseph Beuys in Sophie Duplaix (curator), *Sons et Lumières: Une histoire du son dans l'art du XX siècle*, Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2004, 347.

143 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 23. Fuller quote: *Body and image have to interpenetrate so that revolutionary tensions becomes bodily innervation. Surely this is sympathetic magic, in a modernist, Marxist revolutionary key. Surely the theory of profane illumination is geared precisely to the flashing moment of mimetic connection, no less embodied than it is mindful, no less individual than it is social.*

statelessness where the body revels in its noise and produces partitas both audible and beyond, beneath the range.

In closing, we shall examine Adrian Piper's *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City* (1970) where she attempts to resist a vertiginous mimetic pull at the level of consciousness by blocking off all sensorial input and entering the aforementioned establishment.¹⁴⁴ Piper feels she succeeds for she finds her fear of undergoing what Caillois terms the "gigantic phagocytosis" or, less scientifically, "the depersonalization by assimilation to space"¹⁴⁵ is for naught as she realizes "that complete absorption was impossible, because my voluntary object like passivity implied aggressive activity and choice."¹⁴⁶ Piper's shut out performance using blinders, gloves, ear plugs creates a feedback loop: the ears hear themselves not hearing, the eyes see themselves not seeing, the skin is limited to touching the limiter – a single surface touching back. From this obscure(d) space, Piper soon realizes that the *silent, secret, passive object* she has become is itself seen, heard, perceived (by herself first of all). The apparent failure of the enterprise is nonetheless generative for it stages the relation between subjecthood and objecthood as an uneven oscillation. One where self-consciousness and the anxiety of influence might have led us to a solipsistic mimetism, but it would have been a malfunctioning one, as evidenced by the disymmetries dialoguing throughout her statement (written

¹⁴⁴ Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, 27. Emphasis added. Complete text:

Max's was an Art Environment, replete with Art Consciousness and SelfConsciousness about Art Consciousness. To even walk into Max's was to be absorbed into the collective Art Self-Conscious Consciousness, either as object or as collaborator. I didn't want to be absorbed as a collaborator, because that would mean having my own consciousness co-opted and modified by that of others: It would mean allowing my consciousness to be influenced by their perceptions of art, and exposing my perceptions of art to their consciousness, and I didn't want that. I have always had a very strong individualistic streak. My solution was to privatize my own consciousness as much as possible, by depriving it of sensory input from that environment; to isolate it from all tactile, aural, and visual feedback. In doing so I presented myself as a *silent, secret, passive object*, seemingly ready to be absorbed into their consciousness as an object. But I learned that complete absorption was impossible, because my voluntary objectlike passivity implied aggressive activity and choice, an independent presence confronting the Art-Conscious environment with its autonomy. My objecthood became my subjecthood.

¹⁴⁵ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in October, No. 31, Winter 1984, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Piper, 27.



fig. 14

fig. 14 Adrian Piper, *Untitled Performance at Max's Kansas City*, NYC, 1970.
© Generali Foundation, Photo: Rosemary Meyer.

eleven years later). To untangle the layers of opacities at play here, let us turn to the notion of the *stain* which Lacan derives through Caillois' depiction of the mechanics of mimetism; this *stain* is a seepage which "governs the gaze most secretly and that which always escapes from the grasp of the form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness."¹⁴⁷ Thus, a constant reminder lurks in the realm of the ungraspable shadows. Hence, this opaque mirror which Piper activates reflects the body back onto the scopic register and obscures the view – it cannot be grasped whole, it spills outside of vision, it cannot be surveyed.

The resultant space such seepage creates is heterotopic, per Foucault's formulation: "I am a sort of shadow which provides me with my own visibility, which enables me to see myself there where I am not: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is equally a heterotopia, in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, and from which it exerts a force of return on the place I occupy."¹⁴⁸ That force of return, that power imbedded in momentary absenteeism (i.e. deliberate and habitual decentering by way of moves to the virtual space of the mirror and subsequent returns from) is not to be read as reconstitutive. Rather, it confirms the contingency that recurs in much body art, for instance Susan Hiller conceives herself as "a locus for thoughts, feelings, sensations, but not an impermeable corporeal boundary. *I am not a container.*"¹⁴⁹ It also confirms the power of darkness, one theorized by Caillois as "*filled*", it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton 1981, 74; *Le Séminaire livre XI Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. Points, 1973, 87. Original: *On s'apercevra alors que la fonction de la tache et du regard y est à la fois ce qui le commande le plus secrètement, et ce qui échappe toujours à la saisie de cette forme de la vision qui se satisfait d'elle-même en s'imaginant comme conscience.*

¹⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, New York: Routledge, 1998, 239–40. Translation slightly altered. "Des espaces autres", Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, vol. IV 1980–1988, Paris: Gallimard 1994, 756. Original: *je suis là-bas, là où je ne suis pas, une sorte d'ombre qui me donne à moi-même ma propre visibilité, qui me permet de regarder là où je ne suis pas: utopie du miroir. Mais c'est également une hétérotopie, dans la mesure où le miroir existe réellement, et où il a, sur la place que j'occupe.*

¹⁴⁹ Susan Hiller in *Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 216.

¹⁵⁰ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", 30. This moment returns on p.138.

the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light.”¹⁵⁰ It is evident that one could reformulate the ending as follows: *the ego is permeable for sound while it is not so for light*. For the sonic thrives on opacities, lurks in the shadows, and unearths the volume emanating from all these speechless bodies.

CHAPTER TWO / **SOUNDBODYMOUTH**

The sound that came out was raw and terrible beyond any description that I could give of it. But in fact there was no sound. Nothing. The sound was total silence. It was silence which screamed and screamed through the whole theatre so that the audience lowered its head as before a gust of wind.¹

GEORGE STEINER

¹ George Steiner in Elin Diamond, "The Shudder of Catharsis" in *Performativity and Performance*, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, New York: Routledge, 1995, 162. This is Steiner's account of the effect upon him of seeing Helene Weigel in the role of Mother Courage (in the 1949 production of Bertolt Brecht's play) miming "the cathartic scream her character could not utter" (in the moment following her refusal to identify the corpse of her son). Diamond describes this particular mouth as an "aporetic hole" (p. 163).

1. MOUTH PORES

1.1 MOUTH AGAPE

No abyss is as familiar as one's mouth; the *unheimlich* mouth. An internalized abyss which we presume to control, but which always exceeds such tidy precepts. The mouth is the meeting place of the sacred and the profane; sacred texts are salivated by the mouth's viscosity; the Word is born in a cavity that tears, chews, licks, spits. The mouth negotiates numerous ways into and out of itself; it is the conduit for air, voice, food, fluids. The collision of these disparate elements constitutes the noise of the mouth, purity is rendered impossible in such a contaminated corporeality. The strength of the rational is contingent on language's ability to evince itself from its mode of production. Language, in its very moment of inscription and emission, is awash amidst the slides of the slippery body. In other words, the mouth is not only an articulating engine that *cites*, that voices language, but also an organ that is present as *site*.

When Hayley Newman precedes a lecture she has to give on her work by having a dentist anaesthetize her, she performs a somatic intervention on the circuitry of communication. With the *Lock-jaw Lecture Series*, she disarticulates herself and her subsequent lecture, her talk becomes the performance of an attempt to talk.²

² Hayley Newman, *Performancemania*, London: Matt's Gallery, 2001, 62. The piece is part of a larger series titled *Connotations—Performance Images* which share the particularity that the “dates, locations, photographers and contexts for the performance cited in the text panels are fictional” (p. 39). As such the fabricated texts are integral to the work:

Lock-jaw Lecture Series

1997 – 1998

Lectures given at Chelsea College of Art, Middlesex University, Sheffield & Hallam University and Dartington College of Art.

Photo: Jonny Byars

Over the period of a year I was invited to give a series of lectures on my work. Before each lecture I visited a local dentist and had my mouth anaesthetised. With my mouth made immobile, I gave my feeblest apologies to the students and staff before attempting to talk on my work.



fig. 15

fig. 15 Hayley Newman, *Lockjaw Lecture Series*, from “Connotations Performance Images—1994–1998”, 1998. Courtesy of the Artist and Matt’s Gallery, London. Photo: Casey Orr.

To incapacitate the mouth in its role as a vehicle of language lowers the mouth and thereby places the sonic to the fore. When the mouth is in such a state (one might say, a state of *statelessness*) it is refracted inwards, it becomes a cavity resonating ad infinitum. A sonic fully irrigated by materiality.

The voices Whitehead's numerous bodies emit and the voices Barthes listens to are the sort which "escapes science because no science [...] can exhaust the voice, [...] there is always a remainder, a supplement, a lapse, an unsaid which designates itself: the voice."³ When fully somatized, the voice is unassimilable and unnamable. The inevitable entwining of the sacred and the profane generates the noise of the mouth and the viscosity of screams. As Allen S. Weiss postulates: "The scream is the desublimation of speech into the body, in opposition to the sublimation of the body into meaningful speech."⁴ The scream epitomizes the somatic voice, its drama is that it unfurls the body onto the soundscape, it exteriorizes the viscera:

She let herself go in the pleasure of rolling her bass tones above our heads; to better roar, she removed her dentures and opened her pink windpipe wide, [...] she lets the noise out *RRRaRRRaRRa*. [...] I have never heard a noise so beautiful, so terrifying, I encourage her with whispers, go, go, louder, kill us, kill all, more, more [...] *AarrAaarr Aarr*, the noises rip apart the weak air, old mouth hollow flesh, loud-mouth, it scares off death, *RrraRa*, [...] she fills herself up with her own screams, her head hangs between her front limbs, she rocks her belly with screams.⁵

³ Roland Barthes, "La musique, la voix, la langue" in *L'obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982, 247. Translation mine. Original: *un lieu qui échappe à toute science, car il n'est aucune science [...] qui épuise la voix [...] il y aura toujours un reste, un supplément, un lapsus, un non dit qui se désigne lui-même : la voix.*

⁴ Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 25.

⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Dedans*, Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1969, 67 – 8. Translation and emphasis mine, other version can be found in *Inside*, trans. Carol Bakko, New York: Schocken, 1986, 43. Original: *[E]lle se livre au plaisir de faire rouler sa voix de basse au-dessus de nos têtes ; pour bien hurler, elle a oté son dentier afin d'ouvrir son gosier rose, largement. [...] elle laisse sortir le bruit. RRRaRRRaRRa. [...] Je n'ai jamais entendu un bruit si beau, si terrifiant, je lui chuchote des encouragements, vas, vas, plus fort, crève-nous, crève tout, encore, encore. [...] AarrA aarrAarr, les bruits déchirent l'air faible, gueule vieille chair creuse, gueule fort, ça fait peur a la mort, RrraRa, [...] elle se remplit de ses propres cris sa tête pend entre ses pattes de devant, et elle se berce le ventre de cris.*

Cixous suggests that the scream has the power to foil death, in a later passage from her first novel, *Inside*, she continues to develop the scream's relationship to mortality and eternity:

But are you familiar with screaming? Screams, screams break everything, why doesn't she scream, just whispers here, I would have screamed so loud, my lungs would dilate, enormous, blooming, corollas full of noise, I would have screamed a scream so long, sharp, unbearable, that everything would have changed, I would have won or lost, one must try, God exists or he doesn't, if He does he cannot not respond to a scream like mine, even if he's busy, even if time is a mere drop in his eternity, time exists, he heard me before my scream, he hears, I scream, it's simple, *I am all scream*, I await his answer, as long as he doesn't respond I scream, I scream in front, in back, I scream for five thousand seven hundred and some years [...] my scream is me, I scream I am, prove to me that you are, I am proving to you that I am, the first one who shuts up loses, I *screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee*...⁶

The scream is the I in its barest conception, *I am all scream*, naked, prior to subjecthood, unframed by quotation marks (ref. Judith Butler, ch. 1 p. 53). Let us recall the case of Artaud, where we are immersed less in the realm of expression than of survival at its degree zero. His correspondence with Jacques Rivière is not just an epistolary exchange, but a dance, a *correspondance*, a *pas de deux*, a series of stutter-steps, an entwining between the rational and its antinomy, between two modes of writing: one subscribing to the rules of

⁶ Cixous, 87–8. Emphasis and translation mine, other version can be found in *Inside*, trans. Carol Bakko, New York: Schocken, 1986, 56–7. Original:

Mais les cris, vous connaissez? Les cris, les cris cassent tout, pourquoi ne crie-t-elle pas, ici ça chuchote, moi j'aurais crié si fort, mes poumons dilates, énormes, épanouis, corolles pleines de bruit, j'aurais crié d'un cri si long, pointu, insupportable, que tout aurait changé, j'aurais gagné ou perdu, il faut tenter, ou Dieu existe ou il n'existe pas, s'il existe il ne peut pas ne pas répondre à un cri comme le mien, même s'il est occupé, même si le temps n'est qu'une goutte dans son éternité, le temps existe, il m'a entendu avant que je crie, il entend, je crie, c'est simple, je suis tout cri, j'attends qu'il réponde, tant que tu ne réponds pas je crie, je crie en avant, en arrière, je crie il y a cinq mille sept cents et quelques ans, [...] mon cri est moi, je crie je suis, prouve-moi que tu es, moi je te prouve que je suis, le premier qui se tait a perdu, c'est normal, je *criiiiiiii*...

communication, the other effusive and diarrhetic. The latter is all scream; the scream in a futile attempt to make itself understood. Futile because the scream is always already beyond understanding, it circumvents this path in benefit of a somatic manifest. Significantly the only component of Artaud's submissions to Rivière that was included in the correspondence is a poem titled *Cri* (Scream). The correspondence can be read as a dialogue on articulation, disarticulation and inarticulation. It stages a historic encounter between one of the doyens of French literature and a brute force, one that stands "outside of thought."⁷ In his letters, Artaud argues for inarticulacy; this insistent articulation of the inarticulate reminds us that, with Artaud, we are imbedded in paradox. Rivière remarks on Artaud's paradoxical lucidity; there is a particularity with Artaud which places him both *in* the wolf's mouth and *as* the wolf's mouth.⁸ This speaks to a relationship with language which is one of (desired) mastery alongside (inevitable) trepidation. The latter always tempering the former. This double edge is also one which operates at the level of the body. The emitter, that is the body that utters, is not only a signifying machine, it is also one that malfunctions, that stutters, that floats outside of thought. The intent of these formulations is not to mystify (admittedly, a potential here) but to resist any move which subsumes excess and noise into a system or dictionary. We are mapping a series of faults and fissures. Running cracks proliferate and sketch a median akin to the one depicted by Beckett in *The Unnamable*:

[T]hey'll have said who I am, and I'll have heard, without an ear I'll have heard, and I'll have said it, without a mouth I'll have said it, I'll have said it inside me, then in the same breath outside me, perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces

⁷ Antonin Artaud, "To Jacques Rivière [letter of May 15, 1924]" in *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, 44.

⁸ One finds this articulated throughout Jacques Rivière's letter of March 25, 1924 (in Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 38–41); e.g. *One thing strikes me: the contrast between the extraordinary precision of your self-diagnosis and the vagueness, or at least the formlessness, of your creative efforts* (p.38).

and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either [...]'⁹

The position we are in is both ubiquitous and positionless; in other words, lost, lost in a liminal state. Beckett mentions the tympanum, but let us shift from hearing to expulsing and consider the laryngeal area, the glottis in particular. The glottis, that slit-like in-between which enables the vocal chords to modulate and resonate, is an opening deep inside the opening of the mouth. It is thus a double mouth, an interior one; it is perhaps from this second mouth, the one behind and below the first that is activated when Beckett writes: *without a mouth I'll have said it*. An unmouth, yet still one, one which precedes (or even foregoes) speech in favor of the scream's *informe* outbreaks. Weiss follows the exposition cited earlier by foregrounding how the scream actualizes the forces of eros and thanatos and their concomitant hand in finitude's eternal recurrence: "The scream is the expulsion of an unbearable, impossible internal polarization between life's force and death's negation, simultaneously signifying and simulating creation and destruction."¹⁰

Power relations, which can be characterized as a continual rehearsal of the play between eros and thanatos in the quotidian, are rendered unbearable not only by iniquities, but by that other scream from the second mouth, the buried scream, always present however unheard, like the coruscant atemporal chordal clusters in Ligeti, and their cirrocumulus-like hovering. Or like the potential energy of the scream on display in Martin Kersels' zany pseudo-scientific installation where the submerged speaker is blasting a scream endeavoring to heat up the water but the water ends up squelching the sound. The failure of the contraption is synonymous with its success on another register, the futility of the attempt speaks precisely to the argument of the indigestibility of the scream (and by the extension, of the somatic voice) in rational discourse.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable" in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York: Grove, 1991, 383.

¹⁰ Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 24.



fig. 16

fig. 16 Martin Kersels, *Attempt to raise the temperature of a container of water by yelling at it*, 1995. Courtesy of Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

The stakes in empowering the somatic voice is at the fulcrum of (un)sound art. The grain of the voice, its bristles, its resistant strain broadcast polyvocal, polyphonic, and polysemic utterances (“useless words,” Berio would say¹¹) which implicitly address the condition by which, as Barthes postulates, “discourse is not communication, as is oft repeated, it is subjection.”¹² And this is subjection to the highest authority, language. William S. Burroughs warns, “try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*.”¹³ In other words, as Georges Bataille and Henri Chopin respectively say, “the word silence is still a noise” and “the body ignores silence.”¹⁴ Inner speech removes the possibility of inner peace (meditation practices notwithstanding). With regards to subjection therefore, experiments with somatic sound (glossolalia, zaum, Dufrêne’s *cri-rhythmes*, Whitehead’s *Screamscape Studies*, etc.) are performed with the keen awareness that, as Walter Ong maintains, “one cannot utter a sound without exercising power.”¹⁵ In tandem with Barthes and Ong, sound artists theorize the corporeal language by producing voices as orbits with no real center, as elliptical oscillations, as genealogical vibrrrrrrrations (ref. Marinetti’s “vibbrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr”).¹⁶

¹¹ Luciano Berio, *Visage* (LP), New York: Vox Productions, 1966. In the liner notes Berio remarked that his composition *Visage* “constitutes a tribute to the radio as the most widespread disseminator of useless words.”

¹² Roland Barthes in Antoine Compagnon, “Lequel est le vrai?,” *Magazine littéraire*, No. 314, Octobre 1993, 26. Barthes himself often repeated this declaration, a second instance occurs at the *Leçon Inaugurale* to the Collège de France. Original and fuller quote: *Le langage est une législation, la langue en est le code. Nous ne voyons pas le pouvoir qui est dans la langue, parce que nous oublions que toute langue est une classement, et que tout classement est oppressif. [...] Parler et à plus forte raison discourir, ce n'est pas communiquer, comme on le répète trop souvent, c'est assujettir.*

¹³ William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*, New York: Grove Press, 1962, 49. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure*, Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 25. Translation mine. Original: *Le mot silence est encore un bruit*. And Henri Chopin in interview by John Hudak in Henri Chopin, *Les 9 Saintes-Phonies: A Retrospective* (CD), Amsterdam: Staalplaat / Korm Plastics, 1994, 13.

¹⁵ Walter Ong in Steve McCaffery, “From Phonic to Sonic” in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adalaide Morris, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, 165.

¹⁶ F. T. Marinetti in Gérard-Georges Lemaire, *Les mots futuristes en liberté*, Paris: Jacques Damasse, 1986, 40.



fig. 17



fig. 18

fig. 17 Adrian Piper, *Catalysis IV*, 1970. © Generali Foundation. Photo: Rosemary Meyer.

fig. 18 uncredited, [*Medium producing ectoplasm during spiritual seance*], England, turn of the century.

1.2 FROZEN SPEECH

Mouth agape, but gap cannot be seen because mouth is full, filled to overflowing, stuffed with towel, attempt to dry mouth out, to muffle speech, to suffocate breath, to starve out. This Piper, at the particular instant of *Catalysis iv*, is mute and muted. She is dehydrated, on a bus, catalyzing, precipitating, like a chemistry experiment whose query rewinds and fast forwards Rosa Parks all over us. Dressed conservatively, the only demarcation is her buccal protuberance. She reverses George Brecht's *Three Aqueous Events*: "ice, water, steam."¹⁷ She's *steam, water, ice*. Dry ice. Mad ice.¹⁸ She towels dry her liquid state, or at least keeps it contained. Like the intemperate, even inclement, Artaud we shall investigate in the next section, Adrian Piper's "a wave which hesitates between gas and water."¹⁹ She is hesitant water. And she is torrential. We drown dry. Imagine Piper as vapor, as outer layer, as median between.

A turn of the century picture of a medium producing ectoplasm strikingly resembles the Piper performing *Catalysis iv*. Fred Moten reads Piper as a parergon, "a foreign guest,"²⁰ this is certainly the case with the *Untitled Performance in Max's Kansas City* (discussed in pp. 60–63) and central to Moten's argument. With *Catalysis iv*, the foreign element presents itself in a similar fashion, but here the interiority of her action in the social space is focused squarely on the mouth. Furthermore her mutism is exteriorized, it is a silent discharge which presents a visual cue for somatized silence. Such tactic of presentation reverberates with Moten's striking statement: *sound gives us back the viscosity that ocularcentrism had repressed*.²¹ Here Moten

¹⁷ George Brecht, *Three Aqueous Events* (1961) is a Fluxus performance score cited in numerous places, for instance in Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 285.

¹⁸ Here I am also making an allusion to the title of the book by Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York: Dell, 1968.

¹⁹ Antonin Artaud in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 89.

²⁰ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 249.

²¹ Moten, 235. Italicized in the original. Moten's statement is entwined in a critique of Michael Fried by way of Piper.

speaks to the recurrent insurgent role of the phonic in the visual realm. Sound, in this mode, is not only what can or cannot be heard, but also a marker of material's irreducibility. The statement is reminiscent of the one by Quignard analyzed in Chapter 1: *The introduction of silence introduces the invisible in the visible* (p. 45), but the difference being that in one instance *sound* is the activating agent and in the other it is *silence*. A fine distinction between the two is perhaps unnecessary to stake out for the moment. What is retained from those two formulations is the potentiality of sound/silence to erupt, albeit surreptitiously, upon the brightly lit surface of the visual realm. What is tangential, but of import, is the fact that technologically, especially in the digital realm, sound is mediated by imaging technologies. Sound is, more often than not, found as an image on a computer screen. Thus, it is less paradoxically than he thinks that sound artist Christian Marclay can state, "it may seem like a contradiction, but I'm interested in sound, not just for how it sounds, but also for how it looks."²² Marclay is not speaking of the computer screen, nor are Quignard and Moten referring to the electronic modes of production utilized in sound art, my point being that on these disparate registers the interlacing between the audio and visual realms is simultaneously conflictual and complementary. Furthermore, if this is ultimately a synesthetic phenomenological move, it is also a politicized tactical one (at least for Moten).

Valère Novarina articulates the tenacity involved in the politics of denoting the irreducibility of material as follows: "To speak is not to communicate [...] to speak is not to express oneself [...] to speak is first to open the mouth and attack the world with it, to speak is to know how to bite."²³ The paradigm of communication is replaced, or preceded, by the basic performative act of opening one's mouth and apprehending (instead of comprehending). The conversion of *tongue as muscle* to *tongue as idiom* that is par for the course is momentarily arrested, we are faced by the salivating organ and its surrounding set of jaws. There is a photographic series that aptly combines the somatic

²² Christian Marclay in Rahma Khazam, "Jumpcut Jockey", *The Wire*, No. 195, May 2000, 28.

²³ Valère Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris, P.O.L., 1999, 16. Translation mine. Original: *Parler n'est pas communiquer, parler n'est pas s'exprimer, parler c'est d'abord ouvrir la bouche et attaquer le monde avec, savoir mordre.*

bent of Novarina and the role of sound in the visual realm. In the *myein* series, Ann Hamilton placed a pinhole camera inside her mouth and used her lips as a shutter.²⁴ These portraits acquire a sonorous shade, at least at the level of potential, at the *unsound* level. The resolution of the mouth-eye is not comparable to the eye, but this viewing gains an element of proximity, a degree of intimacy as evoked by the irregular framing produced by the shadowy carnality of the enclosure. Recalling Novarina's incitation to attack and bite, they also evoke a certain animality, a certain tasting is performed by the photographs.

These images confirm the premise advanced throughout this section, that the mouth is a privileged setting and staging whereby the outside and the foreign infiltrates the inside, the interior circuitry of the body, as well as the constitution of the self. Where the foreign and the intimate commingle. Where the relational is thereby amplified. These images open the door to the supposition that the mouth might not be "something which we are the proprietors of (our individual parcel, our identity, the prison of the I), but an interior opening, a spoken passage. The interior is not the site of what is mine, nor of the self, but a passage, a breach through which a foreign breath seizes us."²⁵ One reading of Novarina's statement could be that the foreign cannot seize us, because there is no *us* to speak of in this moment, after all, he is describing an interior without interiority. The foreign element which navigates in that passage from aperture to viscera could actuate a *mise en abîme*

²⁴ Ann Hamilton, "Artist Portfolio", (ai) performance for the planet, fall 2000, 64–73. (While the portfolio presents the series under the title *myein*, they are in fact part of an ongoing series titled *Face to Face*). From the introductory text: *The word myein is an Ancient Greek verb meaning to close the eyes or mouth. Across time, myein has come to stand for that thing which has not been, or cannot be, explained* (65). Etymologically, *myein* is related to *mysticism*. If the mouth can made to visualize, it begs the question of the inverse, ie. a hearing or sounding by the eyes. There are a couple of instances that I am aware of, the first suggests it, Christian Marclay, *Glasses* (1991), a sculptural piece where the lenses of a pair of glasses have been replaced by the ear and mouth pieces of a telephone (Christian Marclay, *Christian Marclay*, Los Angeles: UCLA Hammer Museum, 2003, 113.). The other is an audio piece of mine entitled «I» (2003) based entirely on recordings made of Aleksandr P. Thibodeau as he manipulated his eyeballs and whistled out of his enlarged tear duct. The piece was made specifically for presentation at pitch black concerts.

²⁵ Valère Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris: P.O.L., 1999, 14–15. In this passage, Novarina's subject is speech, I have taken the liberty of metonymically replacing it with the mouth. Translation mine. Original: *non quelque chose dont nous serions propriétaire (notre parcelle individuelle, notre identité, la prison du moi), mais une ouverture intérieure, un passage parlé. L'intérieur est le lieu non du mien, non du moi, mais d'un passage, d'une brèche par où nous saisit un souffle étranger.*



fig. 19



fig. 20



fig. 21

fig. 19 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 8, 2001.
fig. 20 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 16, 2001.
fig. 21 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 26, 2001.
 Images courtesy Ann Hamilton Studio.

of interiority, one that would parallel Valéry when he wrote that “we are human only on the surface, below lies an inexplicable substance”, one that resists representation.²⁶ In other words, a moment where the self and its nonself meet in this passage predicated on incongruence; this conduit swallows the outside at the same time that it spills itself out.

With *myein*, the mouth obscura acts as the body’s interior swallowing light and image, the mouth opens itself to its interior abyss, to the abyss it holds in. But, thanks to the tongue, the mouth can also protrude, it can physically leave the *prison of the I* Novarina speaks of, and that is precisely the project of Chinese artist Cang Xin. In his *Communication_Series* he eschews handshakes in favor of the tongue as primary mode of introduction. He communicates with places and objects (animate and inanimate) through his extended tongue. The tongue is recruited to not only taste but to touch, touch the outside. And the outside is endless, some that have been *tongued* by Xin so far: a postcard, a flame, a flag, the Great Wall of China, a box of detergent Tide, a statue, sandals, the Coliseum in Rome.

This greeting method is a somatized *Hello*, one which collapses distance not only physically but by bypassing language, by favoring *tongue as muscle* over *tongue as idiom*. In one version, Cang Xin is buried in earth, only his head protruding, like Winnie in the second half of *Happy Days*, and from this vantage point he tongues another’s tongue. Tellingly, Beckett’s short prose text *The Image* begins “The tongue gets clogged with mud only one remedy then pull it in and suck it swallow the mud or spit question to know whether it is nourishing.”²⁷ It begins there, and we end with it here.

²⁶ Paul Valéry in Jean Starobinski, *Le Corps, miroir du Monde: Voyage dans le musée imaginaire de Nicolas Bouvier*, Genève: Éditions Zoe, 2000, 123. Translation mine. Original and fuller quote: *L’homme n’est l’homme qu’à sa surface. Lève la peau, dissèque : ici commencent les machines. Puis tu te perds dans une substance inexplicable, étrangère à tout ce que tu sais et qui est pourtant l’essentielle.*

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, “The Image” in *The Complete Short Prose 1929–1989*, trans. Edith Fournier, New York: Grove, 1995, 165.



fig. 22



fig. 23



fig. 24

fig. 22 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.3*, performance, 2000, Haikou.

fig. 23 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.5*, performance, 2000, London.

fig. 24 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.7*, performance, 2001, Oslo.

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2. FLATUS VOCIS: SOMATIC WINDS

Pa Pa Pax Pa Pa Pa Pax Pa Pa Pa Pa Pax!

ANONYMOUS, *L'ART DE PÉTER*, 1776²⁸

... pet, a-mor mor, oc-cu-pet, cu, pet, a-mor oc-cu,
semper nos amor occupet.

ALFRED JARRY, 1898²⁹

to petar
e tanta fetura
ta fetura
e fula fetra

ra ta
petra
bari

re de pina

ta petar
ta feta
tralicha

ANTONIN ARTAUD (O.C. XXII, 54)³⁰

²⁸ Anonymous in Orlando de Rudder, *Ces mots qui font du bruit : dictionnaire des onomatopées, interjections et autres vocables d'origine onomatopéique ou expressive de la langue française*, Paris: JC Lattès, 1998, 253.

²⁹ Alfred Jarry, "Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll: A Neo Scientific Novel" in *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, eds. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor, New York: Grove, 1965 [1898], 217. The onomatopoeia is followed by: "The white-bearded energumen concluded the coprolalic phrase with a throat cry and an obscene contortion."

The onomatopoetic fart in Jarry and in *L'Art de péter* meets the glossolalic pet in Artaud at that *other* end of the mouth-anus axis and give the flatus its voice onto the page. Amplified, it mows down the page like a machine gun, it rips the pages, it breaks open the book with a somatic wind. Flatulence rarely enters the discourse; scatology, its cohabitant offers more substance, more disgust, more metaphors. Flatulence is insubstantial, it does not produce an object, it assaults the ears, it offends the nose and then dissipates. It is a safer excretion, there are no fart sewers. Yet flatulence contains properties and particularities of interest to the sonically inclined. As with any undertheorized subject, its delimitations are unfocused, it permeates into disparate territories.

The anus enters social discourse via two principal routes: humor and insult. It is a difficult subject to discuss with sobriety, perhaps this is precisely its forte. Freud in his foreword to John Bourke's infamous *Scatological Rites of All Nations* remarked that "anyone who studies such things is regarded as scarcely less 'improper' than someone who actually *does* improper things."³¹ In the case of flatulence, the situation is puzzling, everyone actually *does* it, but the one who studies it potentially faces the tag of impropriety. This section will not eschew the comic, there will be some nudging and winking, but it will also attempt to coalesce this material into a base from which to draw critical observations of how the social body prescribes the flesh body – with Antonin Artaud as lightning rod.

The body is a noisy place. It emits and transmits, it cannot contain itself, it has no built-in muffler. Its only silencer is willed, and as we shall see later on, to retain a fart is sometimes just as ill advised as to expel it. The orchestral

³⁰ All quotes from Antonin Artaud found in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard) will be referenced in this section with brackets in the text itself and in the following manner: O.C. volume number, page number (ie. O.C. XXII, 54). Quotes from the O.C. will be footnoted only when additional information is included. The dates of the other volumes used are: XV (1981), XX (1985), XXVI (1994). All translations mine. Of note, the last line of the four which immediately follow this quote could be said to make explicit a genealogical link between Artaud and Jarry: *Je hais les incantations,/ les psalmodies,/ les sorciers,/ le décervelage.*

³¹ John G. Bourke, *The Portable Scatolog*, ed. Louis K. Kaplan, New York: William Morrow, 1994 [1891], 6. Original title: *Scatological Rites of All Nations: A Dissertation upon the Employment of Excrementitious Remedial Agents in Religion, Therapeutics, Divination, Witchcraft, Love-Philthers, etc., in all Parts of the Globe Based upon Original Notes and Personal Observation and Upon Compilation from over One Thousand Authorities.*

renderings of our innards are rarely appreciated for their musicality. Rather, they are consistently considered as an affront or offense in Western mores. In particular, anything related to the anus brings embarrassment and is frowned upon. Yet, Peter Ostwald, a clinician, found the analogy of the orchestra to be a useful way to account for the body's sound emissions:

Among the internal organs of the body which make noises, the digestive tract is probably the most musical, a sort of miniature band. The mouth, a kind of trumpet, can hiss, blare and chomp. The esophagus, like a bassoon, produces gulps, burps, and belches, which, when properly timed can produce considerable hilarity. The stomach, akin to a French horn, gurgles, growls, and groans. The intestines, resembling nothing so much as a glockenspiel, tinkle during peristalsis. The trombone-like colon zooms as it leisurely churns away at semisolid gruel. Now and then its noises, especially the sudden high pitched beeps and bloops embarrass the band director. Tuba-like "brummps" indicate the deposit of feces in the rectum in anticipation of the final discharge to the accompaniment of a fanfare of noises.³²

Followed by an Artaudian remix offered by Carmelo Bene, wherein he adroitly amplifies the stakes and ensconces the voice within the viscera:

[...T]he voice alone (the differentiation of the "roles" is a phonetic-humoral variation) is without language; this interior of the body is an amplified uproar (salivation, farts, belches, borborygmi, etc.) of the remains of the word-sound chewed and vomited, slobbered at the edge of the mouth. The aphasia of such great oral sound effects, in this (dis) concert (full of noise and furor / and without any meaning), redoubles the apraxia of a body, a mummy veiled and/or covered up by a triple armor, blindly groping, seeking a vanishing orgasm amidst the expedients of horror (terror reduced to a will-o'-the-wisp) and of self-dread.³³

³² Peter Ostwald, *The Semiotics of Human Sound*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973, 28.

³³ Carmelo Bene in Allen S. Weiss, "In Memory Carmelo Bene 1937–2002", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 46 No. 4 (T176), Winter 2002, 9.

Pursuing a similar awareness of the significance of a noisy body, Julia Loktev presents a formulation which permutes the famed term *Body without Organs* (BwO); with Loktev, the BwO becomes *the Body as Organ* and it “is neither a conquest nor a transcendence of the body. It is the pleasure of it. The freeplay of the flesh. [...] An ever-mutating improvisational instrument, the *Body as Organ* is entirely corporeal, finite, and musical.”³⁴ This body is filled by Loktev to counter the truism often attributed to the audio arts of the voice being necessarily presented and transmitted as a disembodied entity. At face value, it would also seem to contradict the Artaudian BwO and more directly the Deleuze & Guattarian interpretation and extrapolation of Artaud’s BwO. The concepts, however, concur for they all posit the body as non-organism. That is, the body without organization, without rigidity, without arborescent structure. Deleuze & Guattari depict the full BwO as “the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable”;³⁵ Loktev describes the body as “chaotic and volatile.”³⁶ Both versions conceive of the body as potential, as flux, as unbridled. A body primed for flow, in a state “which hesitates between gas and water.”³⁷ That is, a state of *statelessness*.

According to these concepts the body would seem to be indigestible to itself, or perhaps this is precisely the only function it can fulfill. It can digest, but otherwise it remains fully incomprehensible. It can digest, only because in that migration south it accumulates chaos, it amplifies its affective powers, it intoxicates itself – for our discharges are toxic gifts. Joseph Pujol, the legendary Petomane, called his gift “the principle of intoxication.”³⁸ We shall pay attention to Le Petomane in a moment, but of interest here is the correlation between flatulence and intoxication, for the latter is *sine qua non* with madness. Issues of control, and particularly self-control accompany discussions of

³⁴ Julia Loktev, “The Body as Organ” in *Musicworks*, No. 53, 1992, 42.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 1, trans. Mark Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 8.

³⁶ Loktev, 40.

³⁷ Antonin Artaud in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 89, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 89.

³⁸ Joseph Pujol in Jean Nohain & F. Caradec, *Le Petomane 1857–1945*, trans. Warren Tute, Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1968, 10.

flatulence, and also permeate Antonin Artaud's writings. As a prelude, Diderot in *Le Neveu de Rameau* offers a salient example which precedes Artaud and amplifies the Ostwald digestive tract orchestra we sounded earlier. This is an encore where the whole body tunes up. Or perhaps *detunes* would be more fitting, for this orchestra is delirious. Rameau's nephew is the prototype of a jukebox which has derailed; he is a DJ with innumerable turntables and as many arms:

And off he went, walking up and down and humming some of the tunes from *L'Île des Fous*, [...] and now and again he raised his hands and eyes to heaven and exclaimed: Isn't that beautiful! God, isn't it beautiful! How can anyone wear a pair of ears on his head and question it?' He began to warm up and sang, at first softly, then, as he grew more impassioned, he raised his voice and there followed gestures, grimaces and bodily contortions, [...] He sang thirty tunes on top of each other and mixed up: Italian, French, tragic, comic, of all sorts and descriptions, sometimes in a bass voice going down to the infernal regions, and sometimes bursting himself in a falsetto voice he would split the heavens asunder, taking off the walks, deportment and gestures of the different singing parts: in turn raging, pacified, imperious, scornful. [...] He relents, wails, complains, laughs, never losing sight of tone, proportion, meaning of words and character of music. [...] Everything was there: the delicacy of the air and expressive power as well as grief. [...] sometimes leaving the vocal line to take up the instrumental parts, which he would suddenly abandon to return to the voice part, intertwining them so as to preserve the connecting link and unity of the whole. [...] With cheeks puffed out and a hoarse, dark tone he did the horns and bassoons, a bright, nasal tone for the oboes, quickening his voice with incredible agility for the stringed instruments to which he tried to get the closest approximation; he whistled the recorders and cooed the flutes, shouting, singing and throwing himself about like a mad thing: a one-man show featuring dancers, male and female, singers of both sexes, a whole orchestra, a complete opera-house, dividing himself into twenty stage parts, tear

ing up and down, stopping, like one possessed, with flashing eyes and foaming mouth. [...] What didn't he do? He wept, laughed, sighed, his gaze was tender, soft or furious: a woman swooning with grief, a poor wretch abandoned in the depth of his despair, a temple rising into view, birds falling silent at eventide, waters murmuring in a cool, solitary place of tumbling in torrents down the mountain side, a thunderstorm, a hurricane, the shrieks of the dying mingled with the howling of the tempest and the crash of thunder; night with its shadows, darkness and silence, *for even silence itself can be depicted into sound*. By now he was quite beside himself. Knocked up with fatigue, like a man coming out of a deep sleep or long trance, he stood there motionless, dazed, astonished, looking about him and trying to recognize his surroundings. [...] "Well, gentlemen, what's up? What are you laughing at?" [...] "Now that's what you call music and a musician."³⁹

The scene deserved to be quoted extensively – delirium is diarrhetic. It overflows, it runs amok and renders every dry space leaky like a sieve. One might qualify the nephew's madness as orchestral. He is the prototypical *one-man band*. For our purpose, however, this turntablist extraordinaire has not yet tapped into the potential of the body as instrument to add to his array of available sonorities. Towards this, let us introduce a renegade instrument to this mad orchestra, one suggested by Loktev and Ostwald: the rectum. As the flute emerging out of the anus of a body in Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* suggests, this organ is both instrument and instrumentalist.⁴⁰ It plays itself. Artaud succinctly confirms the musicality of that end of the digestive apparatus: "We fart, madmen, have you smelled the p of fa *On pète, aliénés, avez-vous senti le p du fa*" (O.C. XXII, 283).

³⁹ Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*, trans. Leonard Tancock, New York: Penguin, 1966, 102–104. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ For a study of the sound element in this work by Bosch consult Sharon Brooks, "Silent Machines and Tortured Voices: Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*" in *Public*, No. 4/5, Sound issue, 1990/91, 151–159.

2.1 SOUTH WINDS

The euphemism *to break wind* once reversed, alludes to the power of wind; its invisibility does not portend its all-too-visible ravages. Yet the devastation a high wind can reap on objects may be negligible compared to the damage it can cause to our psyche. The section title, *South Winds*, not only references the nether region of the body, but also the south end of the Hexagon – more precisely, Marseilles. Birthplace of both Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) and Joseph Pujol (1857–1945), Marseilles is in the path of the infamous Mistral, a wind which “has the ill-natured habit of scattering roof tiles about, knocking down chimneys, blowing small children into canals, [and] tumbling walls onto the unsuspecting natives.”⁴¹ Greek geographer Strabo describes the Mistral with similar awe, “an impetuous and terrible wind which displaces rocks, hurls men from their chariots, breaks their limbs and strips them of their clothes and weapons.”⁴² This brutal wind funnels through the valley of the Rhone bordered by the Alps to then do its damage on the French Riviera. Lyall Watson concisely states “we are air conditioned,”⁴³ in other words, we are at the mercy of air’s whims. We are under atmospheric pressure. Winds, as integral to climate, color the temperament alongside the myriad exterior forces which condition us: topography, architecture, family, neighbors, schools, economies, etc. Gertrude Stein expresses this in her inimitable manner: “anybody is as their land and air is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high, the air heavy or clear, and anybody is as there is wind or no wind there. It is that which makes them and the arts they make and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they learn and everything.”⁴⁴ Wind can have soothing properties, even apotropaic effects; it can rectify, but it can also unhinge. An Englishman, Patrick Brydone in *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta* (1776) writes of being under the effects of the sirocco in the

⁴¹ S. Brown in Lyall Watson, *Heaven’s Breath: A Natural History of the Wind*, New York: William Morrow, 1984, 36.

⁴² Strabo in Watson, 36.

⁴³ Watson, 205.

⁴⁴ Gertrude Stein in Watson, 45.

Neapolitan area, and recounts that when this wind is active “the spring and elasticity of the air seems to be lost; and that active principle which animates all nature appears to be dead. This principle we have sometimes supposed to be nothing else than the subtle electric fluid that the air usually contains; and indeed we have found, that during this wind, it appears to be almost annihilated.”⁴⁵ Here the author is prescient in his allusion to electromagnetic fields, for recent studies confirm that ionization and sferics have physiological consequences. The electrical charges diffusing at a global level are tempting to correlate to Artaud’s submission to electroshock therapy. Electroshock as a high dosage of windy ions, a highly concentrated spurt of wind.

The wind by itself is the disembodied epitomized, it necessitates the body of the earth to incorporate. Like a voice awaiting its speaker – be it human or electro-magnetic. Wind is 5600 million million tons of air in motion, it is the earth’s breath. The cover to Christian Marclay’s fart audio piece (7"45 rpm *Untitled*) materializes the somatic wind at this scale: one side a cloudy sky, the other a field with furrows and agricultural workers.⁴⁶ Marclay’s metaphor is explicit: the wind of the fart is fertile, it is earthed air, soiled sky. Evidently, air circulates through every register but the heavenly. In several languages, the word for breath and wind are the same; it is the same air in motion, in constant circulative corporeality. Breath or wind, a mere difference of scale. As Aristophanes states in *The Clouds*, “Thunder is nothing more than a fart.”⁴⁷ Madness is perhaps also a question of scale, it is as if Artaud inhaled the Mistral whole. The fury of Le Môme marseillais is fueled by the Mistral – a force which evacuates all in its path and in its past, “I have no father, no mother, the real and nature are definitions, concepts, which I will no longer enter. I come from the total and absolute NOTHINGNESS of myself *Je n’ai ni père ni mère, le réel et la nature sont des définitions, des conceptions, on ne m’y fera plus entrer. Je viens du NÉANT total et absolu de moi-même*” (O.C. XV, 338). This absolute is the swallowed infinity of the wind, constantly blowing up the

⁴⁵ Patrick Brydone in Watson, 278–9.

⁴⁶ Christian Marclay, *Untitled* (vinyl single), Greenville, Ohio: Robert Shiffler Collection and Archive, 1996.

⁴⁷ Aristophanes in John G. Bourke, *The Portable Scatolog*, New York: William Morrow, 1994 [1891], 91.



fig. 25

fig. 25 Christian Marclay, *Untitled* (front and back cover of vinyl single), 1996.
Robert Shiffler Collection and Archive, Greenville, Ohio.

insides. His insides; Artaud's carnality is measurable only in terms of infinity. André Roumieux followed up his first book, *Je travaille à l'asile d'aliénés*, with a study on Artaud. In it he notes how, even in his teens, Artaud seemed to breathe the unconditional:

My dear mommy,
Pardon, pardon, I beg of you a guilty son, a repentant heart. Oh! mommy,
I love you more than anything, I love you and I am tortured by the remorse at my wrongdoing, I am crazy. I am a monster, but forgive me.
What fury compels me to perpetrate such acts.⁴⁸

Pujol, the Petomane, also ingested an entire geophysics, in his case it was the Mediterranean. He discovered his gift (*of intoxication*, as we saw earlier) following an experience he had when bathing – “the sea had come in through his anus.”⁴⁹ Once he substituted water with air, and learnt to control his *gift*, his career was born: “When the gas comes out with enough force and with a certain degree of tension from the sphincter, noises are produced of intensity, timbre and of great variety. At times these are genuinely musical sounds. Although as it is almost impossible to obtain given notes these turn out to be common chords or, what is more extraordinary, recognizable tunes.”⁵⁰ The *Body with Organ*, indeed. Pujol embodies a particularly interesting reversal of the ingestion to digestion to excretion path. In him “the intestine plays the role of the chest in storing air and the anal sphincter that of the vocal chords, the throat and the mouth.”⁵¹ The body turned upside down. If the anus can sing, then how much closer is it to the sacred and pure? Or is it voice and song that are

⁴⁸ Artaud in André Roumieux, *Artaud et l'asile 1.: Au-delà des murs, la mémoire*, Paris: Séguier, 1996, 16–7. According to Artaud's sister, he was around fifteen when he wrote this letter. Translation mine. Original:

Ma chère maman,
Pardonne, pardonne je t'en supplie à un fils coupable, à un coeur repentant. Oh! maman, je t'aime plus que tout au monde, je t'aime et le remords de ma faute me torture, je suis fou. Je suis un monstre, mais pardonne. Quelle furie me pousse à accomplir de tels actes.

⁴⁹ Jean Nohain & F. Caradec, *Le Petomane 1857–1945*, trans. Warren Tute, Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1968, 21.

⁵⁰ Nohain & Caradec, 62.

⁵¹ Nohain & Caradec, 63.

now sullied? Artaud's answer to that question elevates flatulence to a science, and with it he posits an alternate consciousness:

There is a science of mephitic gases, more commonly known as farts. /
And a consciousness is based on this science, that is it is born from it. /
The mephitic gas is a spirit, cultivated by very fine initiates, and it is
one of the ways which is learnt by which the most harm is done to life. /
The madmen ignore this, but in them are some very high (and very perfect) spirits which take advantage of their madness, but what psychiatrist has understood this?

Ily a une science des gaz méphitiques, communément appelés des pets. / Et sur cette science une conscience est basée, je veux dire qu'elle en est née. / Le gaz méphitique est un esprit, que de très fins initiés cultivent, et c'est l'un des moyens appris par lesquels il est fait le plus de mal à la vie. / Les aliénés n'en savent rien, mais il est en eux de très haut (très parfaits) esprits qui se servent de leur démençe, mais quel est le psychiatre qui l'a compris? (O.C. XXII, 305, translation mine).

The Petomane was doubtlessly unaware of the loftiness his gift could have aspired to. He was of a lineage which confined itself mostly to the frivolous. But it is a lineage which works to undermine the predominance of the mouth as sole site of expression. There are references to several Petomanes *avant la lettre*: In 430 A.D. St. Augustine wrote in *The City of God*, "There are those that can break wind backward so artfully you would think they sang"; Edward I in 1331 granted land to a certain "Roland le Fartere" for "making a leap, a whistle and a fart"; and a "German" at the court of Maximilian (ca. 1500) "could rehearse any song whatsoever with his tail."⁵²

An arsehole which breathes is one by which the animus can pass. Breath, wind, animal, spirit, life, air, all circulate in this passage. The inclusion of such

⁵² The first and third examples are from Joseph T. Shipley, *The Origin of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984, 310–11. The second example is from Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Revels*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, 91.

essential elements alongside, and inside, the anus might be difficult to reconcile with “civilized” mores. Yet the etymology, mythology and history of farts might help one reconsider this difficulty, as Beckett stated: “we underestimate this little hole, it seems to me, we call it the arsehole and affect to despise it. But is it not rather the true portal of our being and the celebrated mouth no more than the kitchen-door.”⁵³ Artaud responds by adding a morbid tinge: “[...] join ass to mouth, kill oneself before being.”⁵⁴ And Joyce rhymes, “Mouth, south. Is the mouth south someway? Or the south a mouth? Must be some. South, pout, out, shout, drouth.”⁵⁵

Flatulence features predominantly in the context of self-control issues. Both Cicero and Plutarch deplored the restraining order that admonished the flatulent. Plutarch asks “Why was it ordained that they who were to live chaste should abstain from pulse? Or rather was it because they should bring empty and slender bodies to their purifications and expiations? For pulse are windy and cause a great deal of excrement that require purging off. Or is it because they excite lechery by reason of their flatulent and windy nature?”⁵⁶ Thus, flatulence also performs a role in sexual mechanics. There is abundant literature which links, and even conflates in some cases, flatus with erection and ejaculation, Artaud for instance: “I ejaculate this good for nothing fart *j’éjacule ce pet foireux*” (O.C. XX, 172). In terms of diet, the equation was: foods that cause flatulence aid in the production of semen. At the other end of the spectrum, “anaphrodisiacs are foodstuffs that do not engender semen, but dry it and dissolve flatulence.”⁵⁷ Flatulence here functions as an engine translating aphrodisiacs (beans figure prominently) into sexual fuel. Of note, this abetment is gender-specific for, as Clement of Alexandria comments, the eating of beans was outlawed because it was purported to make women sterile.⁵⁸

⁵³ Samuel Beckett, “Molloy” in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, trans. Patrick Bowles in collaboration with the author, New York: Grove Press, 1991, 80.

⁵⁴ Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t. XXVI, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, 52. Original and fuller quote: *Il y a un inconscient dans la / oh oh matrice universelle de l’étoc, / joindre cu à bouche, se donner à la mort avant d’être, / travailler facilement, / eh bien, ce n’est pas cela*

⁵⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, New York: Random House, 1990, 138.

⁵⁶ Plutarch in Bourke, 90–1.

⁵⁷ Constantine the African in the entry under “flatulence” in Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, London: Athlone Press, 1994.

On the other hand, the literature of manners removes explicit references to sex from the equation, and merely seeks to regulate a proper way to digest. It accepts the inevitability of farts, but seeks means to hide their occurrence – striving for the inaudible and aromatic fart. Erasmus referred to ancient proverbs to make his point: “let a cough hide the sound” and again “Listen to the old maxim about the sound of the wind. If it can be purged without a noise that is best. But it is better that it be emitted with a noise than that it be held back.”⁵⁹ The general edict these formulations attempt to frame is one where certain forms of behavior and bodily activities are acceptable in public and certain others should be relegated to the private realm. When bodily functions such as flatulence arise so do the difficulties, for one is not always in command of their flatus. What our bodies do despite ourselves has always been source of anxiety and fascination. Incontinence is a fear on par with madness, in fact often a synonymous fear. We are attracted by these fears as spectacle when exhibited in others and compelled by them when they overcome ourselves. As Guy Scarpetta states “Nothing is more erotically charged than bringing one’s partner to overcome his or her distaste.”⁶⁰ One would imagine that a statement from the perspective of the subject overcoming this barrier would be even more erotically heightened.

The last paragraph began negating sex and ended permeated by it. Despite the earlier correlation made between flatulence and arousal, an erotics of farts seems to be absent from the common repertoire. Flatulence does not appear in the vocabulary of seduction. It is only through a discussion of incontinence and its opposition to retention that flatulence attains a level of discourse beyond the jocular. Flatulence by itself, principally appeals to the puerile imagination. There are several examples, from Benjamin Franklin’s excursions in scurrilous texts; to Howard Stern’s radio fart contests; to the video *American Flatulators*, a horrendous spoof of *American Gladiators* (horrendous enough on its own); to *Austin Powers* and *South Park*. Farts as gag are by

⁵⁸ Clement of Alexandria in Williams, “flatulence.”

⁵⁹ Both quotes by Erasmus in Norbert Elias, *The Civilization Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994 [1939], 106.

⁶⁰ Guy Scarpetta, “Variations” in *Traverses*, No. 37: le dégoût, April 1986, 27.

no means undeserving of critical attention, they illustrate a desire to debase, even deprave. The only reservation is that this line of indulgences tends to supersede and thus obscure other threads where the desire might be the same but the tack differs. Pujol's career is not dissimilar to the above examples, his was not an avant-garde project. Aristocrats and celebrities who attended his show were slumming, and often went incognito. Nevertheless, Pujol's stint at the Moulin Rouge in the midst of turn-of-the-century Parisian cabaret life made for interesting cross-pollinations. The most unusual to mention here is that in the assemblage of curios one finds in Freud's consulting room is none other than a picture portrait of the Petomane.⁶¹

2.2 INCONTINENCE

In *La Potière Jalouse*, Claude Lévi-Strauss traces an Amerindian creation myth featuring flatulence as protagonist. In the tale's climax a nightjar blows up a giant rock by the violence of its farts. The rock is shattered into many pieces and this is said to be the origin of all the stones one now sees in the world.⁶² Lévi-Strauss contrasts this with the role of the sloth in Central and South American native cosmologies. In the myth, the sloth has never been observed eating, it is thus speculated that the sloth takes its nourishment solely from the air, as it is often seen with mouth agape in the direction of the wind. The corollary of this perceived idleness is that the sloth is reputed to have no anus (the sloth excretes just once every six to eight days).⁶³ There are all sorts of variants on these myths, but suffice it to say that these are two examples which lead Lévi-Strauss to propose a schema depicting mythology and its relationship to the oral/anal opposition. "[Orifices] can be open or closed, and whether

⁶¹ Scene (not pictured here) from the documentary film by Igor Vamos, *Le Petomane: Fin-de-siècle Fartiste* (VHS), New York: The Cinema Guild, 1998.

⁶² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Potière Jalouse*, Paris: Plon, 1985, 89. Translation mine. Original: *L'opposition oral/anal intéresse des orifices corporels. Ceux-ci peuvent être ouverts ou fermés, et selon qu'ils se trouvent dans l'un ou l'autre état ils sont aptes à remplir trois fonctions différentes: fermés, ils retiennent; ouverts, ils absorbent ou ils évacuent. D'où un tableau à six communications: rétention orale, avidité orale, incontinence orale; et rétention anale, avidité anale, incontinence anale.*

⁶³ Lévi-Strauss, 123–4.



fig. 26

fig. 26 Joseph Pujol performing for Thomas Edison's kinetophonolfactograph during the 1900 Paris World Fair. Stills from Igor Vamos, *Le Petomane: Fin de siècle artiste*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and The Cinema Guild, New York.

they are in either position they can fulfill three different functions: closed it retains, open it absorbs or evacuates. Thus, six options are possible: oral retention, oral avidity, oral incontinence; and anal retention, anal avidity, anal incontinence.”⁶⁴ The schema does complicate the oral/anal binary, but it remains reductive in comparison with the Body without Organs, which is the formulation of the infinite multiple. If one were to retain the Lévi-Strauss structure for a moment, one would note a progression from full control to full lack of control, from retention to avidity to incontinence.

Flatulence consistently figures under the rubric of incontinence. However, the expulsive force of flatulence also translates into instances where flatulence is wielded. The nightjar, for example, willingly exercised its power. French playwright, Valère Novarina also uses flatulence as sign of will: “The gas God produced in farting the world when he produced it, I wonder, if he himself heard it?”⁶⁵ Presumably this points to a form of incontinence which is particularized by a willingness to be unable to restrain oneself. In other words, a disdain for self-restraint, and a relish for lack thereof. Interestingly, both Louis Althusser and Aimé Césaire recount virtually identical stories which illustrate this point. Althusser, in his memoir, narrates this episode:

All of a sudden, I noticed my great-grandmother [...] standing bolt upright and did not say a word as a loud spurting noise issued from beneath her long black skirt. A clear stream ran past her feet. It took me a while to “realize” that she was peeing standing up [...] I was astounded to discover there were women-men, unashamed of their sexuality, who went ahead and pissed in front of everybody, without shame or modesty, and without giving any warning whatsoever!⁶⁶

With Césaire incontinence is featured as a release, an escape which is sought, desired: “this strange crowd which does not pile up, does not mix: agile in

⁶⁴ Lévi-Strauss, 96.

⁶⁵ Valère Novarina, *L'Inquiétude: adaptation pour la scène du Discours aux animaux*, Paris: P.O.L., 1993, 8. Translation mine. Original: *Le gaz de Dieu fit en pétant le monde quand il le fit, je me demande, si lui-même il l'a entendu?*

⁶⁶ Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever*, trans. Richard Veasy, eds. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang, New York: The New Press, 1992, 74.

discovering the point of dis-insertion, of flight, of escape. This crowd which does not know how to be a crowd, this crowd which we realize [...] has the suddenly serious animality of a peasant woman, urinating while standing, legs spread apart, unbending.”⁶⁷

Artaud, in the passage espousing the powers of the mephitic gas quoted earlier, also attributed a will to incontinence. In his case he pointed to nefarious spirits as the scientists in control of this new science. The science of incontinence; a science with a learning curve: “To have slept 9 years amongst the noise and smell of the farts of madmen is a unique learning experience that no doctor has ever known *Avoir dormi 9 ans dans le bruit et l’odeur des pets de fous est d’un immense enseignement que nul docteur n’a jamais connu*” (O.C. XXII, 101). Artaud was immersed in this greenhouse environment, his body was no barrier to the onslaught. But the greenhouse was already rampant inside Artaud before the asylums: the swallowed Mistral, the suspected hereditary syphilis, the neurasthenic adolescence, the addiction to opiates.⁶⁸ He was persecuted on all fronts, from the inside out to the outside in: “I have never ceased to think that *more and more* I could silence enemy and foreign thinking and swallow it in my interior fire [...] Why are beings which are not in me moving inside of me? *Je n’ai jamais cessé de penser que je pouvais de plus en plus faire taire la pensée ennemie et étrangère et l’avalier dans mon feu intérieur [...] Pourquoi des êtres qui ne sont pas en moi bougent-ils en moi?*” (O.C. XXII, 105). A science of possession where the possessor is possessed, where there is infinite retention alongside infinite incontinence. Desire and repulsion

⁶⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, Présence Africaine, 1983 [1939], 9–10. Translation mine. The translation by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith from Aimé Césaire *The Collected Poetry*, University of California Press, 1983, 35–6: *this strange throng which does not pack, does not mix: clever at discovering the point of disencasement, of flight, of dodging. This throng which does not know how to throng, this throng clearly [...] like the sudden grave animality of a peasant, urinating standing, her legs parted, stiff.* Original: *cette étrange foule qui ne s’entasse pas, ne se mêle pas : habile à découvrir le point de désencastrement, de fuite, d’esquive. Cette foule qui ne sait pas faire foule, cette foule, on s’en rend compte, [...] à l’animalité subitement grave d’une paysanne, urinant debout, les jambes écartées, roides.*

⁶⁸ André Roumieux, *Artaud et l’asile I: Au-delà des murs, la mémoire*, Paris: Séguier, 1996, 18–19. With respect to the diagnosis, the author does leave this open for speculation as he acknowledges that this diagnosis appears all too frequently in the period. In this early case, as in subsequent diagnosis, the treatment prescribed for Artaud had no curative effect and often caused more damage. In this particular case, the mercury iodine injections he was given permanently damaged his dentition.

fluxing between the two. Artaud's possession takes the form of an impossibility: he is a bloated body sieve with infinity infinitely passing through. Passing through a negation, or a negation containing all possible negations:

no anatomy, no physiology, no psychology, no physics, no cosmic law, some gris-gris. I am the earth and of the earth [...] I love neither the air nor the light, but the infernal night of my ass and of all asses for I am the voluminous assassin, the depth of my being is the volume of my body.

pas d'anatomie, pas de physiologie, pas de psychologie, pas de physique, pas de loi cosmique, des gris-gris. Je suis la terre et de la terre [...] Je n'aime ni l'air ni la lumière mais la nuit infernale de mon cu et de tout cu car je suis le volumineux assassin, le fond de mon être c'est le volume de mon corps. (O.C. XXII, 308)

One of the concrete manifestations of the voluminous was Artaud's abundant fecal production (O.C. XXVI, 58). Conversely, Artaud's passages pertaining to flatulence are not of his own production but are attributed to the generic plural "des aliénés" and the lowercase "dieu." These passages take the form of invectives tempered with awe: "there is nothing like madmen for farting, I have heard the peyote sorcerers fart but I must say that in this domain they are no match for even the least of the madmen *car il n'y a rien comme des aliénés pour péter, j'ai entendu les sorciers du peyotl péter mais je dois dire que dans ce domaine ils n'en savent pas aussi long que le dernier des aliénés*" (O.C. XXII, 304) and "While you, god, fart in your clouds, incapable spirits sprung from the tomb of my ass, I flip over the angels box in my double cracking grave" *Pendant que tu [dieu] pètes dans tes nuages, espèce d'incapable esprit, sorti de la tombe de mes fesses, [...] je retourne la boîte de l'ange dans mon double tombeau craquant*" (O.C. XX, 170–71). Thus, Artaud was more affected by consistency, by the soil and soiled, by what festered and not by what dissipated. Therefore, he might have concurred with Merleau-Ponty's line of questioning: "Where to assign the limit of the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body can one place seeing, since, by all evidence, our body is no more than a 'darkness stuffed with organs'?"⁶⁹

Again, here the extremes of infinitude coincide, the body is synonymous with the world: open, open wide; and the body is also opaque, sealed and stuffed: closed, closed shut. Monique Wintz sets a scene in which these two states enact their paradox, “In his tomb, Antonin grinds his teeth and pierces through earthworms with jabs of his jaw. He is beside himself.”⁷⁰ Artaud, posthumously vehement and vociferous. He is beside himself, he is forever. Beside himself, as in sublimated, not in the psychoanalytical sense but in the alchemical sense. His solids have become vapor. He is gas. He is spirit *and* its negation.

2.3 EXIT WOUND

A first breath is the condition of possibility of a last breath. The anus as exit figures prominently in death. In a fourteenth-century farce by Le Muynier, a dying man is convinced that the soul leaves the body via the anus at the moment of death. A priest and his wife are upon his side, and as he approaches death they “place him in such a position that if the doctrine of the soul-departure via the anus be true, they may witness the man’s final performance. The phenomenon of rectal flatulence is then observed, when suddenly, to the consternation of the wife and priest, a demon appears and, placing a sack over the dying man’s anus, catches the rectal gas and flies off in sulphurous vapor.”⁷¹ In Marco Ferreri’s 1973 film *La Grande Bouffe*, Michel (Michel Piccoli) is a TV personality who suffers from a tenesmus of gas. He does manage to expulse a couple of times but he is engaged (with three companions) in a suicide pact by way of gastronomical and sexual excess which for him culminates in one long final double breath – one from the mouth, the other from the anus. In Rabelais’

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty in Jacques Garelli, *Artaud et la question du lieu: Essai sur le théâtre et la poésie d'Artaud*, Librairie José Corti, 1982, 128. Translation mine. Original: *Où mettre la limite du corps et du monde, puisque le monde est chair ? Où mettre dans le corps le voyant, puisque, de tout évidence, il n'y a dans le corps que des “ténèbres bourrées d'organes” [...]?*

⁷⁰ Monique Wintz, “Antonin le sublimé” in *Recherches 36: Dérisonnances*, 1979, 136. Original: *Dans sa tombe, Antonin grince des dents et tronçonne les vers de terre à coup de mâchoires. Il est hors de lui.*

⁷¹ John G. Bourke, *The Portable Scatolog*, 151.

Pantagruel, we witness another scenario adjoining flatus and death: inhabitants of the *Isle of Winds* die while emitting gases, and their souls leave the body via the rectum.⁷² Death by way of the anus is the universal leveler and debaser. A folk legend recounted by Rabelais and Molière amongst others, starts with: “This is the court of King Petot, where all are equal.”⁷³ All equal in face of finitude, the last incontinence.

The death fart is a clear example of how this alternate breathing circuit plays its role as universal leveler. It clears the field, much like a gale sweeping all in its path. Césaire has wind hissing through every nook of his *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, the wind of a return, of change, of leakage, of the night, of the apocalypse, ... Winds causing anaphoric phrases which are endless from the start. The body facing the wind is either obstacle or accomplice. A body incontinent is complicit, it gives in, “and it is not only the mouths who sing, but the hands, the feet, the asses, the sexes, and the creature entire which liquefies [again, alchemical sublimation] in sounds, voice and rhythm.”⁷⁴

Rameau’s nephew, after his stint as embodied jukebox, advocates for the stage a state of frenzy in order to better reflect reality, “we need exclamations, interjections, suspensions, interruptions, affirmations, negations; we call on, we invoke, we shout, we emit, we cry, we laugh heartily.”⁷⁵ To this call I would add: We need incontinence; we fart. Jarry is the default for the last salvo: “Suddenly the toad’s descending colon thundered, and the nonalimentary bolus of pure fire took its usual path once more toward the pole of the devil Plural.”⁷⁶

⁷² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984, 151n6.

⁷³ Bakhtin, 264n41.

⁷⁴ Aimé Césaire, 16. Translation mine. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith translation (p. 41): *And not only do the mouths sing, but the hands, the feet, the buttocks, the genitals, and your entire being liquefies into sounds, voices, and rhythm.* Original: *Et ce ne sont pas seulement les bouches qui chantent, mais les mains, mais les pieds, mais les fesses, mais les sexes, et la créature tout entière qui se liquéfie en sons, voix et rythme.*

⁷⁵ Denis Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew*, trans. Leonard Tancock, New York: Penguin, 1966, 109.

⁷⁶ Alfred Jarry, “Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll: A Neo Scientific Novel” in *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, New York: Grove, 1965 [1898], 219.

3. LEAKS: STORIES OF THE SPIT SELF

Spit out words: the dreary, lame, empty language of men in society.
Simulate gray modesty or madness. But inwardly be in a state of tension.
Reach an incomprehensible unconquerable sphere.⁷⁷

The dichotomy between saliva and spit presents interesting parallels to the heard/unheard, sound/unsound pairs that are being discussed throughout this book. Therefore, in this section we return to the mouth and the ensuing focus on the duo of spit/saliva with an accompanying discussion on obscenity will enable us to discuss language at its most somatic (and thus at its loudest). How to navigate waterways, buccal byways and liquid highways of a substance, which, judging by common reactions, is no innocent lubricant. As Vito Acconci in *Waterways: 4 Saliva Studies* (1971) builds up a reservoir of saliva in his mouth, as the dams his lips form can hold no longer, he also collapses distance. In this instance, distance is precisely what is not there, the extreme closeup, the amplification of sound leaves no room for a narrative space, a breathing space, even a space to avert the gaze. He does not bring you to his space, he invites himself into yours, he is here. In Acconci's more well known installation/performance *Seedbed* (1972) piece the body is present, unmediated but separated, hidden *under*. We can discern here two manifestations of the obscene, one in full view, graphically displayed, the other ensconced, and ultimately residing as conjured in the imagination of the viewer. The acts of generating sperm and spit are, of course, different, but at certain points, the following pages will blur the difference. Saliva and spit are the two sides of this divide: the seen and not-seen. Spit, as both noun and verb, is a propellant, it is saliva's public face. Saliva, is not inert, nor static for we

⁷⁷ Hugo Ball in Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994, 41.

salivate, we chew, we kiss, but it remains inside. It is not necessary to be stringent about the distinction. Drool, for example, cannot be considered spit, but it is saliva outsided.

In “The Pineal Eye”, Bataille presents a similar split presence of the obscene. There are two elliptical moments which follow the sacrifice of the gibbon, here is one of them: “all throats were choked by raucous sighs, by impossible cries, and, from all sides, eyes were moist with the brilliant tears of vertigo ...”⁷⁸ Are these moments as obscene as the harrowing description of the sacrifice which precedes the ellipses? The two silent spaces are for yours to fill, and given their placement it is difficult to attain in them a moment of respite/reprieve (however needed), they are more likely to be where the *impossible cries* are heard, amplified, and never forgotten. The reflexivity of the elliptical moment amplifies what preceded it, it lets the memory fall into the vertigo of a playback loop, it repeats ad nauseam. In the concluding section of the film *Hurllements en faveur de Sade* (*Howls for Sade*) consisting of a blank white screen and absolute silence for 24 minutes, Guy Debord knew that this was the loudest possible way to voice a scream.⁷⁹ Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993) extends the ellipsis (visually) to the entirety of a film, he literalizes the AIDS pandemic and his own gradual loss of vision by creating a feature-length film with a blue screen as its only (non)image. The soundtrack, in combination with the blue that leaks out of the screen (reminiscent of James Turrell’s work), result in a heightened hearing that impedes, as with Acconci, a safe and distant positioning on the part of the listener/viewer.

In *The History of Manners* (Part 1 of *The Civilization Process*), Norbert Elias traces the history of spitting. In the Middle Ages, the only restriction to spitting was that one should not spit *on* or *over* the table but *under* it. This prohibition is repeated so often that Elias imagines to what extent the practice existed (that is, of spitting *on* or *over* the table).⁸⁰ In the sixteenth century, with Erasmus as marker, we find that spitting should be covered or hidden:

⁷⁸ Georges Bataille, “The Pineal Eye” in *Visions of Excess*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 86.

⁷⁹ Vincent Kaufman, “Life by the Letter”, October, No. 64, Spring 1993, 94.

⁸⁰ Norbert Elias, *The Civilization Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994 [1939], 129.



fig. 27



fig. 28

fig. 27–28 Vito Acconci, *Waterways: Four Saliva Studies*, 1971. © Vito Acconci/SODRAC (2011).

Turn away when spitting, lest your saliva fall on someone. If anything purulent falls to the ground, it should be trodden upon, lest it nauseate someone. If you are not at liberty to do this, catch the sputum in a small cloth. It is unmannerly to suck back saliva, as equally are those whom we see spitting at every third word not from necessity but from habit.⁸¹

In the following two centuries, the manner to deal with the practice furthers this notion of concealment. The handkerchief and spittoon evolved from luxurious items to common household utensils. Throughout this evolution spitting as a necessary expectoration was never questioned (in fact, as Erasmus points out above its retention was *unmannerly*, similarly La Salle in 1729: “You should not abstain from spitting, and it is very ill-mannered to swallow what should be spat.”⁸² It was only in the nineteenth century that, invoking “health concerns”, spit was discouraged all together: “Spitting is at all times a disgusting habit. I need say nothing more than – never indulge in it. Besides being coarse and atrocious, it is very bad for the health.”⁸³ Elias notes here that the health concerns raised precede any scientific discourse on germs, and therefore the shift is part of a “growing compulsion to be restrained and self-controlled.”⁸⁴ This echoes Michel Foucault’s exposition of the concept of self-mastery throughout *The History of Sexuality*. By the beginning of the twentieth century, spittoons had all but disappeared and handkerchiefs were being mass produced. Spit, by and large, was no longer allowed to be spat.

The relegation of spitting to be done *under* the table and then not to be done at all, its effacement, is the point where Bataille becomes germane for he is interested in pulling everything out from *under*, or in lowering our heads and sticking our face in this *under*. His choice to publish a dictionary in the journal *Documents* (at least to reference the form) operates as a disruptive tactic given his disdain for the completeness, and normative totality intrinsic to a dictionary. This subversion reverberates with Artaud’s provocation: “It is for

⁸¹ Erasmus in Elias, 126.

⁸² Elias, 127.

⁸³ Author uncredited, *Habits of Good Society* (1859) in Elias, 128.

⁸⁴ Elias, 130.

illiterates that I write.”⁸⁵ Fittingly, Bataille’s *critical* dictionary did not commence with the letter A but with his oft-quoted entry under *Formless* where spit is featured:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks [“job”]. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape [“to assume form”]. All of philosophy had not other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.⁸⁶

To destabilize, disrupt, dismantle, the lexicon is, as Denis Hollier points out, the job or task of a word: “If the meaning of words comes to light in a syntax obeying grammatical dictates, the job is simultaneously that which drives and is revealed by the syntax of insubordination.”⁸⁷ But how can we locate the formless, the nameless? Is the unnamable within language, or outside? Hollier refers to the story of Noah to answer the question, “no species was going to survive the flood, hence reproduce, that did not answer to a name. The nameless is excluded from reproduction, which is above all the transmission of a name.”⁸⁸ This would seem to place the formless in a nowhere, beyond discourse, “but Bataille’s writings relentlessly stages the perverse desire to make what is unnamable appear within language itself.”⁸⁹ With these “rude belches”⁹⁰ as

⁸⁵ Antonin Artaud in Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 282. Original: *C'est pour des analphabètes que j'écris*.

⁸⁶ Georges Bataille, “Formless” in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, trans. Iain White, 1995, 51–2. Square brackets point to Betsy Wings’ translation in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, 30.

⁸⁷ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, 30.

⁸⁸ Hollier, 31.

⁸⁹ Hollier, 31.

Yve-Alain Bois describes Bataille's textual transgressions, Bataille creates this tension of the impossible project, constantly countering the drive to rationalize with the drive to debase.

Spit and saliva recur in subsequent entries of the critical dictionary; in one Michel Leiris sees spit's host, the mouth, as being lowered (going *under*) by its amorphous inhabitant:

Spittle bears closely on erotic manifestations, because, like love, it plays havoc with the classification of organs. Like the sexual act carried out in broad daylight, it is scandal itself, for it lowers the mouth – which is the visible sign of intelligence – to the level of the most shameful organs, and, subsequently, man in general to the state of those primitive animals which, possessing only one aperture for all their needs – and thereby exempt from that elementary separation between organs of nutrition and secretion (to which would correspond the differentiation between the noble and the ignoble) – are still completely plunged in a sort of diabolical and inextricable chaos. For this reason, spittle represents the height of sacrilege.⁹¹

Spittle possesses an allusive power to conjure up the lower body and its *shameful organs*, and an ability to migrate shame north (out from *under*) to the location of the head (thereby to language as well). To splutter and to orate in the same breath is seen as the former weakening the argument presented by the latter. Here the high and low meet in the mouth and the low always detracts, tarnishes the other. “The impure is always more powerful than the pure”, as the example where a teaspoon of sewage will spoil a barrel of wine, but the same minuscule amount of wine will have no consequence on a barrel of sewage.⁹² Leiris' dictionary entry continues:

⁹⁰ Yve-Alain Bois in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: a User's Guide*, New York: Zone, 1997, 16.

⁹¹ Michel Leiris, “Mouth Water” in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, ed. Georges Bataille, trans. Iain White, London: Atlas Press, 1995, 79–80.

⁹² William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 258n21 and 9.

The divinity of the mouth is daily sullied by it. Indeed, what value can we attach to reason, or for that matter to speech, and consequently to man's presumed dignity, when we consider that, given the identical source of language and spittle, any philosophical discourse can legitimately be figured by the incongruous image of a spluttering orator? Spittle is finally, through its inconsistency, its indefinite contours, the relative imprecision of its color, and its humidity, the very symbol of the formless, of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchized.⁹³

The low here is not redeemable, it cannot undergo the civilizing process. Rosalind Krauss points out that this secretion, this excremental, echoes Karl Marx's identification of the lumpen proletarian, which is "that which falls outside the dialectical opposition" between the high and low. Interestingly, Krauss sees Bataille leading us to a similar tagging of untouchability to the very high, i.e. "sovereignty and the sacred are precipitated out of the homogeneous structure to form that very exception of which the rule is the product."⁹⁴

St. Augustine, in his *Expositions on the Psalms*, offers another example of language being lowered by spittle:

Spittle signifieth foolishness; spittle signifieth weakness. But if the Foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than men; let not the spittle as it were offend thee [earlier he describes precisely what Leiris mentions: a spluttering and bearded orator], but observe that it runneth down over the beard: for as by the spittle, weakness; so by the beard, strength is signified. He covered then His Strength by the body of His Weakness. Therefore humility is commended unto us. Be humble if thou wouldest bless the Lord at all times, and that His praise should be ever in thy mouth.⁹⁵

⁹³ Michel Leiris, 80.

⁹⁴ Rosalind E. Krauss in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, New York: Zone, 1997, 246.

⁹⁵ Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 33–50 Vol. 2, New York: New City Press, 2000, Psalm 34 section 3. Original text: *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Venetiis: Ad signum Spei, 1550.

Again, here the mouth is the site of a conflict, this time strength (the high) overcomes the weak (the low). Derrida bypasses the purgatory, the limbo of the mouth as intersection prone to collisions, by collapsing or perhaps superimposing the difference and stating that “speech is the sperm indispensable for insemination. (Conception through the ear, all of philosophy one could say). It descends through the woman’s ear, and is rolled up in a spiral around the womb.”⁹⁶ Suffice it to say that through these several examples the classification of organs and their functions has been thoroughly disrupted and inverted. Derrida remarks that for the Dogon and Bambara of Mali, the auditory canal is conceived as a vagina. Here Derrida begs the reversal: sperm as speech, and vagina as auditory canal, while there is no doubt that heteronormativity is at play here, it is interesting to note the absence of the penis in this organ havoc. Yet, as James Clifford summarizes, “in this newly recomposed definition [of spittle by Leiris] to talk or to think is also to ejaculate.”⁹⁷

A letter originating from The Royal Sanatorium in Weinsberg, dated Feb. 5 1909 performs a comparable havoc on the organs via an alchemical and synoptic view of the world, it is addressed by August Klett, the schizophrenic nephew, to his aunt Louise:

Dear Aunt Luise,

[T]he snow as corpse juice of the human body, which turns the animal world to gold [...] Areonal = tomato = water pollen = cold blood [...] onward to God to Valhalla near “Regensburg” and is called tartrate of wine “saliva = spittle = Venacetin, corpse juice = cothurnus = whore feces = water glass. Antipyrin is probably the same as this potassium namely burr oil in the resurrection out of the eye mirror, the songs of the golden earth (aurum = ear = conch).

Your grateful nephew
August Klett⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Tympan” in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, xiv.

⁹⁷ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, 133.

⁹⁸ August Klett in *In the Realms of the Unreal: “Insane” Writings*, ed. John G.H. Oakes, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991, 233–235.

The excremental in all its bodily forms is seen as a movement *out*, a purging. The concept of a return, an ingestion of that which was expectorated, turns most stomachs. Alan Hyde ponders the question: “Thousands of times a day we involuntarily swallow our own saliva. But who could drink a glass of his or her own saliva after it has been abjected from the body?”⁹⁹ Or similarly William Ian Miller, who quips: “Once outside, out for good.”¹⁰⁰ In Hyde, the footnote attached to the above quote is significant: “Burt Neuborne gave me this example. He’s sure it’s not original with him, but neither of us can locate the source.”¹⁰¹ We cannot pinpoint the source of our disgust, or indeed sources, they form intricate webs of causes and effects which are never in stasis. We must also be weary of grouping bodily excretions, for each functions differently in terms of disgust and obscenity (and thus also with this particular instance of ingestion thereof). And each is received in a historical and cultural context, which means it is specific to a frame, a frame of a scene which is constantly being reframed. For instance, Julia Kristeva cites an instance in the Bible where Christ’s act of spitting *on* was curative and miraculous. Kristeva quotes Mark 7:33–35 where Christ spat on a deaf mute and enables speech to circulate: “And straightaway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”¹⁰² Marcel Griaule enumerates instances in other cultures of spittle as miracle-maker. His entry in *Documents* titled *Spittle-Soul* goes from Great Russia, where to seal an oath, one spits; to Oriental Africa where one spits upon opening a door that has been long closed in order to cast off the demon of the empty house; and finally to Occidental Africa, where to confer the spirit on the child, the grandfather spits into the mouth of his grandchild several days after his birth.¹⁰³

Alain Testart, in his anthropological study *Des Mythes et des Croyances*, senses that as readers we would have a reluctance or inability to suspend these biases. In his introduction, he performs a singular move to address this issue.

⁹⁹ Alan Hyde, *Bodies of Law*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 212.

¹⁰⁰ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 97.

¹⁰¹ Alan Hyde, 212 fn.14.

¹⁰² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1982, 116.

¹⁰³ Marcel Griaule, “Spittle-Soul” in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, ed. Georges Bataille, trans. Iain White, London: Atlas Press, 1995, 79.

His study focuses on how salt, saliva and blood function in the (sacred) rites of various cultures. Testart then takes the fortuitous coincidence that in French all three of these elements begin with “S” (sel, saline, sang) and henceforth abbreviates them to this letter.¹⁰⁴ The structural study that ensues is dehydrated in more ways than one. The “S” here functions as a strange kind of collapsed plural compared to the “s” pluralizing the word *Positions* which Derrida heralds as being the polysemic marker of excess, the letter of dissemination par excellence.¹⁰⁵ This example points to instances where “it” is the topic of discussion, but “it” cannot be named (evoking as well the “s” common to sound and silence). Its power as an obscenity forces the formation and utilization of euphemisms and *mathematical overcoats* (to return to Bataille), or any other tactic of avoidance, of erasure, of hiding *under*.

We can surmise that Bataille would not be interested in hollowing out something like saliva and replicating it as a desert onto the reader, he would want you to traverse this desert (in other words, the normative power of language), and the only way to do it and remain alive is through transgression: “The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it.”¹⁰⁶ Let us now return to the question, why *once outside, out for good*? Bataille describes excretion as the body’s performance of a violent rupture which produces a foreign body, but key is that this expulsion results not in a disposal of the foreign, but in a realization that the body continually produces and reabsorbs this violent presence.¹⁰⁷ In Kristeva’s exposition on the foreigner in *Strangers to Ourselves*, the foreigner cannot enter the conversation, the foreignness of the foreigner cannot be assimilated.¹⁰⁸ Thus, faced with a glass

¹⁰⁴ Alain Testart, *Des mythes et des croyances*, Paris: Fondation de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1991, 19–20.

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, 133.

¹⁰⁶ Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, trans. Mary Dalwood, San Francisco: City Lights, 1986, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Georges Bataille, “The Use Value of D.A.F. Sade” in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 94. Original: *the object of activity (excrement, shameful parts, cadavers, etc.) is found each time treated as a foreign body; in other words, it can just as well be expelled following a brutal rupture as reabsorbed through the desire to put one’s body and mind entirely in a more or less violent state of expulsion (or projection).*

¹⁰⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 20–21.

of spit that has become foreign, it cannot be brought to the mouth, back to its source, and swallowed without transgression. Bataille's notion of transgression is to be in a constant battle to dismantle the subject, at least the stability which constitutes it and the interiority which keeps it closed, solipsistic, and repressed. He is not contented with what can be recuperated, systematized, assimilated into thought. Yet, the contradiction was not lost on him, just by his use of words (albeit those he strove to use were "words that put a stop to language")¹⁰⁹ he was aware of his compromise. It is a compromise premised on the mediation of language, according to Derrida, Bataille's (and Artaud's) "texts operate, in their deployment, the manifestation and (simultaneously) the deconstruction of *representation*."¹¹⁰

Proximity does not provide room for safe distance, it is not a measurement towards an escape (Bataille: "words, serve only to run away.")¹¹¹ It blurs the subject from the outside, an outside which can sometimes be so close that it is ingested. It also functions in conjunction with the other key spit-self moment of obscenity: the derangement of the organs, the heterogeneous effect, the destabilizing power of incongruity, the blurring of the subject and its boundaries.¹¹² The mouth is the core location, once opened, it cannot help but negotiate the inside/outside flow, and the traffic in air, food, speech, fluids. It also cannot help but get confused, jumbled, mixed up. Like the pleasure possible between two sets of mucous membranes, as Freud insists on naming the kiss. A pleasure which wreaks havoc with his classification system and thus, is placed by him under the rubric of the perversions.¹¹³ The mouth is its own anus, it is an incongruous machine, "no word contained my anus,"¹¹⁴

109 Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone, Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1988, 8.

110 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, 93. Translation mine. Original: *ces textes opèrent, dans leur mouvement même, la manifestation et la déconstruction pratique de la représentation*.

111 Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure*, Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 25. Translation mine. Original: *les mots, qui ne servent qu'à fuir*.

112 Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, New York: Marion Boyars, 1995, 142. Regarding the power of incongruity, Bataille in his introduction to said novel describes it as the most incongruous of all books. Original: *le plus incongru de tous les livres*.

113 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey, New York: Basic Books, 1962, 16.

114 Marie Cardinal in Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Cornell University Press, 1986, 186.

the mouth that speaks language cannot see its other end. The mouth creates accidents, bottlenecks, detours. Sometimes it even acquires a taste for it. As “the attraction of the detour” in the sense of the averted gaze, as in rubbernecking at an accident, or more importantly as in “the absolute turning away which attracts us absolutely” (Blanchot writing about Sade).¹¹⁵ Sometimes it salivates at the mere thought of it.

The desire to transgress is what thwarts any attempt to impede the flow. There is no cure, no vaccine that could eradicate it, there will always be a strain – dormant or hidden waiting to resurface – a leak, a noise. There is no way to legislate it out of existence, there will always be those who cannot comply or wantonly seek to break the law. The attempts to contain excess never exceed the power of the overflow. The excess is the remainder. The spit-self is the reminder that a dam can accomplish its functions of containment, but only as a never-ending task of vigilance. It is always containing, and thereby itself contained. How do we control our passions, violences, excesses? The act of containment has difficulty in being discerning. The spit-self here is an agent provocateur which spits between the normative homogeneous and the abjected heterogeneous. Saliva leaks between the contained and the spilled.

¹¹⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 45. Fuller quote: *To say, I like Sade, is to have no relation to Sade at all. Sade cannot be liked, no one can stand him, for what he writes turns us away absolutely by attracting us absolutely: the attraction of the detour.*

CHAPTER THREE / SOUNDTIMESLANGUAGE

Seated. Head in hands.
Nothing else. Face invisible.
Dim spot. Speech hesitant.
Mike for audibility.¹

SAMUEL BECKETT

¹ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose 1929–1989*, New York: Grove, 1995, xvi. These are Beckett's instructions from a letter dated April 26, 1980 to American director Joseph Chaikin for the staging of *Text*.

1. UTTER THE STUTTER

1.1 THE PERFORMANCE OF INARTICULATION AND POROSITY

The stutter is not an individual defect, but the retention of language to a level of non-speaking, [and from it] emerges something which astounds, frightens, deranges and repulses all speakers, all listeners from their comfortable state.²

As Maurice Blanchot points out in his heightened hearing of the stutter, in his accent on the affect and effect of defect, the stutter is an ensemble, it is a polyphony of the oral register. This plural amidst the singular marks a shift from the monophonic to the polyphonic and brings to presence the foreigner active at the very heart of language. Deducible from a presence of the collective and the foreign in the singular is the work of porosity; as echoed by Edouard Glissant: “From the steady localized scream, unfurls an arid, difficult speech. Tune your voice to a world time. Exit from the skin of your scream. Enter the world’s skin through your pores.”³ The performance of porosity activates a zone of transition, a permeable zone impeding successful implementation of a hermetic seal. Leakage, of any magnitude, from the insidious drip to the gushing torrent, undermines any xenophobic impulse. In this context, the stutter perforates, disseminating (s)pores to all within range. The stutter, as staccato rhythm which radically interferes with legato is that foreignness which is active from the inside. This section will posit the stutter as an active and generative agent by which one can engage in a reconsideration of the relation between individual and community.

² Maurice Blanchot, “Le « discours philosophique »” in *L’ARC Merleau-Ponty*, 1990, 3. This was written in the context of an issue of the journal *L’ARC* on Merleau-Ponty who had recently passed away; Blanchot is referring specifically to Merleau-Ponty’s significance as a pedagogue (which one might say, is the speaking profession).

³ Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997, 27. Translation mine. Original: *Du cri fixe d’ici, déroule une parole aride, difficile. Accorde ta voix à la durée du monde. Sors de la peau de ton cri. Entre en peau du monde par tes pores.*

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams points out that originally *individual* meant *indivisible*, the question at stake here pertains to the level at which the division is invoked.⁴ The indivisibility in the etymology of *individual* is commonly taken to refer to the individual's wholeness, its unity, its self-containment (including its self-hearing as we shall see later). In other words, it is an individualized indivisibility predicated by the erection of a definitive divisibility *from* the collective, the erection of an impassable sheath delimiting an interior from the exterior. Catherine Clément has advanced the term *dividual*, which designates the individual as necessarily a member of the collective.⁵ The reason we retain the notion of a coherent whole "I" is predictable, the plural always gets us into trouble, "*one* becomes *two*, *four* becomes *eight*, *sixteen* becomes *thirty-two*. Multiplying and worsening."⁶ From his multiplication tables, Valère Novarina proceeds by predicting an eventual respite from the chaos: "This is a movement of expansion according to the laws of the living disorder of nature [...] It is by means of infinite multiplication that symmetry arises."⁷

The triggered retention Blanchot refers to at the opening of this section, *the retention of language to a level of non-speaking*, is the action which performs a paradoxical contracture – an inward movement with outward effect releasing pores and injecting the foreign into the comfort of stasis. In this moment of the stutter, immobility is rendered mobile and thereby mobilized, thus it can be recruited for the task of studying the performative of the term *community*, for as Jean-Luc Nancy states, the community has "no subsistence on its own, it is the contact, the encounter, the porosity, the osmosis, the rubbing, the attraction and the repulsion."⁸ The *contact* mentioned by Nancy will be amplified

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, 1983, 161. Actual quote: *Individual originally meant indivisible. That now sounds like paradox. 'Individual' stresses a distinction from others; 'indivisible' a necessary connection.*

⁵ Jacinto Lageira, "La Syncope et l'Extase Interview avec Catherine Clément" in *Parachute*, No. 64, 1992, 31.

⁶ Valère Novarina, "The Debate With Space", trans. Allen S. Weiss, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45 No. 1 (T 169), Spring 2001, 118.

⁷ Novarina, 118–9.

⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Cosmos Basileus" in *Lignes*, No. 35, Octobre 1998, 96. Translation mine. Original and fuller quote: [*La communauté*] (*qui n'est rien non plus de subsistant par soi, qui est le contact, le côtoïement, la porosité, l'osmose et le frottement, l'attraction et la répulsion, etc.*) *est consubstantielle à l'existant : à chacun et à tous, à chacun en tant qu'à tous.*

here in order to render audible its movement of contracture and its ensuing transmutation into *contract*; as phonetist Marie-Claude Pfauwadel, asserts, stuttering requires at least two to be manifest.⁹ To contract a community, as with any disease, is a declaration of dependence (of the *dividual*), and as Nancy makes explicit above, the condition of the porophile is keenly acquainted with its reverse motion, the contraction, the phobic impulse, the repulsion which is fueled alongside every attraction. Nevertheless, if one conceives the body as porous, it becomes impossible to think of an individual without a collective, impossible to keep your distance, impossible to delimit the outside from the inside – one turns into a divisible and *diseased* dividual.

The stutter emerges from porosity, it is a contagious performative. The stutter as considered here acts as the incisor for a number of similar actions which have metaphoric force precisely because they remain ensconced in the somatic. Thus to stutters one should add squints, hiccups, blinks, lisps, twitches, squeaks, spasms, shakes, hems & haws, moans & groans, grunts, yelps, screams, murmurs, mumbles, laughs, cracks, garbles, ... any and all disrupters and disturbers, be they voluntary or involuntary. In the same spirit as Deleuze and Guattari's usage of schizophrenia, the stutter, in this expanded definition, does not shed its (non)voicing as an impediment, but here is tactically presented as a necessary force. Nancy writes of a *partage* [sharing] of voices,¹⁰ I am intervening in this trajectory by concentrating, squinting one might say, on the moments when the fluid *partage* comes to a barrier or barrage – somatic interruptions at the level of geography – and *portage* becomes necessary. With *portage*, the lifting and shouldering of all that weight constitute the proper measures of the responsibility the voyage assumes and undertakes. Sharing here is seen not only as a conduit to community but as a constitutive origin where *partage* is meant as cleavage, as separateness. This is the condition of possibility of speaking, it is the condition of separation (what Blanchot terms “the

⁹ Marie-Claude Pfauwadel, *Être Bêgue*, Paris: Le hameau/retz, 1986, 181. While this is not strictly correct, for instance there are rare cases where someone will stutter when they read aloud to themselves, I believe that Pfauwadel was referring more broadly to the notion that the stutter is manifest in the relational and this would include a relation to self involving language and self-hearing.

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le partage des voix*, Paris: Galilée, 1982, passim.

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 75.

philosophy of separation”¹¹) which produces the *autrui* – an other which we can recognize even in its full unrecognizability. The separated other is no mere acquaintance, you recognize it as the foreigner from within which rhythms you.

To praise the stutter, to elevate it, is not to ignore or diminish the difficulties encountered by the stutterer. It is, however, philosophically and politically imperative not to translate concern as a retreat, retreat into a normative mellifluousness – a smooth operator. Fluency and articulacy are generally premised as the condition of possibility for discourse, for thinking in the service of communication. Impediments towards these conditions are marginalized, vilified, outlawed; as Aristotle states: “a letter is an indivisible sound. [...] for even brutes utter indivisible sounds.”¹² The stutter, however, can be heard as a surfeit of articulation, a disarticulation which divides infinitely, which divides the indivisibility of letters. Deleuze in examining Artaud’s virulent critique of Lewis Carroll, articulates how he perceives that Artaud operates *on*, or even *against*, language: “It is a question of transforming the word into an action by rendering it incapable of being decomposed and incapable of disintegrating: *language without articulation*.”¹³ The espousal of illiteracy, of unreadability, is in actuality one for an augmented notion of literature. In other words, for an embodied literature, where one of the steps might resemble Natalie Sarraute’s: “When I write, I listen. [...] Everything I say, I hear, I always hear the words, I always hear them from the inside, I hear the rhythm, I hear the words, that’s also the way I read, I always read by listening to the text.”¹⁴ Sarraute’s inner rhythm connects to a hearing we are less conscious of – physiologically, our hearing is doubled, our ears hear and so does our body. This second hearing, via bone induction, is “the foundation of the first, an inarticulate moan.”¹⁵ An infinitesimal delay between this type of self-hearing and the one our ears perform is reported to cause the stutter. This neurological misfire creates the space in-between, the porous space, space which is and isn’t. Again, a doubling which

¹² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher, New York: Hill & Wang, 1961, 95 [xx 2–3].

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 89.

¹⁴ Nathalie Sarraute, *Lecture* (CD), Paris: Gallimard, coll. à voix haute, 1998.

¹⁵ Benson Bobrick, *Knotted Tongues: Stuttering in History and the Quest for a Cure*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995, 178.

blurs exterior and interior distinctions, which disturbs fluency, which injects difference amidst repetition. A doubling which is not merely an addition of one, but a forerunner of multiple permutations. The second hearing may be an inarticulate bass track, but it is replete with differentiated and embodied intelligibility nonetheless. It is the indicator on the space-time matrix, that space between words, letters, notes. Space where staccato deranges legato. Space of the foreign mother tongue, as Cixous in “my German mother in the mouth, in the larynx, rhythms me.”¹⁶ Cixous also depicts the scene of writing as one where an obscure exterior vacillation rhythms the writer:

I write before myself by apprehension, with no comprehension, the night vibrates, I see with my ears, I advance into the bosom of the world, hands in front, capturing the music with my palms, until something breathes under the pen’s beak. (I’ve just written these lines eyelids closed as usual, because the day and its huge light keeps us from seeing what is germinating.)¹⁷

Thus, the inarticulacy implicit in an *apprehension with no comprehension* is, as Artaud repeatedly performs, somehow able to speak. De Certeau describes glossolalia as a kind of utterance which speaks for the sake of speaking.¹⁸ Similarly, the stutter can be heard as a “noise of otherness,”¹⁹ in what I would call, a *stutterance*, which, through its eruption, performs upon language an act of disruption. The implications of this act, this moment, are multiple; in an Austinian sense, one might dub them solipsistic performatives for these eruptions often mark the object’s appearance *on its own terms*. In other words, they are the moments where, despite systematic resistance by the surroundings, the object declares its existence, however tenuous. Beckett’s thoughts on Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* aptly depict this insistence towards *assertion*:

¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, *Entre l’écriture*, Paris: Des femmes, 1986, 31.

¹⁷ Hélène Cixous, “Without End no State of Drawingness no, rather: The Executioner’s Taking Off” in *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory & Interpretation*, Vol. 24 No. 1, Winter 1993, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray, 92.

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, “Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias” in *Representations*, No. 56, Fall 1996, 29. Trans. Daniel Rosenberg. Original: Michel de Certeau, “Utopies vocales: glossolalias” in *Traverses*, No. 20, November 1980, 26.

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, “Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias”, 30. “Utopies vocales: glossolalias”, 26.

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*.²⁰

The text seems to have swallowed the author whole, if *it is not written at all*, have the words written themselves? Perhaps, Austin's *How to Do Things With Words* has become *How Words Do Things With You*. In the variation on the original title, the *you* is named, in the original it is assumed, the *you* is the agent, the subject which does the how of the book. In the reversal, agency shifts, words become actors, they acquire a certain magical, animistic power. Sartre's essay, *Orphée Noir*, presents the project of poetics to be "an incantatory attempt at suggesting a Being in and through the vibratory disappearance of the word [...] by driving the words mad."²¹ Sartre then provides a setting where the madness occurs: "The poem is an obscure chamber where the words collide into each other at every turn, crazy. On air collisions, they ignite themselves reciprocally and fall into flames."²² Thus, the poet, as firestarter, not only holds particular responsibility but is also in a dangerous position, contained within an *obscure chamber*, liable to be consumed by the inflamed word. Mad words are echoes that do not fade, confusing *before* with *after*. They are that infinitude of two mirrors facing each other, confusing the *there* with the *here*. Dissolving heretofore stable precepts, they are that chronic time which is not a single point rendered perpetual, but the work of repetition, of rhythm. Amidst the rhythm of these mad words, these language sparks, in this highly combustive environment which holds us transfixed, which envelops us in the tension between warmth and danger, the poet is in the role of an instigator who cannot help but to "keep rubbing at this frictional area."²³

²⁰ Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce" in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, New York: Grove, 1984, 27. Of note is the punctuation in the title of Beckett's essay, it reflects the temporal spacing between each author named. By this idiosyncratic nod to biography, Beckett performs a perfect illustration of the superimposition of content and form.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre in Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, Paris: PUF, 1948, xx.

²² Sartre in Senghor, xx.

²³ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 41 No. 3 (T 155), Fall 1997, 13.

Sartre begins his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, by referring to those who owned the Verb (privilege of ownership), and to all the others who merely had the option to borrow it (borrowing privileges).²⁴ The now active, mad word counters the prevalent reverse movement from verb to noun which Nathaniel Mackey traces in *Discrepant Engagement*: "The domain of action and the ability to act suggested by *verb* is closed off by the hypostasis, paralysis, and arrest suggested by *noun*."²⁵ Wilson Harris addresses the consequence of this arrest by identifying the temporal parameters at play: "We need somehow to find an *original dislocation* within which to unlock a body of claustrophobic assumptions which strengthens itself by promoting a self-encircling round of protest [...] like a static clock that crushes all into the time of conquest."²⁶ There is a striking contrast between the "Je suis *fixé*" (I am fixated, I am targeted) of Fanon, and Cixous's "from all sides I beat, I pulse, I drip, Rhythmed."²⁷ Fanon might be moving, but not fast enough, he is being tracked, pursued by *static time*. At the other pole, Cixous is leaking a song.

The concomitance of finitude and infinitude is the recurring theme here; the "I" is divided, but also multiplied, whole but fragmented, here *and* there, displaced *and* displacing, petrified *and* dancing. We have begun to see how this is staged in language especially with respect to subjectivity in the encounter. Another aspect of this highly charged intersection we must examine regards methods of address. In *Time and the Other*, Fabian utilizes Benveniste's notion of a "correlation of subjectivity" with respect to the "I" and "you" of a conversation to posit the third person as a non-person.²⁸ The "they" become

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Les damnés de la terre" in *Situations, V colonialisme et néo-colonialisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, 167.

²⁵ Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000, 266. Emphasis in original. Mackey presents this in context of "the erasure of black inventiveness by white appropriation" and more specifically how "the 'noun,' white commodification, obscures or 'disappears' the 'verb' it rips off, black agency, black authority, black invention."

²⁶ Wilson Harris, "Continuity and Discontinuity" in *Selected Essays: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. A.J.M. Bundy, New York: Routledge, 1999, 179. Emphasis added.

²⁷ Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952, 93. Emphasis in original. Hélène Cixous, *Souffles*, Paris: Des femmes, 1975, 70. Original: [...] *de toutes parts je bats, je pulse, je jute, Rythmée*.

²⁸ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 84–7.

the observed, the object of study, and this othering performs a spatial-temporal distancing. Fabian's assessment is that anthropological discourse eviscerates the dialogic necessary for coevalness. How can one read this in light of what has been postulated thus far? Is the promise of dialogism predicated on stable subject positions, on encounters between non-porous subjects? Can we find that *original dislocation* and if so, what would we do with it? Have the tactics of dislocation outlined up until now served only to relocate or gloss that original moment? Is there a Big Bang Other?

As the questions have ebbed towards unanswerability, perhaps presenting Blanchot and Glissant in contradistinction can be useful here. Both present theorizations of a third; the necessity of the "il" for Blanchot, the imbedded scream of Creole as actualization of insubordination for Glissant. In *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot presents a "he" (il), a third person, that is not a presumptuous conduit to the universal (the observer position) but a vertiginous movement by the writer towards "a language which nobody speaks, which is not addressed to anyone, which has no center, which does not reveal anything."²⁹ The writer becomes a foreigner within their creation, the writing *others* the writer – and Derrida would add that that is to be "within the provocation of the so-called 'performative contradiction'" – in other words, and as famously stated by Rimbaud, *Je est un autre*.³⁰ Thus, full coherence is put into question, even dismantled, through a process where the text asserts its own existence. A text which is not beholden to an array of criteria outside of itself; a text which, through the performative unfolding of its own words, acquires immanence. A paralytic rhythm emerges out of an immanence steeped into recurring disruptions *of* and *by* the encounter – what Blanchot terms "an interruption of being."³¹ Interruption and repetition are intimate partners in a

²⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, 21. Translation mine. Original: *L'écrivain appartient à un langage que personne ne parle, qui ne s'adresse à personne, qui n'a pas de centre, qui ne révèle rien.*

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, trans. Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, 1998, 5; *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, Paris: Galilée, 1996, 19. In fact, prefacing this passage Derrida draws a distinction between a language that is "foreign to me" and one that is "not mine." I invoke the foreigner figure for it recurs in myriad sources, namely in Proust's well-known statement: "The beautiful books are written in a sort of foreign language," which is referred to explicitly by Deleuze and implicitly by Cixous.

philosophy of separation, they intervene in the exchange between addresser and addressee. Glissant pays attention to sound in his theorization of the creolization at play in this moment:

Creole is forged as a third term between slave and master, the scream imposes on the slave its particular syntax. For the Antillean, the word is first a sound. Noise is speech. Din is discourse [...] Since it is forbidden to speak, we will camouflage it under the provocative paroxysm of the scream. It will be mistaken for the call of the beast. This is how the dispossessed will organize speech, by weaving it in the apparent insignificance of extreme noise.³²

Creole, which is derived from the Latin *creare* – to create, thereby performs that turn, that facing which does not equalize but questions time, that facing which we witness in Baldwin’s “with a grin meant to hide more than it revealed, which hideously revealed more than it could hide.”³³

When enemies are innumerable, the stutter has to function as a sideways move, yet from within a frontal assault. Sideways, to be angled according to the attack plan. Or escape plan. The latter, amongst slaves in the antebellum period, was a common plan of attack. Some statistics indicate a high incidence of stuttering amongst slaves. Even though the statistics have been questioned, our purpose here is to examine the stutter’s functioning in this relationship of enemies. The stutter, along with the *down look*, were seen as indices of fear and trembling, of slow wit and bashful submission. Yet even those who exhibited such behavior and were not openly rebellious, were known to run

³¹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 109. In a parallel formulation, Jacques Rivière, in a letter dated June 8, 1924, from his correspondence with Artaud, remarked that “Proust described the ‘intermittences of the heart’; someone should describe the intermittences of being.” In *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, 47.

³² Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997, 406. Translation mine. Original: [L]e créole est forgé comme moyen terme entre l’esclave et le maître, le cri impose à l’esclave sa syntaxe particulière. Pour l’Antillais, le mot est d’abord son. Le bruit est parole. Le vacarme est discours. [...] Puisqu’il est interdit de parler, on camouflera la parole sous la provocation paroxystique du cri. On n’y supposera que l’appel de la bête. C’est ainsi que l’homme dépossédé organisera sa parole en la tramant dans l’apparent insignifié du bruit extrême.

³³ James Baldwin, “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” in *Going To Meet The Man*, New York: Dell, 1965, 141.

away.³⁴ This evidence exemplifies the stutter as subterfuge, as utensil in a palette of mischievousness and deception, as remainder remaining entirely beyond control. Perhaps there is, in the very moment of ultimate objecthood, a wielding possible of heretofore unfathomable weapons. A setting where, paradoxically, disrupters become smooth, become untied knots, become fluid and fluent. Become a kind of Artaudian war machine: “I have never ceased to think that *more and more* I could silence enemy and foreign thinking and swallow it in my interior fire [...] Why are beings which are not in me moving inside of me?”³⁵ The *more and more* of the here and now is always a foreign state in a foreign land.

1.2 REMAINDER

The particular breach the stutter creates in the communicative act serves as a reminder that misunderstandings, mistranslations are constantly undermining the success of the transmission. Furthermore, the stutter renders present and unerasable the soma in its full spasmodic mode. Deleuze would seem to be describing precisely this moment in the following: “What must happen is a highjacking of speech. Creating has always been a different thing from communicating. In order to escape control, the most important thing is perhaps to create vacuoles of non-communication, interrupters.”³⁶ The stutter belabors the point, by undoing its work, it swerves into the ditch, derails, keeps running but always off course. Stutter is also a verb, it is verbophonic; like Mackey’s contraction “ythmic”, it is a shortcut, a skip.³⁷ A fast forward which

³⁴ Michael P. Johnson, “Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830” in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 38 No. 3, July 1981, 425–6 and fn.18. Also Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, Oxford University Press, 1972, 98–103 and 186n.45; and John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum Period*, Oxford University Press, 1979, 203–6.

³⁵ Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes* vol. xxii: *Cahiers du Retour à Paris 26 mai – juillet 1946*, Paris: Gallimard, 105. Translation mine. Emphasis added. Original: *Je n’ai jamais cessé de penser que je pouvais de plus en plus faire taire la pensée ennemie et étrangère et l’avaloir dans mon feu intérieur [...] Pourquoi des êtres qui ne sont pas en moi bougent-ils en moi?*

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze in Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism & Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982, 180n.10.

does not advance but disperses. We are in the midst of a verb which marks a space where scattered beats sound. A percussive space. A metronomic space with undetermined tempo. A space where the verb conjugates itself, where the repetition is, as Moten would say (enacting the promise of the word): “reperpetition,” “re-re-re-petition,” “repetitionnnnnnnnn,” “rrrepetition,” “ripetion,” “a rep that is resonance or echo.”³⁸

By the same paradox which renders spit as alternately apotropaic or obscene, the stutter’s status vacillates. In both cases, however, the overwhelming tendency is to regard *them* as nefarious. In rare moments, the stutter is viewed favorably: “His verbal impediment... was... to wise men an index of his wisdom... since there was never, or very rarely, known a fool that stammered.”³⁹ More common, however, is the correlation between stutter and doubt, weakness, imperfection, awkwardness; just to cite two of numerous examples, Rousseau: “When the memory vacillates, the tongue stammers”⁴⁰ and Wittgenstein: “often my writing is nothing but ‘stuttering.’”⁴¹ Non-fluency is regarded as a hindrance to full participation in a society where functionality is measured by degree of communicability. This premise has to be examined within a relation to power. Language is wielded, it has shifting barometers of exclusion, it is not a neutral utility. Access to knowledge, for the *homo loquens*, transpires by way of speech, the stutterer is easily dismissed by the presumption that “if you can’t say it, you don’t know it.”⁴² Already, thanks to the pervasive porosity engendered by the figure of the foreigner, we have maneuvered an opposition to such paradigms. Artaud’s case is of particular relevance for he, by way of autobiographical embodiment, inscribes a level of urgency to the opposition:

37 Nathaniel Mackey, *Whatsaid Serif*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1998, 102.

38 Fred Moten, “Bridge and One: Improvisations of the Public Sphere” in *Performing Hybridity*, eds. May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 240–1.

39 H. Lestrangle, 1654, cited in Oxford English Dictionary under entry for “stammer”.

40 Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the Littré dictionary, entry for *balbutier*. Translation mine. Original: *Quand la mémoire vacille, la langue balbutie*.

41 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 18.

42 Benson Bobrick, *Knotted Tongues: Stuttering in History and the Quest for a Cure*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995, 150.

[T]his inability to form or develop thoughts might in some sense be regarded as analogous to the stammering which possesses my outward elocution almost every time I want to speak. It is as if each time my thought tries to manifest itself it contracts, and it is this contraction that shuts off my thought from within, makes it rigid as in a spasm; the thought, the expression stops because the flow is too violent, because the brain wants to say too many things which it thinks of all at once, ten thoughts instead of one rush toward the exit, the brain sees the whole thought at once with all its circumstances, and it also sees all the points of view it could take and all the forms with which it could invest them, a vast juxtaposition of concepts, each of which seems more necessary and also more dubious than the others, which all the complexities of syntax could never suffice to express and expound; but if one really analyzes a state of this kind it is not by being too full that consciousness errs at these moments but by being too empty, for this prolific and above all unstable and shifting juxtaposition is an illusion. [...] The truth is, therefore, that rather than an overflow or an excess there was a deficiency; in the absence of some precise thought that was able to develop, there was slackening, confusion, fragility.⁴³

The irony of such a passage is that it is cogently and lucidly presenting the condition of its inverse predicament. This confluence is of the same order as for Demosthenes, whose very name became synonymous with eloquence, but who was also a stutterer. Disdain for the stutter stems from an expectation or demand for articulation, let us not forget Aristotle's *For even brutes utter indivisible sounds*. Artaud's ebb towards emptiness is perhaps not an exclusionary shift but evidence of a periodic movement, one where excess is active at both ends – an abundance of plenitude *and* an abundance of lack. Paul Celan's *lump of air* shares Artaud's empty fullness and returns us to the porous condition:

⁴³ Antonin Artaud, "To George Soulié de Morant [1932]" in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, 293.

⁴⁴ Paul Celan, "SEWN UNDER THE SKIN" in *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger, New York: Persea, 1990, 247.

When I knead the
lump of air, our nourishment,
it is soured by
the letter effulgence from
the dementedly open
pore.⁴⁴

We are holed, a condition where air is somehow enough to constitute a lump (a *lumpen*). It is the foreign body which, to return to Cixous, sees her tongue as many tongues, as foreign tongues, mother tongues. She says that each tongue “[t]raverses me, makes love to me, loves, speaks, laughter at the feeling of its air caressing my throat.”⁴⁵ This is exemplary of the other sort of disdain for the stutter, the one which stems from fear of the uncontrollable within our own bodies. When the beyond is within us – the foreigner again – we do our utmost to either eradicate or submerge it. The stutterer has faced myriad so-called cures, from prescriptions to wrapping the tongue in little towels soaked in lettuce juice; to calls for the patient to immerse his head in cold water, eat horseradish, and vomit; to severing of the sublingual ligaments; to bleeding the lips with leeches, and eating the feces of goats; to outright glossotomy.⁴⁶ It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that such absurd and cruel means were abandoned in favor of neurological, psychological and psychanalytical approaches.

As Beckett stated earlier in his statement on *Finnegan’s Wake*, there is a hearing and a speaking in this space of literature that we should not remain deaf to. It is the body voicing its reminder, *I am still here*. The excess of being still here is an element of the word but it is what it cannot contain: the gesture of a hand writing, the sound of a voice reading, the power of a polysemic lexicon. What overflows does not flow into other containers, it is forever leaking: “I am the government and I cannot be governed.”⁴⁷ As the speaker of this,

⁴⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Entre l’écriture*, Paris: Des femmes, 1986, 31. Translation mine. Original: *Ne s’écrit pas : me traverse, me fait l’amour, aimer, parler, rire de sentir son air me caresser la gorge*.

⁴⁶ Info on the various cures of stuttering culled from Benson Bobrick, *Knotted Tongues: Stuttering in History and the Quest for a Cure*, passim.

⁴⁷ Lee “Scratch” Perry, *From the Secret Laboratory* (CD), New York: Mango/Island, 1990.

the power is in Lee “Scratch” Perry’s hands and he does not want it. It overflows. Seminal Jamaican dub producer, Perry here rhymes what Samuel Beckett stated in more subdued manner in *The Unnamable*: “The thing to avoid, I don’t know why, is the spirit of system.”⁴⁸ With a tenuous control of the uncontrollable, the barest grip, Perry is nevertheless tirelessly generative, “I am what I am, and I am he that I am.”⁴⁹ This is the *I & I*, the stutter ID, the “I am the Word Processor,”⁵⁰ which oscillates between the individual and the collective. This functions, Nathaniel Mackey declared, as the “enabling confusion concerning the singular and the plural.”⁵¹ Mackey also refers to the *I & I* of Rastafarians and in reformulating the phrase just quoted he causes a shift whereby the confusion indeed becomes enabled: “an insistent interrogation of the bounds between individual and collective identities.”⁵² This double *I*, this solo duet, is also one of the waver between presence and absence, between the here and there of the mirror. The leak that I hear in and through Perry takes the form of a fadeless echo in the infinitude of Foucault’s heterotopic mirror(s). When words enter this excess economy, we have not only the multiple “I”s to keep track of but a whole vocabulary of leaps, an entire array of words unbounded.

Once
I did hear him,
he did wash the world,
unseen, nightlong,
real.

One and unending,
annihilated,
I’ed.⁵³

⁴⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. Trans. Samuel Beckett, New York: Grove, 1991, 292.

⁴⁹ Lee “Scratch” Perry in Ted Haimes, *History of Rock & Roll Vol. 9* (DVD), Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1995.

⁵⁰ Lee “Scratch” Perry, *From the Secret Laboratory* (CD). New York: Island/Mango 1990.

⁵¹ Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1997, 33.

⁵² Mackey, 33.

To be whole and yet endless, to be reduced to ashes and yet “I’ed.” A curious “I” this, is it a contraction of *multiplied* or is it an *annihilated* “I”? Paul Celan’s words and their in-betweens have a propensity to carry such weight, they perform such concise incisions, they are themselves one and unending. Their echoes ricochet with no fade. The spaces of this infinity, of this self multiplied by the words it casts, are the sites I am investigating here. Cixous provides a similarly multiplying tool with her *plusje*, term translatable as *manyI* or *moreI* (I & I & I &...).⁵⁴ The *plusje* is mischievous, “it must violate the laws of lineage, of gravity, and of *simplurality* in order to take flight by its own wings in the middle of its actuality.”⁵⁵

In this context of exalted agency, of powerful subjects even, the stutter is that insistence, that reminder of the remainder. The remainder being that which is constituted by the “accompaniments to the utterance” Austin refers to, those untranslatable gestures which produce the utterance and yet are irreducible to the utterance.⁵⁶ In other words, how the sign is a reduction of the sound, and, in turn, how *sound*, according to Saussure would seem to be indissociable from thought, and vice versa:

A language might also be compared to a sheet of paper. Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side. Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate sound from thought, or thought from sound.⁵⁷

⁵³ Paul Celan, “Once” in *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1995, 249. In Michael Hamburger’s translation (where *I’ed* becomes *ied*) the presence of the “I” is less obvious, less on its own, but perhaps more part of the verb, it has been activated, verbalized, conjugated, pluralized – a tentacular “I.” Paul Celan, “Once” in *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger, New York: Persea, 1990, 279. Original: *ichten*.

⁵⁴ Hélène Cixous, “L’essor de plusje”, *L’ARC* Derrida, 1990, 48. Translation mine. *Simplurality* (*simpluralité*) is a Cixous neologism. Original: [I]l [le Plusje] faut qu’il viole les lois de la parenté, de la gravité et de la simpluralité pour commencer à voler de ses propres ailes en plein milieu de son actualité.

⁵⁵ Cixous, 48.

⁵⁶ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, Harvard University Press, 1975, 76.

⁵⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986, 111.

Saussure refers to thought as that “swirling cloud,” that unstructured and undetermined space which requires that “mysterious process by which ‘thought-sound’ evolves divisions, and a language takes shape with its linguistic units in between those two amorphous masses [that of thought and sound].”⁵⁸ Thus, any structuring project makes moves to set aside (outside) any amorphous material. Flooding, the anagrammatic undertow,⁵⁹ poses such a threat that these attempts to contain it become examples one can read for leakage. I will defer this reading for now (emblematic of my own leakage perhaps), save to say that some authors (e.g. Mackey: “in its own possibly more exacting way the inarticulacy spoke”)⁶⁰ have made explicit forays into this cloud in order to impede its reduction and dismissal. Mackey, echoing himself, provides a formulation similar to the aforementioned quote in his review of Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s *Sun Poem*: “Brathwaite helps impeded speech find its voice, somewhat the way Monk makes hesitation eloquent or the way a scatsinger makes inarticulacy speak.”⁶¹ The three movements Mackey outlines, however laudable, still seem to head in the direction of graspability, of meaning. I would argue for the necessity to resist that move to clarity by turning (away) that sentence for a second, with a turn that would produce the following: *Brathwaite helps voice finds its impediment, Monk’s eloquence is made hesitant, and the scatsinger speaks its inarticulacy*. This shift is important to mark, to insist upon, it impedes the dissipation of the nebulous, it serves as reminder than the polysemic must be heard amplified by the polyphonic.

To draw this section to a close, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, in a manifesto style passage (thus, unabashedly elliptic and enigmatic), adjoins Mackey, Cixous

⁵⁸ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986, 110–111 [sections 155 and 156]. Interestingly, Rosenstiehl and Petitot (cited by Deleuze and Guattari in their discussion of arborescent versus rhizomatic systems, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 16–18) also refer to clouds, though this time it is a cloud of mosquitoes. They mention it in order to speak of acentered chaotic systems. Original article: Pierre Rosenstiehl and Jean Petitot, “Automate asocial et système acentrés” in *Communications*, No. 22, 1974, 50.

⁵⁹ *Anaphonic* would perhaps be the better term here, for according to Saussure (via Starobinski), *anaphonic* is the imperfect form, whereas the *anagram* would be the perfect form. Thus even here Saussure seems to be delimiting the anagram by ascribing it as the successful form. Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, 27.

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1997, 182.

⁶¹ Nathaniel Mackey, [untitled review of *Sun Poem* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite] in *Sulfur*, Vol. IV No. 2, 1984, 205.

and Beckett by delineating the way by which knowledge should not be the primary quest, and inarticulacy can be heard as generative materiality:

Move from that which is easily identifiable to that which is at the limit of being identifiable. Listen to them [sounds] non-knowingly but alertly. Enjoy their materiality. SUSPEND the MEANING of sound, by multiplying their naturalistic-realist role to the point where no single anchoring is possible, no message can be congealed, no analysis can be complete. [...] Cutting a sentence at different places for example, assembling it with holes, repeating it in slightly different forms and in ever-changing verbal contexts, helps to produce a constant shift and dislocation in meanings. Silences and repetitions are rejected as a failure of language when they are experienced as oblivious holes or as the utterance of *the same thing twice or more*. WE SHOULD NOT STAMMER, so goes the reasoning, for we only make our way successfully in life when we speak in a continuous articulate flow. [...] After many years of confusions, of suppressed voice and INARTICULATE SOUNDS, holes, blanks, black-outs, jump-cuts [...] I finally say no: yes, sounds are sounds and should above all be released as sounds. Everything is in the releasing. There is no score to follow.⁶²

1.3 ARRRHYTHMIA AND CLAUSTROPHILIA

In order to further elaborate on the argument outlined thus far, it is necessary to situate the stutter in the haptic space – a type of relation *to* and engagement *with* space which includes the tactile, kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses.⁶³ The sonic circuitry of voice and ear (particularly in terms of self-hearing) inserts itself in this haptic realm and is at the crux of the tension between the individual and the community. In a critical reading of Husserl, José Gil refers to self-hearing as “an act of ‘absolute reduction’ of space”, and this engenders

⁶² Trinh T. Minh-Ha, “Holes in the Sound Wall” in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 205–6.

⁶³ Jennifer Fisher, “Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics” in *Parachute*, No. 87, July 1997, 6.

Gil's reflection that the body "in its very 'organicism', in its being-one, is differentiated from other organic unities [...] because it speaks about its meaning – and hears itself – we live our bodies in an immediate 'nonthetic', unquestionable presence."⁶⁴ The results of some neurological studies seem to indicate that what occurs in a stutterance is a (mal)functioning of self-hearing. Thus, the stutter disturbs this self-referencing mechanism and can be argued to constitute a questioning of the unquestionability of presence, and while remaining a reduction of space, it is now crucially non-absolute. Factoring the stutter into Gil's reading, the following paradoxical formulations emerge: *The stutter as a space of fluidity. Claustrophilia as a time of porosity*. Here fluidity is uncannily arid, stuck in a claustral space, nevertheless it enables porosity to become part of the theoretical weave whereby community and language are considered at a somatic level.

The term *claustrophilia* has less currency than the stutter, yet it underpins the movement of porosity. Entwined with its opposite, *claustrophobia*, I would like to focus on the *-philia* on the other side of the *-phobia*. As with the stutter, the claustral space presents itself as an oscillation; the fort/da of a fortress in constant self-siege. This entwining of a constant return upon departure is activated by desire, a desire for community. But a community only in its potentiality; its actualization remains framed by factors of alienation. So the contracture, the urge to retract, to recoil remains active even as the opposite movement is displayed. Referring to his 1992 installation *Soft Cell*, James Turrell advises that it is "not for the claustrophobic or the impatient, [it] is both solitary confinement and infinite space."⁶⁵ Turrell's Pascalian depiction of the anechoic chamber which comprised his installation echoes Bruce Nauman's succinct phrase for the extensive body of work he did featuring corridors – "withdrawal as an art form."⁶⁶

The stutter engenders a withdrawal, literally, which is to say that the words are triggered but trapped, the mouth cavity holds and harbors them.

⁶⁴ José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, trans. Stephen Muecke, Theory Out of Bounds Vol. 12, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 192.

⁶⁵ James Turrell, *James Turrell: the other horizon*, ed. Peter Noever, Vienna: MAK, 2001, 144–5.

⁶⁶ Bruce Nauman, *Bruce Nauman*, curators: Kathy Halbreich and Neal Benezra, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994, 28.

As a consequence, the stutter is a threat to coherence, to the established course, to smooth flow; it proliferates in the mouth that utters even when idle. In this context, the stutter is the eruption which reminds us of the already existing stutter. The somatic stutter reveals the metaphoric one. As Barthes states regarding the music of a text, “It is both what is expressed and implicit in the text: what is pronounced but not articulated.”⁶⁷ Alvin Lucier’s *I am sitting in a room* is a key instance where the spatial and temporal parameters of the stutter are explicited. In this work the relationship between a subject and an enclosure develops through a text which functions as both score *and* script *and* content:

I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.⁶⁸

What this work performs is the transfer and inscription of the stutter onto the reverberant walls of the room rather than a genuine *smoothing out*. Each repetition of the text is a fade becoming amplification, it is a persistent fade – meaning that words in their articulated form fade, while their *inarticulate moan* emerges. The rhythm of the speech is what remains; the rhythm is the bass track of the song, and this is the music which Barthes sees as the site of difference.⁶⁹ In the space of the sitting room, the differentiated space is driven by the rhythmized speech which is contagious for it envelops the space, but the space is also enveloping the voice by its de facto physicality. Would this mutual invagi-

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, “La musique, la voix, la langue” in *L’obvie et l’obtus: Essais critiques III*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982, 252.

⁶⁸ Alvin Lucier, *I am sitting in a room* (CD), New York: Lovely Records, 1990 [1970]. This piece makes a second appearance in ch. 4 pp. 166–171 where its spatial parameters benefit from further consideration.

⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, “La musique, la voix, la langue”, 246. Actual quote: *Sur la musique, aucun autre discours ne peut être tenu que celui de la différence.*

nation be comparable to Caillois' tale of assimilation into space? "While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is *filled*, it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence 'the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light.'" ⁷⁰ Lucier would seem to have realized the aural equivalent of this performance of permeability. An audible squinting which marks an unmarkable space.

Lucier's intent to smooth out his stutter provides the impetus for the piece but what results is a heightened stutter, one where the mouth which utters it is completely exteriorized. This marking by way of a fade is interesting to juxtapose to another erasure which also undoes itself. In an interview, Lucier's stutter is transcribed in the form of ellipses and truncated words. The same interview in *Reflections*, the comprehensive tome on Lucier, excises the transcribed stutter:

Well ... spa— ... if not visual, sp—, see ... I was concerned with space, you know spatial, that is, the piece exists almost completely on a spatial plane.⁷¹

Well, if not visual, spatial. The piece exists almost completely on a spatial plane.⁷²

One notices that it is not only the stutter which disappears but the oral trace, a common practice with printed interviews which originate from oral conversations. However, having a version which does not perform this reduction reminds us of what we have grown accustomed to. The streamlined version privileges the signified and has no allegiances to the mouth, in fact, it erases the mouth, it is arid. In this formatting, this bringing to form, the formless is shed.

⁷⁰ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in October, No. 31, Winter 1984, 30. The quotes within the citation are from Eugène Minkowski, "Le temps vécu" in *Etudes phénoménologiques et psychopathologiques*.

⁷¹ Alvin Lucier in "Interview with Douglas Simon" in *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, ed. Alan Sondheim, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977, 158. The piece being discussed is Lucier's composition *Still and Moving Lines of Silence in Families of Hyperbolas*.

⁷² Same interview as above, here titled "Making audible that which is inaudible" in Alvin Lucier, *Reflections*, Köln: MusikTexte, 1995, 152.

Returning yet again to the Blanchot epigraph to this chapter's first section one must also take notice of its stipulation that both listeners and speakers are under the stutter's spell. Having considered the foreign infection at play in the stutter and the mechanics of self-hearing, the listener/speaker distinction is now blurred. A tactic such as Carmelo Bene's "To speak to oneself, in one's own ear, but in the middle of the market place, on the public square,"⁷³ is emblematic of such a blurring. This genre of solipsistic radiophony (radiation which does not seek out an audience) is the arrhythmic which rhythms Deleuze's call "to make language stutter."⁷⁴ How to account for this desire to resist clarity, coherence, fluency? In short: because we have enemies. The call of subterfuge, the fugue performance is the generative process which enables the necessary "decentering, slidings, splittings, secret discharges" to be deployed in the face of the enemy.⁷⁵ Resisting clarity, to be in the dark and leave others in the same state, can sometimes be equivalent to resisting questioning, arrest: "the most obscure place is always the one under the lamp."⁷⁶ Clarity is anathema to the stutter, the stutterer's arteries are sclerotic. The whole body contracting, squinting like Anna O. and Nietzsche's man of *ressentiment* whose "soul squints; his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble. A race of men of *ressentiment* is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race."⁷⁷ *Ressentiment*, moment where the voice is voiceless, hidden, arid, where communication breaks to communicate its incommunicability. An awkward reminder of presence, as in (again) Judith Butler's bracketed, held, trapped, "I", while she, without quotation marks, remains

⁷³ Carmelo Bene in Gilles Deleuze, "Un manifeste de moins" in *Superpositions*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979, 107.

⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "He stuttered" in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin V. Boundas & Dorothea Olkowski, New York: Routledge, 1994, 25. Fuller quote: *The point is to make language itself cry, to make it stutter, mumble or whisper.*

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "I have nothing to admit" in *Semiotext(e)*, Vol.3 No.2: *Schizoculture*, 1978, 112.

⁷⁶ Chinese proverb in Roland Barthes, *Le grain de la voix Entretiens 1962–1980*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981, 247.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage, 1989, 38.

here.⁷⁸ *Here*, that place where we can also hear Anna O's cough shifting the rhythm to an arrhythmia, resisting the pulse of the beat by sonically inscribing an interruption, a skip.⁷⁹

In these pages the stutter is undeniably under a philosophical, theoretical turn; yet I also hear this turn as an amplification, as a sub-woofer's low frequency assault, as an awkward amplification, akin to Blanchot's "to shut up, you must speak."⁸⁰ Now an implicit imperative arises, a duty to respond, even if stuck and voiceless, stuck in voicelessness. The position is by no means powerless, the stutter *can* be recruited to speak. However momentary, the stutter lingers and permeates. The stutter is the quintessential Beckettian performative: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."⁸¹ The stutter lingers and permeates and obligates. In the stutter we encounter the pervasiveness, persistence and proliferation of the performative.

1.4 SCREAM AND RUN, RUN, RUN

running running and running and screaming running and screaming
without running and screaming without interruption running and
screaming without interruption, running and screaming without inter-
ruption, without running and screaming without interruption, without
rushing running and screaming without interruption, without rushing
to running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any

⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 123. This time it is a paraphrase of the phrase I have referred to several times: *I bracket this "I" in quotation marks, but I am still here*.

⁷⁹ Josef Breuer, "Fräulein Anna O." in *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1893–1895], 40–44. Peggy Phelan, in the "Immobile Legs" chapter of *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997) does a more extensive reading of the rhythm of Anna O., for instance, she states, concisely: "Her timing, one could say, is off" (p. 57).

⁸⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983, 92.

⁸¹ Samuel Beckett, "Tal Coat" in *Proust (and three dialogues with Georges Duthuit)*, New York: Grove, 1970, 103.

running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without responding running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call without always responding yes running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without maintaining running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without responding always yes, without always maintaining running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed, running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed, running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed, this running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed, this is running and screaming without interruption, without rushing to any call, without always responding yes, without always maintaining the same speed [...] ⁸²

Walter Marchetti's *Running* collides the run with the response to the call, the interruption, the scream, the affirmation. Some of these actions are inactivated or held in abeyance via their negation by the recurring *without*. Thus the running here is posited as pure movement, with variants in speed perhaps but with no stoppage, pure continuity. The smooth and lanky strides of a marathoner, albeit a manic one. We must also remember to listen to the runner, for the running here is double, it is the running of a set of legs and the running of a set of lungs endlessly repeating, and endlessly going forward. The scream of the runner is a Doppler scream, shrilly piercing the landscape. The path the runner takes (or screamed run) takes is one which, without the interruptions of the call and response, does not dialogue nor converse. This is a running *away from*. Could this be the flight from a philosophical peripatetic dialogue gone awry? A running away from the condition that would prevail were one to activate the interruptions – a run without *without*? Such a hurdled run would read: *Running and screaming with interruption, rushing to every call, always responding yes*. Whether Marchetti is traversing a metaphorical or geographical space (or both simultaneously) is not crucial for us to discern. Mnemonics where ambulation and memory intertwine, for instance, blur the distinction.

The site of action in *Running* is unspecified, the running could resemble Paul McCarthy's performances of *Too steep, Too fast* (1968–72), in which the artist raced down a hill in order to trigger a falling sensation.⁸³ Or Georges Bataille's, who, at the onset of the Second World War, wrote: *I am scared [...]* my movements are those of an invalid, or at least of a man out of breath, exhausted."⁸⁴ Bataille's weary run is one onto the page, driven by fear, a running of inscription. Neither an escape nor an act of cowardice, "insofar as what I fear in this world is not limited by reason, I have to tremble,"⁸⁵ it is a

⁸² Walter Marchetti, "Running" in *Walter Marchetti*, trans. Henry Martin, Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery/University of British Columbia, 1999, 103. Walter Marchetti, Italian composer, member of the avant-garde dissident group Zaj, founded by Juan Hidalgo and Marchetti in 1964. Zaj was immensely influenced by John Cage and ran parallel tracks with Fluxus.

⁸³ Paul McCarthy, *Paul McCarthy*, London: Phaidon, 1996, 37 and 106. His instructions were: *Run down a hill. The angle of the hill should increase so that one has the sensation of falling*. It was performed Summer, 1968; Fall, 1970; Spring, 1972 in the Hollywood Hills and Marin County.

⁸⁴ Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, 12. Translation mine. Original: *j'ai peur [...]* mes démarches sont d'un malade, au moins d'un homme à bout de souffle, épuisé.

vacillation which binds the runner to the run, where distance is of the kind measurable only by a treadmill. It is not quite a Sisyphean run, in that it maintains or is evidence of a dialectic (at least in the pre-Hegelian sense). In other words, I want to reinscribe a dialogic dimension into this uninterrupted and uninterruptible run. I have disrupted its course, or at least proposed or surmised that its continuity was a subterfuge by the author to allude to quite the opposite.

Despite a seeming opposition at the level of exertion, McCarthy and Bataille find themselves in the same race, both in the face or facing the incomprehensible (a facing which can manifest itself as an *about face*). This incommensurability is discussed by Roger Caillois as vertigo:

Vertigo first destroys one's autonomy. One is no longer the center nor the origin [...] One lets itself be sucked in by the void. It is an essential fact that existence is powerless in the face of the temptations which cause its ruin. The abyss beckons. An inopportune paralysis invades the ones who abandon themselves to their fascination.⁸⁶

When one teeters over the precipice, it always entails a somatic consequence – for both the writer and the reader. *Running* is a performative text, we might be stationary, but in our reading our mouths run, out of breath, out of saliva. Words runs over themselves, tripping, stuttering, mumbling, droning. The harmonics of repetition (the endless running of the run) are made dissonant by the injection of difference. Cixous also *hears* the run, and defiles it in the process: “[i]n the running out of breath, the chest burns, a fusion of familiar languages occur and they boil to the lips of a bizarre tongue, which scorches the flesh, emits guttural sounds, ululates, whirls, swirls, sharpens and wraps

⁸⁵ Bataille, 13. Translation mine. Original: *dans la mesure où ce qui me fait peur en ce monde n'est pas limité par la raison, je dois trembler.*

⁸⁶ Roger Caillois, *Instincts et société: Essais de sociologie contemporaine*, Paris: Éditions Gonthier, 1964, 46. Translation mine. Original: *Le vertige détruit de l'être d'abord son autonomie. Il n'est plus ni centre ni point de départ [...] Il se laisse aspirer par le gouffre. C'est un fait essentiel que l'existence se montre si désarmée devant les tentations qui la ruinent. Les abîmes la sollicitent. Une inopportune paralysie envahit celui qui s'abandonne à leur fascination.*

⁸⁷ Hélène Cixous, *Souffles*, Paris: Des femmes, 1975, 17. Translation mine. Original: *[d]ans l'essoufflement de la course la poitrine brûle, il se fait une fusion de langues familières, et bouillonne aux lèvres une langue bizarre, qui écorche la chair, pousse des sons gutturaux, hulule, tourbillonne, s'aiguise et s'emballant vient de très loin encluer le tympan.*

itself and comes from afar to sodomize the tympanum.”⁸⁷ Another runner we could recruit in order to make it a race and continue to trace a distinctly sonic course, would be Tatsuo Miyajima. With him, the run is more metaphoric than actual, it is a static run amidst the scurrying shoppers; his incision into the sound space is concrete and insistent, however fleeting. Miyajima’s scream punctuating the Tokyo intersection is an exemplary staging of the lone individual’s scream amidst the teeming mass in the urban setting, and as such it functions as the paradigmatic example of a stutter at the metaphoric level – ie. the individual as constituting the stutter *in* and *to* the collective. He clashes with the rushed crowd by performing a run away from the teleological ethos of late capitalism. He is tilting his head so that his mouth faces up, he is no longer looking ahead, but screaming at the infinite sky.

The seemingly existential angst of Miyajima’s performance is counterbalanced by Xu Zhen’s *Shouting*, a piece strikingly similar in terms of its formal characteristics. This piece is set in the streets of Shanghai and in this instance the screams are heard but never seen, they come from behind the camera, they prompt the crowd for a reaction. What is the nature of the scream? The crowd is curious, and always at the ready to turn curiosity into fright. Might there be danger afoot? The crowd’s collective startle, their momentary turning towards the source of the scream is captured by the camera. Briefly, the bustle stops, a pregnant pause, then laughter is heard from those who screamed and the pranksters delight in their success in being able to stop the incessant flow for but a fleeting moment. For a second, the mass was at their mercy. They tapped into a basic irrepressible reaction causing the animality of the human to resurface as the fight or flight response is activated.



fig. 29



fig. 30

fig. 29 Tatsuo Miyajima, *na.ar. (Voice)*, 1981. © Tatsuo Miyajima.

fig. 30 Xu Zhen, *Shouting*, 1998 / 2005. Courtesy ShangART Gallery, Shanghai.

2. METRONOMICS

2.1 VEXATIONS

Erik Satie's composition *Vexations* of 1893 instructs the performer "to repeat 840 times this motif, it is advisable to prepare oneself in the most absolute silence, by some serious immobilities."⁸⁸ It is impossible to determine if Satie, renowned prankster, appended the above instructions to the score in all seriousness or as an aside which he would never imagine anyone would take to the letter. Irrespective of his original intention, these instructions introduced a sensibility that was to fuel, via John Cage, a considerable current in 20th century performance aesthetics. The implication of the instructions in the event of their literal interpretation bring to the fore questions of space and time with a characteristically Satiean concision. It was Cage who first took Satie's seemingly whimsical advice literally on September 1963 at the Pocket Theater in New York. On that occasion, it took ten pianists (including Cage, Tudor, Christian Wolff, Philip Corner, James Tenney) eighteen hours and forty minutes to repeat *Vexations* the prescribed eight-hundred and forty times. The duration of the known complete performances ranges from ten to twenty-four hours. The significant duration implies a similarly significant concert experience for both performers and audience.

I was feeling mournful, without knowing why; almost afraid, though for no apparent reason. It then occurred to me to amuse myself by counting

⁸⁸ Erik Satie in Anne Rey, *Erik Satie*, Paris: Seuil, 1974, 49. Translation mine. The differences between translations can be quite astounding, for example, from the liner notes to the *Vexations* (LP), New York: Phillips, 1976, translator uncredited: *In order to play this motif 840 times without a break, it is as well to prepare oneself in maximum privacy with the aid of extreme degrees of immobility.* A version more faithful to the original in Erik Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook: Collected Writings of Erik Satie*, ed. Ornella Volta, trans. Antony Melville, London: Atlas Press, 1996, 183: *To play this motif 840 times in succession, one would do well to prepare oneself beforehand, in the deepest silence, with serious immobilities.* Original: *Pour se jouer 840 fois de suite ce motif, il sera bon de se préparer au préalable, et dans le plus grand silence, par des immobilités sérieuses.*

on my fingers, slowly, from one to 260,000. This I did, but only succeeded in becoming more and more bored.⁸⁹

One might surmise that Satie had a certain fixation with counting and numbers.⁹⁰ Satie composed languid, stripped bare, ditties amidst a continent overrun by Wagner's influence. One might posit *Vexations* as the antithesis to the Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), and in terms of the German versus French rivalries of those times that might be accurate, however, as we shall see in this section, *Vexations* and its descendents achieve a totality not dissimilar to the Gesamtkunstwerk, though one less steeped in epic and pomp. The characteristics of the Satiean sensibility are the threads that I shall be examining here.

She had certain habits. When she counted to ten she always counted them on her fingers to make ten times ten. It was very hard to remember how many times she had counted ten when once she had counted them because she had to remember twice and then when she had counted a hundred then what happened. Really nothing. Ida just sat down. Living alone as she did counting was an occupation.⁹¹

Both the Satie quoted earlier and Gertrude Stein's *Ida* seem to associate repetition with boredom and a certain morose ambiance. Stagnancy connotes waste

⁸⁹ Erik Satie, "Choses du Théâtre" in Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie*, New York: Dover, 1968, 122.

⁹⁰ Anne Rey in her book on Satie attempts to find the significance of the number three in his life: there were 3 *Petites pièces montées*, 3 *Sarabandes*, 3 *Gymnopédies*, 3 *Morceaux en forme de poire* (titled as such even though there are actually four of them). Satie's association with the Rosicrucians from 1890 to 1892 provides a possible answer for this sect of fairly nebulous structure bases itself on trinities: 3 vows, 3 hierarchical grades, 3 activities, 3 qualities (Anne Rey, *Erik Satie*, Paris, Seuil, 1974, 50–51). The Rosicrucians are purported to originate in the 15th Century with a certain Rosenkreuz who brought back mystical knowledge from the East. The branch of the sect Satie was involved with was headed by Joseph Péladan. He set the principal objects of the sect to regulate the arts according to a Wagnerian aesthetic (which is quite incongruous given Satie's distaste for Wagner). More information on Satie's Rosicrucian period in Myers, 21–23. He shared with its leader, Joseph Péladan, a penchant for hyperbole and obfuscation. Predictably, however, Satie's mythological machinations were too idiosyncratic to be subsumed under Péladan's own idiosyncratic vision. Soon thereafter he would be producing tracts for the Metropolitan Church of the Art of Jesus the Conductor, an organization concocted by Satie (he was its sole member).

⁹¹ Gertrude Stein, *Ida*, New York: Random House, 1941, 28.

and calls for methods of avoidance. Our daily lives are populated by habits and reoccurring obsessions. Mechanization further emphasizes an assembly line structure: “For boredom speaks the language of time, and it teaches you the most valuable lesson of your life: the lesson of your utter insignificance.”⁹² The Satiean method of surviving the existential bleakness of such stasis is to drop the broad sweeping paintbrush depicted above and opt for a thin discerning brush. By altering the focus one can picture an entirely different scape: “In Zen they say: if something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it’s not boring at all but very interesting.”⁹³ Fittingly, Satie had fine tuned his sensibilities to detail: “Before I compose a piece, I walk around it several times, accompanied by myself.”⁹⁴ With such a metaphorically sculptural approach, a seemingly static object is made to move through the perception of the observer.

The simplest of Satie’s pieces are most enigmatic for this very reason: they have no beginning, middle or end. The *exist simultaneously*. Form ceases to be ordering time like ABA and reduces to a brief single image, an instantaneous whole both fixed and moving. Satie’s form can be extended only by reiteration or endurance.⁹⁵

Satie was undeniably unique, but one cannot affirm that his use of repetition was unique. Music is characterized by repetition. In the European classical tradition, compositional forms such as the fugue are constructed on the tenet of repetition.⁹⁶

This is a piece [Chopin’s *Polonaise in A major*] notable for the six-fold statement of its opening period, each time literally repeated: AABABA Trio, ABA. But the second A is already different from the first. The first

⁹² Joseph Brodsky, “Listening to Boredom” in Harper’s, Vol. 290 No. 1738, March 1995, 13.

⁹³ John Cage in Alan M. Gillmor, “Satie, Cage, and the New Asceticism” in Contact, No. 25, 1982, 19.

⁹⁴ Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 142.

⁹⁵ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, New York: Vintage, 1968, 141. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ The Webster’s New World Dictionary defines “fugue” as a musical composition for a definite number of parts or voices, in which a subject is announced in one voice, imitated in succession by each of the other voices, and developed contrapuntally.

was preceded by silence and followed by its repetition; the second is preceded by the first and followed by B, and so on. My contention is that each statement is influenced by its position, by what preceded and what follows it, so that each is, different from all the others. Therefore, in general, there is no such thing as true redundancy in music.⁹⁷

It is an economy of form which singles out Satie, the prior examples of repetition still required some form of conventional development or recapitulation. When the repetition is the only element or motive of the piece, focus is sharpened and heightened. There is debate as to whether Satie established the concept of 840 repetitions prior to composing the music for *Vexations* or if he included it as a mere afterthought. A *performance* (in the performance art sense of the term) of *Vexations* would clearly entail not only playing the notes inscribed on the score but also following the instruction.⁹⁸ The hypothesis that Satie conceptualized the numerous repetitions before writing the notes rests on the fact that the piece utilizes a chordal structure with a preponderance of unresolved diminished chords, which performers say are almost impossible to memorize as the piece lacks the usual major chords that would point towards a conclusion or resolution. This renders the performance of these repetitions particularly fragile and tenuous, always evoking a sense of blurriness and unsureness.⁹⁹

Satie was simultaneously anachronistic and prescient and was quite conscious of this paradoxical temporal positioning: “I came to this world very young at a very old time.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, not simply an outsider, but an outsider in terms of time, to wit Debussy: “For Erik Satie, a gentle and medieval musician,

⁹⁷ Edward T. Cone in Peter Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 339.

⁹⁸ In fact, the possibility exists of performing *Vexations* by only following the instruction and not playing the notes. In 1995 I performed a version which I entitled *vex*, it lasted 840 minutes (14 hours) and consisted of splicing 840 times with 840 razor blades the reel to reel tape of a prior recording I had done live on radio where I counted to 840 accompanied with the incessant repetition of the last note of Satie's *Vexations* from the locked groove of a vinyl recording of the piece.

⁹⁹ For an in depth musical analysis of the composition consult Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 142–144.

¹⁰⁰ Erik Satie in Pierre-André Tempier, *Erik Satie*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969, 3. In the same vein, as Roger Shattuck (*The Banquet Years*, 114) maintains, he had two careers as a composer: one in the 19th century, the other in the 20th century (and I would contend that, through Cage, yet another, posthumously).

stranded in this century.”¹⁰¹ More significantly, to continue with the discussion of compositional techniques, Satie was able to paradoxically arrest time by setting it free: “Satie’s *Gnossienes* of 1890 were the first to be written in bar-less notation, without either key or time signatures.”¹⁰² A composition without time signatures not only renders its interpretation open to interpretation but *obligates* one. The paradox of an open-ended methodology and ethos that also requires an obligation is one which constantly challenged Cage (who acknowledged his debt to Satie repeatedly).

There seems to be no reason why these chords might not continue for hours. One senses that their originator [Satie] has dallied voluptuously with these sonorities, very lovely, unknown at the time and relegated to the index of forbidden dissonances. One feels that the composer’s sense of hearing, his nerves, vibrate sensuously, lulled by these infinite undulations of sound.¹⁰³

Gilles Deleuze articulates his method of distinguishing or collapsing difference and repetition as follows: “The role of the imagination, or the mind which contemplates in its multiple and fragmented states, is to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it.”¹⁰⁴ Crucial to this method is the notion that our contemplating selves are creatures of habit, and that there is no continuity apart from that of habit. Within a reality constituted of repetitions, time is a repetition of presents. The moment just past is experienced only in its relation of difference with the moment present, and the moment future becomes anticipated from the pattern established by the moments past and present. Deleuze terms this contraction *the synthesis of time*.¹⁰⁵ *Vexations* exists in this synthesis, this living present, this repetition of instants, this moment that disappears as soon as it occurs, as the present

101 Claude Debussy in Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie*, New York: Dover, 1968, 33.

102 Myers, 71.

103 Rudhyar Chennevière in Alan M. Gillmor, “Satie, Cage, and the New Asceticism” in *Contact*, No. 25, 1982, 16.

104 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 75–76.

105 Deleuze, 70–71.

passes by. However, *Vexations* is not arrested in a perpetual present but a tool to make us aware of the range, scale, or scope with which we constitute time.

If, as suggested by relativity theory, speed expands time in the instant it contracts space, we arrive finally at the negation of the notion of physical dimension, and we must ask once more, “What is a dimension?” Mandelbrot repeats that this is a matter of the degree of resolution, and that the numerical result depends on the relations between the object and the observer.¹⁰⁶

In Virilio’s sense, we are not talking of resolution as in deciding or determining, but simply as the act of being able to distinguish the parts of an object with a developed awareness of our own positioning. In this sense, *Vexations* could perhaps be heard as a composition based on an entwining of sculptural and schizophrenic time: “Time has stopped; there is no time ... The past and the future have collapsed into the present, and I can’t tell them apart.”¹⁰⁷

Interpretations of the score for this *Ring des Nibelungen des pauvres*, as dubbed by Gavin Bryars, vary widely (especially of the instructions), and thus what constitutes a valid performance has been a contentious subject. For example, Richard Toop, one of the performers states: “The polemic doesn’t worry me at all; we always have to find some impurity in our predecessors in order to find faith in our own activity. I took a lot of strength from the ‘impurity’ of Cage’s team performances, which was very important to me at the time, though naturally it seems trivial now.”¹⁰⁸ As one might suspect, the sheer endurance a performance calls for, no matter what the interpretation, means that not everyone has withstood the demands required, for example, pianist Paul Evans rebelled at the fifteen hours mark stating that “I would not play this piece again. I felt each repetition slowly wearing my mind away. I had to stop. People who play it do so at their own great peril.”¹⁰⁹ He also reported that his mind became full of evil thoughts, animals and “things” started peering

¹⁰⁶ Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991, 55.

¹⁰⁷ An account from an “acutely schizophrenic patient” in Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1988, 375.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Toop in Gavin Bryars, “*Vexations* and its performers” in *Contact* No. 26, Spring 1983, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Evans in Bryars, 15.

out at him from the score. This hallucinatory experience finds uncanny parallels in the case of speleologist Veronique Le Guen, a tragic tale where the descent into an obscure chamber and into insanity is not metaphoric:

On August 10, 1988 32 year old Veronique Le Guen plunged down the throat of the Vlat-Nègre cavern into a small grotto where she spent the next hundred and eleven days. Little by little, her normal bodily rhythms were knocked off-kilter. On some “days” spending forty waking hours followed by thirty four hours sleeping. She took one eighteen hour “nap” she perceived as lasting only minutes. Diary entries reveal a mind that was gradually losing its grip: “I feel calm, too calm. I feel the sort of lucidity that fills your soul just after or is just before? a great catastrophe. My only horizon is darkness, my sky, emptiness. I am buried alive. I am not here. This cave doesn’t have any meaning anymore. My soul is dissolving into the humidity. Nothing is true anymore. I have a feeling that a terrible evil has gotten hold of me: insanity.”¹¹⁰

As a sculptural or installation piece, *Vexations* is a work one enters, or *descends into*. Once inside we relinquish control and the work is able to “simply take over. At first a kind of passive object, it became a guiding force.”¹¹¹ This beacon ensconced in the depths of the cave of the imagination might be weak but it is relentless. A pitch black space can be illuminated by the merest glimpse of light. The guide shows you the way *in*, but not the way *out*. *Vexations* is less a mass than a hollow shell, the mass is provided by the engulfed occupants. Rober Racine from Montreal who embarked on the most rigorous performances of *Vexations* likens the work to “a cathedral of art where its 840 motifs construct a specter of the infinity of perception and silence.”¹¹² Here Rimbaud’s

¹¹⁰ Jim Goad, “100 Spectacular Suicides” in *Answer Me*, No. 3, 1992, 72. Le Guen committed suicide on January 17, 1990 and the article implies that her experience in the cave was the trigger.

¹¹¹ Christian Wolff in Gavin Bryars, 14.

¹¹² Rober Racine, “Vexations” in *Parachute* No. 15, 1979, 50. By “rigorous” I am referring to the fact that Racine performed *Vexations* in its entirety four times. Since each time it was solo he had to devise systems so that he could keep count on his own (most performances of the piece have involved teams of pianists who would take turns and also help each other with the counting). In one version Racine transcribed by hand 840 copies of the score, in another he made a box with 840 pins that sat on top of the piano where he could push a pin in after each repetition.

infamous call for *the derangement of the senses* is realized not by an intake of substances into the body but by taking the body into the substance.

2.2 FURNITURE AUDIENCE

I do not write experimental music. My experimenting is done before
I make the music. Afterwards, it is the listener who must experiment.¹¹³

The end of the 19th century marked the beginning of the end of the agreeable and passive contract between the performer and the audience. It was not a clean breach, for after all the stage is constructed on the site of irony. But Alfred Jarry disposed of the artifices and frivolities which tempered the critical message. Similarly, Satie was not always subtle and often engaged the audience with his disdain: “Those who are unable to understand are requested by me to adopt an attitude of complete submission and inferiority.”¹¹⁴ It is perhaps with tongue firmly in cheek that Satie states: “The public venerates boredom, for boredom is mysterious and profound. The listener is defenseless against boredom. Boredom subdues him.”¹¹⁵ But, given that boredom and repetition were tenets for Satie, it could also be read at face value. Dick Higgins in the essay “Boredom and Danger,” describes the extent of *Vexations*’ wearing (in both senses of the word) effect:

The music first becomes so familiar that it seems extremely offensive and objectionable. But after that the mind slowly becomes incapable of taking further offense, and a very strange euphoric acceptance and enjoyment begin to set in. [...] By the time the piece is over, the silence is absolutely numbing, so much of an environment has the piece become.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Edgard Varèse, *The Varèse Album* (LP), New York: Columbia, 1972.

¹¹⁴ A “warning” by Satie published before the premiere of Satie’s *Socrate*, in Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie*, New York: Dover, 1968, 57.

¹¹⁵ Erik Satie in Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, New York: Vintage, 1968, 184.

¹¹⁶ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger” in *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of the New Music*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981, 21.

Vexations surrounds and captures all in its path, both performers and audience. This foreshadows Satie's development, circa 1920, of his famed concept of furniture music. At first glance, furniture music seems to argue for a kind of sophisticated passivity, yet we must again remember the issue of scale: "We want to establish a music designed to satisfy 'useful' needs. Art has no part in such needs. Furniture music creates a vibration; it has no other goal; it fills the same role as light and heat – as comfort in every form."¹¹⁷ Light and heat might be comforting but they also behave as penetrating forces, they are elements that can determine life and death. This implies a music that can be prying and unnerving as well as resembling innocuous wallpaper, a music that is not relegated to the background but thrives under the skin. The manner by which it becomes intimate with you is subtle, but deceptively vital.

2.3 IT NEVER ENDS

This piece seems to postulate that infinity begins immediately after the 840th repetition or perhaps even a little earlier.¹¹⁸

Vexations' lasting interest lies in its ability to disturb accepted structures and create a polysemic set of definitions for space and time. *Vexations* epitomizes Breton's credo that "the work of art is valuable only in so far as it is vibrated by the reflexes of the future."¹¹⁹ *Vexations*' simultaneously anachronistic and prescient prescription continues to be performed for it is closely grooved to current concerns of time-based and performance arts. *Vexations* looms with ennui and its legacy permeates.

Let us conclude this chapter with the examination of a few works that share a certain mania and a predilection for numbers; they glean the absurdity of the meeting between our finite selves and the infinity of the conceptual. Rodney Graham's *Parsifal* 1882–38, 969, 364, 735 A.D. (1991) is a byzantine

¹¹⁷ Erik Satie in Shattuck, 169.

¹¹⁸ Fred Goldbeck in Bryars, 13.

¹¹⁹ André Breton in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 249.

case in point. In the staging of the premiere of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1882 there was a transition where the curtains were taking too long and the corresponding music was too short. Wagner had refused the request of the set designer to write more music (“I do not write music by the meter!”) so his assistant, Engelbert Humperdinck, obliged. Humperdinck’s supplement was in fact an extrapolation of the bars preceding the *hole*, in effect creating a loop which could conceivably be repeated as needed. Graham’s intervention at this moment consists of an elaborate computational arrangement utilizing prime numbers to arrange the bars which results in a scheme whereby it would take close to 39 billion years for the orchestra to sync up with itself again. Given that the time span exceeds the lifetime of the sun itself, and therefore a time when the notion of a day will no longer apply, the piece goes beyond time, or at least suggests this (im)possibility (nay, this eventuality). The audio excerpts play as if Wagner’s composition was in suspended time, imbedded in amber, languorously and dramatically scrolling down the lifetime of the universe. The recording of Graham’s extra-extrapolation samples six different dates in the composition: 1882, 1919, 1955, 1997, 2779 and 38, 969, 364, 375.¹²⁰

Graham characterizes his piece as “trivial, [...] purely conceptual, [...] a musical joke, [...] it redeems itself only because it is a joke of cosmic proportions.” Self-deprecatingly, he adds, “on the CD of my piece all the musical excerpts sound pretty much identical,”¹²¹ and this would seem to approach the Warholian ethos:

I’ve been quoted a lot as saying, “I like boring things.” Well, I said it and I meant it. But that doesn’t mean I’m bored by them. Of course, what I think is boring must not be the same as what other people think [...], most people love watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I’m just the opposite. If I’m going to

¹²⁰ Rodney Graham, *Parsifal* (1882–38,969,364,735) (CD), Saint-Etienne: Espace Art Contemporain, 1991. The factual elements were culled from the extensive liner notes to this publication.

¹²¹ Rodney Graham, *Rodney Graham: A Little Thought*, Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004, 188.

sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don't want it to be essentially the same – I want it to be *exactly* the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away. And the emptier and better you feel.¹²²

Graham, however, acknowledges the existence of difference (he does say: *pretty much* identical) hence meeting up with Deleuze's earlier statement which suggests that we are prone to draw difference from repetition. This position is not necessarily dissimilar from Warhol's, his notion of emptiness is perhaps homologous (or conditional) to one's ability to discern difference in repetition of the same. In any case, each repetition is incontrovertibly different from the one preceding and the one following it, each becomes part of a series, a count of iterations, its position in space and time is singular even when comprising a continuity that is plural. An artistic illustration of this may be the pair of works by On Kawara, *One Million Years (Past)* and *One Million Years (Future)* which gather a numerical typewritten entry for each year of the million needed per piece. The resulting twenty volumes of years move respectively backward and forward at a rate of a decade per line, five hundred years per page.¹²³ In the 2006 exhibition of Kawara's work at the Power Plant in Toronto, the visitor was greeted at the entrance of the gallery by a pair of persons reading from the prodigious series of numbers. They alternated, one read one year into the future, the other one year into the past. The dual movement of time, each with a distinct voice, produced a rocking back and forth that was lulling but also unnerving when one invariably became aware of the weight of time and its relentless pace. We are admonished to hear the mass of the *tantum quantum*, the markers and measure of time.¹²⁴

¹²² Andy Warhol, *In His Own Words: Andy Warhol*, ed. Mike Wrenn, London: Omnibus Press, 1991, 16.

¹²³ *One Million Years (Past)* starts backwards from 1969 (the year it was made) and *One Million Years (Future)* starts forwards from 1980. More info in Jonathan Watkins, "Where 'I Don't Know' Is the Right Answer" in *On Kawara*. New York: Phaidon, 2002, 98.

¹²⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Technique du présent: essai sur On Kawara*, Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée/ Institut d'art contemporain, 1997, 22. Nancy introduces the *tantum quantum* in the context of a play with the homonymy of *entend* (hear), *temps* (time), and *tant* (amount) while discussing Kawara's *Date Paintings*. I take responsibility for the transposition.

Kawara dedicated the rewind piece to *all those who have lived and died* and the forward piece to *the last one*, in Roman Opalka we could propose to have a candidate for the last one, or perhaps, in a fittingly more effaced manner, the penultimate one. In 1965, Opalka conceived a work that is inexorably bound to his lifetime, he began painting numbers in succession, from 1 to whichever number he will reach at the point of his death. Each canvas becomes a detail of this lifework and is titled using the following format, for example: *1965/1 – ∞, Detail 1897108 – 2010495*. As of 2006 he has passed the five million mark and the lines upon lines of numbers are ever increasing. Painting is secondary here, *recording* is the primary goal, in fact as he paints he also records himself (in his native Polish) saying each number (some of these audio recordings have been published on CD).¹²⁵ Painting is also undergoing a process of effacement here since the background in each successive *Detail* has one percent more white in it, so it progressively meets up with the white of the numbers (at this point he is painting white on white). This is an existential *Vexations*, one with a unique literalization of what an autobiography entails. In fact, here the autobiography is augmented to include a postbiography, the infinity symbol, ∞, marking the bridge to a beyond the work espouses to. In a sense, the work articulates *I am dead* ad nauseam (or at least *I am dying*). It is as if Opalka was intent in remaining in a constant state of incompleteness, of pre-mortem limbo, for as soon as a *Detail* is completed he starts a line of the numbers on a new canvas. His explicit objective is to entwine his finitude with the boundlessness of infinity: “I want to avoid the risk of having my death finish the oeuvre [...] on a completed *Detail* which would mean the failure of having the finished defined by the unfinished.”¹²⁶

Whereas Opalka is tracking the entirety of the rest of his life, Rober Racine is facing the entirety of a classic work of literature akin to the “retired

¹²⁵ Roman Opalka, *OPALKA 1965/1 – ∞* (CD), Bremen: Neues Museum Weserburg, 1992. Unfortunately, on the CD Opalka's recordings have been subject to layering. This compositional intervention detracts from an appreciation of Opalka's performative act.

¹²⁶ Roman Opalka, *OPALKA 1965/1 – ∞* Paris: La Hune/Flammarion, 1992, 42. Translation mine. Original: *Un Détail achevé, enlevé du chevalet, j'installe immédiatement une nouvelle toile, toujours préparée à l'avance, et je commence la première ligne du Détail suivant. Je veux échapper au risque de voir ma mort achever l'oeuvre, contre mon programme, sur un Détail terminé et de manquer ainsi le fini défini par le non-fini.*



fig. 31



fig. 32

fig. 31 Roman Opalka, *Detail 993460–1017875* (detail), undated. Courtesy of the artist.

Photo: Joachim Fliegner.

fig. 32 uncredited, [*Roman Opalka at work in his studio*], undated. Courtesy of the artist.

businessman” and the Iliad (see ch. 1 pp. 42–43). Racine’s concept was to transpose the book’s length, in terms of both number of pages and time it takes to read, to a unique spatialized rendition of a novel, in this case: Flaubert’s *Salammbô*. Flaubert’s renowned sense of fastidious absoluteness, “You can only achieve style by dint of atrocious labor, by fanatical stubbornness and dedication,”¹²⁷ is shared by Racine. For his version of *Salammbô* he copied the entire novel by hand and proceeded to read it aloud on a staircase-like structure he had built where each step corresponded in size to a chapter’s length. Over the course of 14 hours on August 9, 1980 he read and ascended the 15 chapters of the book, during this period he became the work’s “living bookmark.”¹²⁸ It has been reported that Flaubert “shouted his texts in order to appraise their musicality, rhythmic efficacy, and sonorous color,”¹²⁹ Racine is offering the author a posthumous performance and in the process injecting volume into the novel – spatial and sonorous volume. The novel has filled the space, he has not just read it aloud, he has *sculpted* it. Having reached the end of the last chapter, the top of the spatialized novel, Racine cannot unread it. So he is left with no other choice but to jump. À la Yves Klein, he leapt into the void.

127 Gustave Flaubert in “Rober Racine”, *Pluralities 1980 Pluralités*, curator: Jessica Bradley, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1980, 103.

128 Danielle Legentil, “The Past Recaptured” in *Rober Racine*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2001, 62.

129 Raymond Gervais, “Les Musiques de Rober Racine” in *Parachute* No. 75, 1994, 25.



fig. 33



fig. 34

fig. 33–34 Rober Racine, *Salammô*, 1980. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: René-Pierre Allain.

CHAPTER FOUR / **SOUNDSPACEBEYOND**

Truth embraces with it all other abstentions other than itself.
Outside Time. Outside Space. Parallels other durations, oblivious to the
deliberate brilliance of its own time, mortal, deliberate marking.
Oblivious to itself. But to sing. To sing to. Very softly. ¹

THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA

¹ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, "Clio/History" in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. Brian Wallis. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, 174.

1. VOLUME

1.1 OF CONFINEMENT AND INFINITY

A line of sound,
running down
the length of a
large open space.

Standing inside it
the sound exists,
outside it,
it does not.

Unmarked, it leaves
expanse intact,

Forming an invisible
place within it,

Wholly separate.²

Volume: measure of a space, and volume: amplitude of sound. Consider volume as the variability of that space in sound. Consider volume as something within but wholly separate. Consider volume as the invisible and unmarked presence of sound. Consider volume as the intertwine of the spatial and the sonic. Now consider sound art as lost in space, more intent to illimit than delimit. The volume of sound art is immeasurable, deafening. It can overwhelm with silence just as well as it can blast with noise. By playing with the volume dial here we shall consider the *place* of sound art. Exhibiting sound art poses challenges to the white cube, sound epitomizes leakage, sound confirms the porosity of

² Max Neuhaus, *Place: Sound Works vol. III*, Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1994, 48.

space. Sound art's presence in museums is increasingly prevalent but remains problematic for spaces conceived for viewing instead of listening. Wide open, reverberative galleries are not generally conducive to focused listening. Even prior to an intentional sound entering the equation, every space has its own soundtrack, its room tone. Every space is sonorous, every space has a breath. In this section we shall weigh the propensity for sound to displace, multiply, heterogenize the topos, place, site.

1.2 WITH IN

One of the preeminent example of sound art, Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room*, explores an exteriorized form of inner speech; and as such, through a process of sounding, extends the speech apparatus far beyond the physiological.³ Let us recall the basic process involved, Lucier reads a text out loud and this is recorded, the recording is subsequently played back through speakers into the same room, and this is recorded in turn, and so on through many generations. The voice that was distinct at the onset progressively becomes shapeless. Lucier's composition constructs a rapport of resonances between a room and a voice; in *I am Sitting in a Room* the architectures of voice and room merge, they are superimposed as an aural palimpsest, the room is not only populated but also polluted, truly saturated with speech. While the words

³ The reader is encouraged to refer back to ch. 3 p. 137 in order to read the score of the piece which is simultaneously the concept, the script, and the material of the piece.

⁴ The research of Dr. Konstantin Raudive is briefly mentioned in Gregory Whitehead, "Principia Schizophonica: on noise, gas, and the broadcast disembody" in *Art & Text*, No. 37, 1990, 60–2. There is an abundance of material (primary and critical texts plus audio) on what is now generally called Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), some sources: Friedrich Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions With The Deceased*, Stockholm: Firework Edition, 2004 [1967]; Joe Banks, "Rorschach Audio: Ghost Voices and Perceptual Creativity" in *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. II, 2001, 77–83; Anthony Enns, "Voices of the Dead: Transmission/Translation/Transgression" in *Culture, Theory & Critique*, Vol. 46 No. 1, 2005, 11–27; Friedrich Jürgenson, *Friedrich Jürgenson – from the Studio for Audio-scope Research* (CD), London: Ash International, 2000; Mike Harding (curator), *The Ghost Orchid: An Introduction to EVP* (CD), London: Ash International, 1999. This last CD contains tracks originally published on a vinyl single which accompanied the classic book, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication With The Dead*, by Dr. Konstantin Raudive (New York: Lancer, 1971).

become unintelligible, they are comprehensible in an augmented way, they are the words uttered as the room has heard them, they are performing an expanded embodiment. The words linger – as in the so-called *Raudive voices* which haunt tape recordings.⁴ The room becomes all ear, akin to Pliny the Elder's Auriti or All-Ears, inhabitants of the Ear Islands, imagined in his *Inventorum Natura* of the 1st century CE.⁵ The Auriti are people whose ears covered their whole bodies; in Lucier's case of course, the room is even better equipped, for it plays a dual role, it is also All-Speaker. In the space of the sitting room, each repetition is a fade which becomes amplification, it is a persistent fade. The direction of the fade here is reversible, it is both *fadeout* and *fadein*. By the end of the piece, Lucier's room has reversed and augmented the phenomenology, it is sitting in him *and* in the room of the listener, and it is speaking back its resonances.

The sonic transformations generated by Lucier's piece find a homologue in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. When the family encounters the changed Gregor for the first time, Gregor is himself faced with the confirmation that his transformation is not a mere hallucination. This realization occurs sonically and through a process of distortion strikingly similar to Lucier's:

Gregor had a shock as he heard his own voice answering hers [his mother's], unmistakably his own voice, it was true, but with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it like an undertone, which left the words in their clear shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating around them to destroy their sense, so that one could not be sure one had heard them rightly.⁶

The manner by which Gregor occupies the room is less than total, he hides under the couch, the family ends up using the room as storage, and eventually, he withers and dies, yet Gregor, in that moment, is the exemplary iteration of *I am sitting in a room* (though, given the privilege of fiction, what occurs

⁵ Entry in *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places*, eds. Alberto Manguel & Gianni Guadalupi, New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1980, 105.

⁶ Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, New York: Schocken, 1971, 91.

gradually in Lucier manifests almost instantly in Kafka's short story). The voice is verifiably Gregor's, but only for a moment, for the destructive resonances of the room soon ensure that his words loosen their grip on shape and thereby their hold on comprehensibility. Naturally, Deleuze and Guattari's statement about Kafka's use of sound applies here: "What interests Kafka, is pure and intense sonic matter, always in relation to its own abolition; a deterritorialized musical sound, a scream that escapes signification, composition, song, and language; a sonority that ruptures to purge itself of shackles still overly bent on signifying."⁷ The underlying violence of such a process of self-disintegration is illustrated in a surprisingly light-hearted manner in a section of Gregory Whitehead's *Degenerates in Dreamland* where the Castaway Chorus (so dubbed by Whitehead) from Montreal's CKUT-FM is asked to repeat *I am a degenerate* along to the versions they hear on tape.⁸ The pretaped version reproduces the degenerations of intelligibility we have witnessed with Lucier and Kafka, and the Chorus falls willingly into what Whitehead likens to be a sonic rendition of M. Valdemar's "liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putrescence."⁹ A volume, set in such swampy surroundings, provides the condition of possibility for what Allen S. Weiss dubs a new episteme "where all signs (textual, visual, oral) are in constant degeneration, displacement, recombination, dissemination, resulting in the reconstruction of the symbolic as a heterotopia."¹⁰ In its performance, the choir playfully absorbs the resonant frequencies of the room (admittedly, in this case, the room is metaphoric since the context was a radio art workshop) and, in the process, undermines the constitution and consistency of its utterances. As with Gregor, a process of dehumanization is at play through a deformation of language into sound, a kind of sound that Deleuze and Guattari call an "unformed matter of expression."¹¹

⁷ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Kafka Pour une littérature mineure*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975, 12. Translation mine. Original: *Ce qui intéresse Kafka, c'est une pure matière sonore intense, toujours en rapport avec sa propre abolition, son musical déterritorialisé, cri qui échappe à la signification, à la composition, au chant, à la parole, sonorité en rupture pour se dégager d'une chaîne encore trop signifiante.*

⁸ Gregory Whitehead, "What I Am, And What I Am Not" in *Degenerates in Dreamland* (CD), Amsterdam: Staalplaat, 1995.

⁹ Edgar Allen Poe cited in liner notes of Gregory Whitehead, *Degenerates in Dreamland* (CD), 16.

¹⁰ Allen S. Weiss, "Incidents of Displacement" in liner notes to *The Architecture of the Incidental* (CD), Brooklyn: GD Stereo, 1999, unpaginated.

But a form, however unformed, of expression nonetheless. What is of import here is how this recurrent paradox functions in the context of a volume (meaning, in this context, a sounded space).

To further the discussion let us consider a work that predates Lucier's, *The Wolfman* (1964), a work for live amplified solo voice and tape, by one of his colleagues, Robert Ashley. Ashley's usage of voice has predominantly focused on the development of an idiosyncratic operatic language, but in this early work his harnessing of space via amplification (instead of via recording as with Lucier) produces a piece that has the reputation of being a threat to the listener's health.¹² This psychotronic piece is a neglected precursor to the plethora of works under the rubric of noise that have ensued. First performed at Charlotte Moorman's *Festival of the Avant-Garde* the same year of its composition, *The Wolfman* requires that the amplification apparatus be set to produce a full-room feedback (as opposed to "color" feedback which is what one hears commonly when a guitarist faces and approaches their amplifier). The effect of such a setup is that even the smallest sound made by the voice into the microphone appears psychoacoustically to move around the room.¹³ The piece is seldom performed and its distorted mythology has it that the performer is instructed to scream into the microphone, but that is clearly counterindicated. In fact there is no need, for the setup ensures that a scream is heard, one triggered by a set of lungs but produced and *housed* by a room.¹⁴

The sheer emotive force of *The Wolfman* (even in recorded form) is matched by Bruce Nauman's sound installation *Get Out of This Room, Get Out of My Mind* (1968), a work that is "so angry it scares people."¹⁵ What is germane here is its paradoxical spatial positioning, after all here is a piece that repeats its title and thus welcomes the visitor with an invocation to leave the room. The volume is loud, unbearably so, the voice is grating, foreboding, unwelcoming.

¹¹ Deleuze & Guattari, 13. Translation mine. Original: *le son n'apparaît pas ici comme une forme d'expression, mais bien comme une matière non formée d'expression*.

¹² Robert Ashley, liner notes in *The Wolfman* (CD), Milano: Alga Marghen, 2003, unpaginated.

¹³ Paraphrased from the liner notes by Robert Ashley, *The Wolfman* (CD).

¹⁴ Ashley states that rooms of different sizes would produce a feedback centering on different frequencies (which follows basic principles of acoustics).

¹⁵ Bruce Nauman, *Raw Materials*, London: Tate, 2004, 137.

The room is barren (the piece is sometimes exhibited with speakers visible, but when possible they are hidden), and its threshold is figuratively guarded by a sonic barrier. The repellent room works in absolute contrast with work such as those by Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller where the interiority of the narrative voice is exploited to its fullest. One might even go so far as saying that Cardiff and Miller's use of space is interiority run rampant whereas Nauman's is exteriority *nec plus ultra*.¹⁶ The former relishes and privileges interiority, the latter attempts to get the I so far out that it no longer has a head, body, room to be housed in.¹⁷

Returning to Lucier, finally, one should remember that in *I am sitting in a room*, the *smoothing out* sought by Lucier is illusory, it is no cure for his stutter. Yet, while the words with all their irregularities might linger they also succeed in "transforming the word into action by rendering it incapable of being decomposed and incapable of disintegrating: *language without articulation*."¹⁸ Here Deleuze was speaking in reference to Artaud (also quoted in ch. 3 pp. 122), Lucier's speech-room would have interested Artaud, this kind of amplified return could serve as ammunition against the dematerialized, disemboweled voice Artaud resisted with vehemence. The speech-room befits the criteria for cruel representation set in Derrida's reading of Artaud: a form of representation that does not face you but "invests you, one that deploys a volume, one that produces its own space, a spacing which no word could summarize or comprehend."¹⁹ The interiority that is being conceived here is corporeal, desublimated, producer of mass rather than meaning. In this context, language is unmoored from its syntactical pier and the temporal is unraveled, no longer

¹⁶ A related latin phrase, *non plus ultra*, meaning "not beyond", might even be more appropriate given the spatial pariah Nauman's work performs.

¹⁷ More on the work of Cardiff and Miller in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (curator), *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works, including collaborations with George Bures Miller*, New York: P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 89.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, "La clôture de la représentation" in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 348. Translation mine. Original: *La représentation cruelle doit m'investir. [...] elle] signifie aussi déploiement d'un volume, [...] expérience productrice de son propre espace, [...] espace qu'aucune parole ne saurait résumer ou comprendre.*

the line of History, but mere lines traversing, intersecting, crossing, knotting space. Time here is *volumed*. A language without time is one that has incurred a paradigmatic assassination. It straggles aimless, barely able to put one word in front of another.

1.3 PROVISIONAL PLACE AND SPEECH

Speaking in the state described above is at best provisional. David Merritt's work with twigs presents a vulnerable, fragile language that is less installed than stalled, its immobility is liminal, its arborescence fractured by the rhizomatic. Twigs barely held by pins, barely suggesting words, barely holding in place, or holding on to place. Merritt has found the ellipsis in the ellipse, and what better manner to concretize that acentered interior of language which refers to something outside of itself. Something unpinnable is evoked in this murmuring, something echoing Jean Lescure's remarkable formulation that "unknowing is not ignorance but the difficult act of going beyond knowledge."²⁰ In Merritt's spatial depiction, language is tentative and frail, yet nonetheless obstinate – it remains, it litters and lingers. Merritt's work performs a dismantlement. Tenuous form here flirts with formlessness, in the work *glot'l* (not pictured) the twig-words are gently thrust down the throat into the opening at the center of the larynx, the organ of the voice, where muscled air forms speech. This "interference with a moving body of air"²¹ which describes the somatic production of speech can be easily transposed to the kind of voicing we heard in Lucier's *speech-room* and to any space one enters in hearing, any space heard. This kind of lowercase implosion within a confined space is a recurring condition (of which I will be outlining just a few examples here), and could be said to be the condition of possibility of unsound art.

²⁰ Jean Lescure in Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 1957, 15. Translation mine. Original: *Le non-savoir n'est pas une ignorance mais un acte difficile de dépassement de la connaissance*.

²¹ A paraphrase in an unpublished essay by David Merritt, of Francis Katamba from *An Introduction to Phonology*, San Francisco: Addison Wesley, 1989.



fig. 35

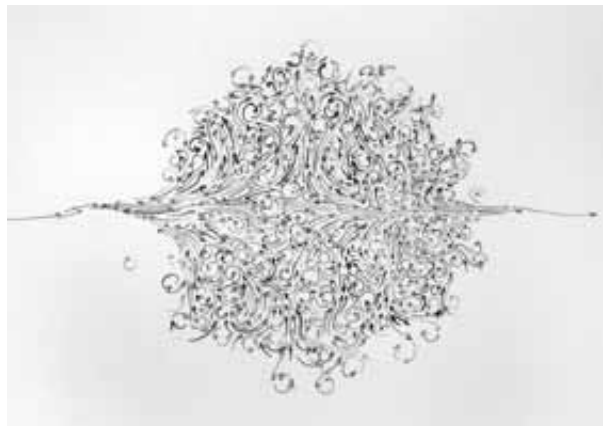


fig. 36

fig. 35 David Merritt, *moritat* (detail), 1995. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 36 Marla Hlady, *Proposition for tracing a conversation No.5*, 2005.
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Bradley Art & Projects.

A confined space could also be said to be the prime characteristic of the area of play created by a conversation. Toronto-based sound artist, Marla Hlady's impressionistic drawing (from a series focusing on conversations) renders in a delicate and detailed manner the swirls of our words and phrases as they navigate between the mouths and set of ears at play. The twirly arrows cluster and then escape (or attempt to), we can imagine them to be an amalgam of words, phrases, and perhaps even intentions, double-entendres, surreptitious games, snide asides, etc. The ephemerality of discourse is maintained by the contingent quality of the amassed strokes, they flurry and scatter in directionless directions, they come back on their word, they suggest rather than delineate. In order to explore this further, let us examine an installation by Samuel Roy-Bois where conversation is forestalled. With Roy-Bois language is not *volumed* along the gallery walls but is housed. In *I heard a noise, I ran away* the only sound we hear is in the title. While we are free to take the hint at a narrative and imagine an actual incident, let us consider this title as a description of one's self-hearing (the aforementioned work by Hlady could be reconsidered in this light as well). José Gil states that: "In the soliloquy of 'hearing oneself speak,' subjectivity, not coming out of itself, discovers the presence of the object."²² Then he reflects that "the subject hears itself as mediated by the body, and it is in the *infinitesimal interval* separating the speaking and hearing subjects that this object places itself."²³ We can thus posit the volume Roy-Bois proposes in this installation as a manifestation of the objecthood which emerges out of that separation. In other words, we are in our bodies as both subject and object. This is not a Cartesian split, this is a transmission circuit, we are both transmitter and receiver, we are in the space of the relation. We are singular plural. We are not self-contained, the foreign element is introduced by this very circuitry and expands infinitely outward. The installation is in affinity with Bachelard's notion that "vastness is an intimate dimension."²⁴ It is a space we no longer just face, but one

²² José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, trans. Stephen Muecke, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 190. Emphasis added.

²³ Gil, 191.

²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1957, 177. Translation mine. Original: *l'immensité est une dimension intime*.

where we are thrust inside, inside the *infinitesimal interval*. In other words, it is a volume which *takes place*. Taking place, which in this instance is the running in place of the speaker upon hearing its own noise – *I heard a noise and I ran*. In the installation you enter the room and every surface of the room is in conversation with the outside, the room is a sieve, holes have been manually poked through its walls, floor and ceiling, the resulting pores are breathing in light. Such a space performs, it performs “the placing in movement of the place” as discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman regarding Parmeggiani’s *Delocazione*.²⁵ Thus the *infinitesimal interval* is the movement whereby place can no longer be accurately determined. And whereby movement in place becomes the mechanism by which hearing enables a self to come into presence.

I heard a noise, I ran away does not tell us whether the running escape was successful, or even possible. Concerning self-hearing, as Jean-Luc Nancy explicates “a self is nothing else than a form or function of a return: a self is constituted by a relation *to* self, or by a presence *to* self.”²⁶ So the subject can only place a claim on itself through this reflexive act. What might be at stake when self-hearing is undetermined or malfunctioning? What is this running away from? In the tale of Veronique Le Guen, the speleologist (see ch. 3 p. 153), her reflexive apparatus has undergone a radical destabilization, Le Guen’s *I am not her(e)* locates the “I,” or rather, confirms its dislocation. The “I” is unhinged from a place, its function derails and becomes a spiral of malfunctions and dysfunctions. The spiral is at its most tragic here for it marks a point of no return for the psyche. Yayoi Kusama undergoes an analogous descent (along a visual register, but is nevertheless useful in this discussion):

One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows, and the walls, and finally all over the room, my body, and

²⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Génie du non-lieu*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2001, 34. Translation mine. Original: *la mise en mouvement du lieu*.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l’écoute*, Paris: Galilée, 2002, 24. Translation mine. Original: *Un soi n’est rien d’autre qu’une forme ou une fonction de renvoi : un soi est d’un rapport à soi, ou d’une présence à soi*.



fig. 37

fig. 37 Samuel Roy-Bois, *I heard a noise, I ran away*, 2003. Courtesy of the artist.

the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothingness ...²⁷

Once a space is in movement can it remain absolute? “What is expressed when one says not space, but *a* space: a disturbing expression that defines something that is at the same time empty and well circumscribed.”²⁸ In the same passage Cailliois describes a desire which echoes with Kusama’s reduction: “I wanted to cross the border of my skin, live on the other side of my senses; I practiced watching myself from a given point in space.”²⁹ Of confinement and infinity, edging towards a self without self, a distancing which blurs one’s cognitive hold. What is the place of sound in this? What stakes does sound amplify? Keeping in mind Nancy’s caveat that “nothing can be said about sound that is not also valid *for* the other registers as well as *against* them, [the registers are] in an inextricable complementarity and incompatibility one from the other.”³⁰ A discussion on sound involving space and place in particular demands a certain synesthetic sensibility; furthermore, the movement that we have focused on is at play on many levels, and the tensions between the senses Nancy ably describes is certainly one of these instances. But to return to the questions posed, we can posit that sound, in its specificity, crowds the place, it saturates, “[it] invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us.” Deleuze and Guattari continue their outline of the power with: “It takes leave of the earth, as much in order to drop us into a black hole as to open us to the cosmos. It makes us want to die.”³¹ This

²⁷ Yayoi Kusama, “Fortress of Shooting Stars” in *Grand Street*, No. 53 *Fetishes*, Vol. 14 No. 1, Summer 1995, 32.

²⁸ Roger Cailliois, *The Necessity of the Mind: An Analytic Study of the Mechanisms of Overdetermination in Automatic and Lyrical Thinking and of the Development of Affective Themes in the Individual Consciousness*, trans. Michael Syrotinski, Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1990, 105. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Cailliois, 104.

³⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l’écoute*, Paris: Galilée, 2002, 24. Translation mine. Original: [Q]u’on ne perde jamais de vue que rien n’est dit du sonore qui ne doive à la fois valoir pour les autres registres aussi bien que contre eux [...], dans une complémentarité et dans une incompatibilité inextricables l’une de l’autre.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 348.

dramatic contrast between a black hole and the open cosmos further echoes with Caillois, Roy-Bois and Kusama and presents a kind of *thanatopia*, a place of death within the living that renders the latter incapable of stability or inertia. Here is death, literally. No longer relegated temporally to a future, it is present and occupies a place. Blanchot depicts a similar space, predictably for one whose biographical note reads “his life is entirely devoted to literature and to its inherent silence,” it is one occupied by words:³²

This even word, spaced without space, affirming underneath all affirmation, impossible to deny, too feeble to shut up, too docile to be contained, not saying anything, only speaking, speaking without life, without voice, with a lower voice than any other: alive amongst the dead, dead amongst the living, calling to die, to resuscitate in order to die, calling without recourse.³³

Philip Monk in his discussion of Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* views the appearances in the film of the two inert objects, the bookcase and the corpse, not as comments on narrativity in film but as observations on the place events take. The seemingly self-evident statement that “events *take place*” is pertinent to our discussion for these “representational” events are contrasted by Monk with the “‘abstract’ sine-wave glissando” which becomes the other soundtrack at this point in *Wavelength*.³⁴ That the representational and the abstract are not as disparate as one might think is a recurring strategy for Snow. He places these opposite in play, Snow’s game is depth – of field, of interpretation, of signification. By *Wavelength*’s end the flat screen regains its flatness, but only for a moment, soon we internalize the zoom we have just experienced and

³² Maurice Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 155, 7. Translation mine. Full original: Maurice Blanchot, *romancier et critique, est né en 1907. Sa vie est entièrement vouée à la littérature et au silence qui lui est propre*.

³³ Maurice Blanchot, *L’Attente L’Oubli*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 155–6. Translation mine. Original: Cette parole égale, espacée sans espace, affirmant au-dessous de toute affirmation, impossible à nier, trop faible pour être tue, trop docile pour être contenue, ne disant pas quelque chose, parlant seulement, parlant sans vie, sans voix, à voix plus basse que toute voix : vivante parmi les morts, morte entre les vivants, appelant à mourir, à ressusciter pour mourir, appelant sans appel

³⁴ Philip Monk, “Around Wavelength” in *The Michael Snow Project: Visual Art 1951–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/The Power Plant, 1994, 327.

find ourselves deep in the waves of the photograph on the wall that was initially at the opposite end of the loft from the camera. In *Two Sides to Every Story* Snow juxtaposes the flatness with the voluminosity of the screen in the very installation of the piece. The same scene is shot from opposite ends of a room and is then projected on a double sided screen in the middle of the room. Simultaneously projected, we see the front of a person on one side and the other side shows us the back. The arrangement according to Bruce Elder, “re-enchants a dead metaphor by literalizing it”,³⁵ it also obligates the viewer to pick a side. In both instances I saw the piece exhibited, I observed viewers eventually drifting to a place beside the screen where one can witness the thinness of the story and its flirtation with virtuality. Interestingly, from that position, with a back and forth motion, one is also able to see both the back and front of the protagonist. With this to and fro motion we enter a paradoxical space where materiality is located in the nowhere of the in-between. Indeed, by being on the side and moving side to side, we are literally *in* the action. By thwarting conventional viewing, spatial movement is enhanced. It takes this relocation to the screen’s side to remind ourselves simultaneously of the work’s fiction (meta) and of its liveness (physics).³⁶

A space in movement is an amplified topography, one that inscribes notions of utopia and heterotopia to the heretofore singular space. In this plural context, sound could be conceived as the jukebox of place. As Rick Altman points out in his appropriately titled essay “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound,” in a recording we hear double, we hear both the sound of the site it was recorded and the site where the recording is being

³⁵ Bruce Elder, “On Sound, Sound Recording, Making Music of Recorded Sound, The Duality of Consciousness and its Alienation from Language, Paradoxes Arising from These and Related Matters” in *The Michael Snow Project: Music/Sound 1948–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/The Power Plant, 1994, 244.

³⁶ In fact, Snow called *Wavelength* “metaphysics”. He called another one of his films “philosophy” (*New York Eye and Ear Control*). From Philip Monk, “Around Wavelength” in *The Michael Snow Project: Visual Art 1951–1993*, 326

³⁷ Rick Altman, “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound” in *Sound Theory – Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman, New York: Routledge, 1992, 27. Also cited in Sean Cubitt’s worthwhile essay “Sound: The Distances” in *Definition of Visual Culture II: Modernist Utopias – Postformalism and Pure Visuality*, ed. Chantal Charbonneau, Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 1996, 98–111.

played.³⁷ This dissonance induced by the playback of recording can destabilize self-hearing by adding an elsewhere to the mix, as a result the here and now can no longer be clearly delineated. Xenakis is pertinent at this juncture, Louis Marin writing on the composer/architect provides us with a generative definition of utopia: “U-topia, no-place, the nowhere does not mean the unreal or the imaginary, but the indetermination of place, the neutral space of difference and the force of differentiation. Place which is neither here nor there, utopia presents an absence in the here and now of space.”³⁸ The multiplicity implied in the work of difference is the theoretical underpinning of this image of the juke-box of place. Sound negotiates (activates and enables in equal measures) the various levels of heightened hearing a space can generate. Xenakis worked with densities of space, from the 400 speaker array at the Philips Pavilion for the 1958 Brussels World Fair to his *Polytopes*. The multiplication of sites here is again along the arrangement suggested by the idea of the *singular plural*, that is to say that we have a single topos which is then polymorphed (understanding morphing here as not necessarily pertaining only to physical form). In the concluding statement of his study on *Les Polytopes*, Olivier Revault d’Allonnes makes this paradoxical statement “the Xenakian polytopia is the right to be a self, that is to say the right to be other.”³⁹ The movement of space under the sign of sound, as we see here and have seen earlier, causes ontological questions to resonate. Foucault’s discussion in “Of Other Spaces” on the conjoined utopic and heterotopic aspects of the mirror with the regards to the self provides a useful analogue.⁴⁰ We are both *in* the mirror and reflected back, with the mirror we are performing in image the act of self-hearing. We are returned to ourselves, as other. We are in a dialogue of one.

Amplifications of these various kinds all echo the space. The volume of air has thickened. This is the resultant ambiance of Emile Morin and Jocelyn

³⁸ Louis Marin, “L’utopie de la verticalité” in *L’ARC Xenakis*, No. 51, 1972, 74. Translation mine. Original: *U-topie : le non-lieu, le nulle part qui ne signifie pas l’irréel ou l’imaginaire, mais l’indétermination du lieu, le lieu neutre de l’espace de la différence et de la force de la différenciation. Lieu de ce qui n’est ni ici, ni là, l’utopie présente une absence, dans l’ici et le maintenant de l’espace, autour de laquelle celui-ci s’organise.*

³⁹ Olivier Revault d’Allonnes, *Xenakis : Les polytopes*, Paris: Balland, 1975, 129.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres” in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, vol. IV 1980–1988, Gallimard 1994, 752–762. In English in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, trans. Jay Miskowiec, Routledge, 1998, 237–244.

Robert's *La Salle des Noeuds III (The Hall of Knots)* (2001), an installation working in an interesting parallel to Xenakis, using hyperbolic mathematics and speaker array, but using remote links on various continents and systems of "orderly disorder" to manage the inputs of images and sounds.⁴¹ Another room where we are enveloped by a volume, by layers of inputs and outputs, is *Room of Fears* by Michael Fernandes. In this performance/installation, Fernandes wrote and filled the walls in longhand with the fears contribute to him by the visitors to the gallery. Here are selections:

I am afraid of losing my wallet / I am afraid of beautiful women / I am afraid that the sky is falling / I am afraid of never having another idea / I am afraid of my art coming between me and my partner / I am afraid of clever people / I am afraid of sitting on my uncle's lap / I am afraid of craving the quick fix / I am afraid of bedtime / I am afraid of cops with bad tempers / I am afraid of large open spaces / I am afraid of insanity / I am afraid I don't speak properly / I am afraid of choking in my sleep / I am afraid there is no place for me / I am afraid of Mike Tyson / I am afraid of visa bills / I am afraid of Old Man River / I am afraid of stupidity / I am afraid of tall people who look important / I am afraid that squeaky wheels get the oil / I am afraid of ways and things that have nothing to do with me / I am afraid of doing something that is out of control that haunts me for the rest of my life / I am afraid of eros / I am afraid of cornering a rat / I am afraid I'll do all this work and then die / I am afraid of anyone who tells me that I don't know what I'm missing / I am afraid to date boys from other cultures / I am afraid of Edmund the bully at our school / I am afraid of my ego / I am afraid of performing / ...⁴²

While here the volume is unsound, the performative element of the work makes the room vibrate, it is not static, it is a *becoming-afraid*. Presumably, this becoming is also a shedding, an unbecoming, a fading of fear. But the

⁴¹ Émile Morin and Jocelyn Robert in Corinna Ghaznavi, *Computer Voices/Speaking Machines*, Banff: Walter Philips Gallery, 2001, 10.

⁴² Stephen Horne, *Michael Fernandes: The Everyday Escapes* in Parachute, No. 87, 1997, 22.



fig. 38

fig. 38 Michael Fernandes, *Room of Fears*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery.

room also opens your every pore and injects fear inside. It stages a backfiring catharsis, a purging full of leaks, an undertow. The anaphora of every phrase and the arrangement of each phrase into lined rows heighten the amplification. It is an enumeration, a taxonomy, a systematized graffiti.

Snow's *Wavelength* offers a comparable performance, it is a focused study of "how our communication creates a membrane over chaos: laughter so easily becomes slaughter, but only in writing."⁴³ Arguably *Wavelength's* principal aim might not be to make a statement on communication, but given its metaphysical aspirations, we must pay attention the possible slippages between various lengths of wave. Variability of wave has immediate effect on our apperceptions of the room. The room wavers. The viewer's uncertainty is not merely with regards to the occurrence of the events but to their placing. This spatial tampering occurs, paradoxically, because the zoom and glissandi assert their inexorable certainty throughout. The waves are both measured and lengthless.

Raymond Gervais' work often delves into similar questions; regarding a piece from 2001 he writes: "It is the listening not the sound that is rendered in space. It is the gaze which plays the music, in silence."⁴⁴ In the mutism of his work, Gervais makes sound resonate at a level which addresses the question and referentiality of listening. Gervais scores sound, reads it and places that literalization in space. The work provides a "space in quotation marks",⁴⁵ and enters a back and forth where site rhymes with cite, and citation with situation. The *space in quotation marks* is synonymous, of course, with Cage's 4'33", the

⁴³ Michael Snow in "On Sound, Sound Recording, Making Music of Recorded Sound, The Duality of Consciousness and its Alienation from Language, Paradoxes Arising from These and Related Matters" in *The Michael Snow Project: Music/Sound 1948–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario / The Power Plant, 1994, 235. This statement was not made in reference to *Wavelength*, I take the responsibility of this inference.

⁴⁴ Raymond Gervais, *Via Charles Ives : La Symphonie Universe (via La Question sans réponse)*, Orford: Centre d'arts Orford, 2001, 14.

⁴⁵ Louise Déry, *Are You Talking to Me? Conversations(s)*, Montréal: Galerie de l'UQAM, 2003, 44. While the exhibition includes work by Gervais, this phrase was used by the curator, Louise Déry, in reference to the exhibition as a whole.

⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that Cage has referred to 4'33" as a work that could be pronounced "four minutes, thirty-three seconds" or "four feet, thirty-three inches". Reference in John Cage, *Conversing with Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, New York: Routledge, 2003, 70.

former makes explicit a spatial frame, the latter a temporal one.⁴⁶ Both activate each other.

Next time you enter a gallery or museum, close your eyes. You will enter the space of the relation. You will hear Vito Acconci in *Seedbed* (1972) saying, “I’ve done this for you, I’ve done this with you, I’ve done this to you.”⁴⁷ You will realize that there is an embodiment ever present in this unsound art, this thinking art. You will have a work that might be concealed and confined, but with undeniable materiality, corporeality. You will face the plethora of spaces conjured here: the speech-room, space volumed by sound, thanatopia, the jukebox of place, the infinitesimal interval, polytopia, the unsoundtrack. You will then open your eyes, and see the volume of your listening.

1.4 SLIPPERY THREADS

My first anxiety attack occurred during a Louis Armstrong concert. I was nineteen or twenty ... the atmosphere warmed up fast ... my heart began to accelerate, becoming more important than the music, shaking the bars of my rib cage, compressing my lungs so the air could no longer enter them. Gripped by panic at the idea of dying there in the middle of spasms, stomping feet, and the crowd howling, I ran into the street like someone possessed ... “I’m going to die. I’m going to die. I’m going to die.”⁴⁸

Marie Cardinal is facing death by contamination, death by Artaud’s plague. Not the death *of* performance, but death *by* performance. She is running, she

⁴⁷ Vito Acconci, *Vito Acconci – Writings. Works. Projects*, ed. Gloria Moure, Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2001, 154. In *Seedbed* (performed at Sonnabend Gallery, New York in 1972), Acconci masturbated for some six hours a day, twice a week, while concealed under a low wooden ramp built into the gallery. Brandon LaBelle’s discussion of *Seedbed* echoes and complements mine with regards to the situational, relational and spatial specificity of the voice (Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London: Continuum, 2006, 130):

Acconci’s orality seems to suggest that the voice is always housed within a structure that is not Universal but architectonic, that one speaks from a situated and social position that is partly uncontrollable, and that the interior state that the voice exposes, amplifies and presents to another, is at times violating, disgusting and unstable within its own processional intensities.

⁴⁸ Marie Cardinal in Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, 181.

is going, fast forwarding the future, sprinting to her death. What engenders Marie Cardinal's phobic phonics performance? Is her asphyxiation caused by Satchmo's "quixotic leaps or ellipses (quantum lump in one's throat)"?⁴⁹ The sonic and linguistic channels are saturated with soma. The stage and what it emanates slips inside skin and impacts the core. She is out of wind. As a speaker, she is blown, ruptured by frequencies beyond her capacity. She is running and the wind is blowing against her, she is advancing backwards, her fast forward is rewinding.

Is her panic a somatic manifestation of feeling the stage throb in all its "common differentness"?⁵⁰ Michel Leiris used this formulation in relation to the absurdity of speaking of African sculpture as a single category, here I am speculating that Cardinal is possessed by a similar undifferentiated and undifferentiable fear. Similarly, playwright Antonio Buero Vallejo talks of "the infinite importance of the singular case."⁵¹ Cardinal's asphyxiation is such a case, particular as well as infinitely common. Consider Sartre's depiction of an outing where the encounter with a jazz band occasions much more than a listening experience:

They are speaking to the best part of you, the toughest, the freest, to the part which wants neither melody nor refrain, but the deafening climax of the moment. They take hold of you. They beat you, they turn, they crash, the rhythm grips you and shakes you. You bounce in your seat, faster and faster. The trombone sweats, you sweat, the trumpet sweats, you sweat some more, and then you feel that something has happened on the bandstand; the musicians don't look the same; they speed ahead, they infect each other with this haste, they look mad, taut, as if they were searching for something. Something like sexual pleasure. And you begin to look for something. You begin to shout; you have to shout; the band has become an immense spinning top: if you

⁴⁹ Nathaniel Mackey, *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1993, 19.

⁵⁰ Michel Leiris in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, 192n3.

⁵¹ Antonio Buero Vallejo, *El Tragaluz*, Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1997 [1970], 67. Original: *La importancia infinita del caso singular*.

⁵² Jean-Paul Sartre, "Jazz in America" in *Reading Jazz*, ed. Robert Gottlieb, New York: Vintage, 1999, 711.

stop, the top stops and falls over. You shout, they shriek, they whistle, they are possessed, you are possessed, you scream like a woman in childbirth. The trumpet player touches the pianist and transmits his hypnotic obsession. You go on shouting. The whole crowd shouts in time, you can't even hear the jazz, you watch some men on a bandstand sweating in time, you'd like to spin around, to howl at death.⁵²

There is something akin to birth in these near-death experiences. Cardinal and Sartre join Armstrong on stage and voice the desperate lyric, *I'm going to die*. The performance *on* stage is running *off* stage. One assumes from both accounts that their aphonia and apoplexy is temporary, another voice will emerge out of the loss: *I'm going to be born*. A birth which is no longer tied to genealogy: "What do I have to throw away? Everything by God everything. I am stark naked. I've thrown everything away. My genealogy."⁵³ Aimé Césaire is also within close range of the void. Hélène Cixous provides the multiplication table for this death-birth moment: "I am the son, the daughter, my father, his father and my own son, never ceasing to remember myself, I am heir to myself, never forgetting that I am me."⁵⁴

The stage is a speed up. It is where the start and the end coincide. A place where the world can start from the end. From the stage, the first strains emitted by a group of musicians into a space invade all bodies occupying the space and reverberate on all surfaces in its path. Architecture is stretched to contain time signatures. Eventually each sound fades and is replaced by the next one, its only lasting effect is in the memory of the ears within range. This moment when a room is filled for the first time by the speed of sound is always tentative, it acquaints all involved to each other – the sounds with the players with everyone's ears and with the room. Is this multiplied and multiplying coincidence a convergence establishing an inordinariness, or, by its sheer ubiquity, simply yet another set of individuals inhabiting a stage

⁵³ Aimé Césaire, "At the Locks of the Void" in *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 203.

⁵⁴ Hélène Cixous, *Dedans*, Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1969, 121. Translation mine. Original: *je suis le fils, la fille, mon père, son père et mon propre fils, sans cesser de me souvenir de moi-même, je me succède sans m'oublier*

and amplifying themselves? For now we know that the stage is revving up, the first emissions have marked an aural amplitude shift, the entrance of the sonic attack presently resonating throughout our architectures.

The augmented moment ends as soon as it begins, even though it seems to last forever. It is the race which begins by the end, the birth which comes at the end, as with Edouard Glissant's "prophetic vision of the past."⁵⁵ It must end in order to last forever, it is that speed up which slows everything down. Césaire clamors: "The only thing in the world worth beginning: The End of the world of course".⁵⁶ Moment which is out of time, outof time as soon as it occurs. In light of Cardinal's flight what are our expectations and fears of the stage, the staged, and the staging? Whether on or off, what happens when a stage does not split a space in two but collapses time and multiplies singularities? Gilles Deleuze speaks of being constantly on the lookout (*être aux aguets*), in this case we could say, on the *listenout* for the encounter: the collision between oneself and a painting, a film, a music, a person, another, an other.⁵⁷ The wait can sometimes take forever. Often, the stage is ossified, a mere structure elevating or focusing attention as opposed to a context with the force necessary for the speed up. The stage and its emissions are standardized, we go through the motions, the motions go through us.

Sometimes, however, the motions move us beyond where our feet can take us. Sarah Vaughan's rendition of *Misty* at the Tivoli Garden in 1963 exhibited this singular speed up. Errol Garner and Johnny Burke's composition opens with the phrase "Look at me ..." and Vaughan voices this phrase taking the standard within her and digesting its parameters. She pilots the standard according to her currents. The standard marks the thread of history, the thread can either be taut and rigid, or pliable and flexible. Vaughan, as virtuosos are prone to, imposes the latter. And she takes the audience in tow. In this rendition, Henri Michaux joins the cast as a mescalinated audience member and the musicians on stage respond in accordance: "The response which

⁵⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash, University Press of Virginia, 1989, 64.

⁵⁶ Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a return to the Native Land" in *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 55.

⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze avec Claire Parnet* (DVD), Paris: Vidéo Editions Montparnasse, 1997.

the musician gives to the world [...] a response via the fluid, the air, the sensate. I was inside, engulfed.”⁵⁸ Michaux then envisions music as a conjunction of laces suspending him from the drug induced *glissement* overtaking him:

Horror!
I slip
Everything slips
There is nothing but that which slips
Nothing ever stops, and that continues and slips
around me slips, inside me slips
there should be
there should be...
.....
Music which leaves me suspended
its laces
its laces
which holds me in its laces.⁵⁹

The second line of *Misty*: “I am as helpless as a kitten up a tree” expresses a vulnerability, even a fear not unlike Cardinal’s or Michaux’s, though admittedly, the lyric is resolutely coy. Towards the end of the song, one of her sidemen (Kirk Stuart on piano) joins in the vocal and the song unravels. Now a duet,

⁵⁸ Henri Michaux, *Connaissance par les gouffres*, Paris: Gallimard, 1967, 80. Translation mine. Original: *Cette réponse que fait au monde le musicien [...] réponse par le fluide, par l’aérien, par le sensible. J’étais dedans, englouti.*

⁵⁹ Henri Michaux, 77. Translation mine. Original:

Horreur!
Je glisse
Tout glisse
Il n’y a plus que ce qui glisse
Rien n’arrête plus, et cela continue et glisse
autour de moi glisse, et en moi glisse
il faudrait
il faudrait ...
.....
Musique qui me laisse suspendu
ses lacets
ses lacets
qui me tient dans ses lacets.

they moan, groan, and gasp the standard off its moorings. “The point is to make language itself cry, to make it stutter, mumble or whisper.”⁶⁰ For Deleuze, what makes sense is nonsense. The point is to make the thread itself twirl, to make it vibrate, tangle and break. For Nathaniel Mackey, it is “a collective stutter.”⁶¹ Sarah Vaughan and Kirk Stuart disintegrate *Misty* for a moment, the duo become “the intersection of two lines of articulation – doubling the voice, splitting the voice, breaking the voice, tearing it.”⁶² They are one voice in two bodies. Time is no longer kept, no finger snapping, time is stretched, *spatialized*, time is explicit, *sexualized*. Even the “Excuse me” ending the unraveling is lascivious, mischievous. It is not an apology, it is “excuse” as in “free from a charge,” the charge of the standard, of the genre, of history (Glissant’s “vertigo of history”).⁶³ Yet it is within the standard, within the charge, in fact, the charge is necessary to its own unloading. As when one speaks of lifting a weight off of one’s shoulders, one should not neglect to think that that is also the precise moment of the weightlifter’s final exertion. It is the culminating moment when the weight is lifted above the head and is at its most weighted. When you are finally free of the weight, you are carrying the most weight. You are a ligament, bound to be unbound.

The break, the paradigmatic rupture, has often been induced by the intake of mind-altering substances in the examples cited in these pages. These have the ability to shift or expand parameters in such manner that sound becomes a space one enters and spends time in. The space thus created is peculiar for it is invisible, one negotiates it sonically, depth of field is increased in surround:

So under the spell of the reefer I discovered a new analytical way of listening to music. The *unheard* sounds came through, and each melodic line

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “He stuttered” in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin V. Boundas & Dorothea Olkowski, New York: Routledge, 1994, 25.

⁶¹ Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1997, 29.

⁶² Nathaniel Mackey, “Cante Moro” in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adalaide Morris, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, 205.

⁶³ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash, University Press of Virginia, 1989, 161.

⁶⁴ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York: Vintage, 1995, 8–9. Emphasis added.

existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waited patiently for the other voices to speak. That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths.⁶⁴

The *unheard* sounds? The literature examined thus far has been replete with these paradoxical formulations, Ellison's *unheard* sounds recall Beckett's *unspoken words* (ch. 1 p. 30). Are these recurring paradoxical formulations consequent of a hearing that has shifted to a spatial paradigm, a *hearing in space*, as Ellison writes? Jacques Rancière speaks of an "art of sonic vibration" which is constituted by "the contradictory union between speech devoid of sensible form and an art of sound lacking sense."⁶⁵ And this is "[a] spatial art which renders visible what cannot be seen and what can only be heard in the discord: the contradictory union of the word which does not designate and the music which does not speak."⁶⁶ Rancière points us again to unheard sounds and unspoken words, perhaps the blurring of tenses engendered by the speed up of the stage, in the instances we have examined in this section, has produced a scene stripped bare, replete with empty signifiers and entangled in a profusion of entrances and exits. Disoriented and free of bearings, we can only situate ourselves with trepidation and tenuousness. Each step is already one displaced, as Beckett wrote: "little panic steps."⁶⁷ Steps nonetheless.

⁶⁵ Jacques Rancière, "La métamorphoses des Muses" in *Sonic Process: une nouvelle géographie des sons*, ed. Christine van Assche, Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2002, 31. Translation mine. Original (and fuller quote): [*C*]e qui s'affirme avec la prédominance du bruit de fond musical, c'est une autre idée d'espace. À la topographie représentative des analogies entre la parole et le visible s'oppose l'espace paradoxal engendré par l'art de la vibration sonore, c'est à dire de la matérialité de-spatialisée. Ce qui est mis en espace, ce ne sont pas simplement ces visions que la musique suscite pour l'imagination. C'est l'union contradictoire entre la parole sans forme sensible et l'art des sons privé de sens. L'art propre à l'âge esthétique, ce n'est ni la peinture abstraite, ni la musique atonale, ni la littérature intransitive, ces paradigmes de la modernité glorieuses, dont certains font aujourd'hui les sentinelles pathétiques de l'irreprésentable, désarmant toute pensée et toute volonté. C'est bien plutôt l'art de l'espace qui fait voir ce qui ne se voit pas et ce qui ne s'entend que dans le discord: l'union contradictoire de la parole qui ne montre pas et de la musique qui ne parle pas.

⁶⁶ Rancière, 31.

⁶⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Fizzles*, New York: Grove, 1976, 27.

2. DEPTH CHARGES

2.1 PNEUMATICS

Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable ... The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion ... The circling rivers the breath, the breathing it in and out ...⁶⁸

Art is a conduit, an in-between. Ins, outs, throughput – in and of itself, art is nothing. Art's nothing status, its nothingness, should not raise any ire, concern, or anxiety, it's a rich and swarming petri dish. It is research which mixes plans with fluxes with chances with obsessions. It circles round and around. It confuses the complex with the simple. It unknowns givens, and discovers knowns anew. Every time, it takes a new breath with the same old lungs. It is weary of morals and exigencies. It breathes best when the air flows unfettered. Bare chests. The inaugural installation of *Thorax* by Jean-Pierre Gauthier was presented in an artist-run center with a storefront gallery on the main street of a small town. In this context, the message that an unrestricted pulse is the imperative necessity for the flourishing of the *ungovernable* could not be clearer.⁶⁹

You walk in. Bare chests, so bare you see through to the inner workings. You walk in, you are immediately inside yourself. Breaths are exteriorized through the skeletal canopy of the installation. An anthropomorphics of the body's interior where oxygen, blood and carbon dioxide are filtered so as to maintain the life of its breather. *Thorax* is a cavity comprising the mechanics which regulate inhales and exhales. Jean-Pierre Gauthier orchestrates the breathing apparatus with batons made of electrical wires. He conducts the

⁶⁸ Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric" in *The Complete Poems*, New York: Penguin Books, 2004, 130, 132 and 135.

⁶⁹ The exhibition of the same name was guest curated by Eric Mattson and took place at Action Art Actuel, an artist-run center in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec, Canada, September 16–October 30, 2010.

myriad alveoli, teeming transistors, lung capacitors, contorted ribs. He drives the diaphragm faders on the hanging mixers. His patient is splayed out. He programs the nervous tension, the arterial pulse, the venous flow. He ventilates the whole as a 21st century puppeteer. Gauthier acts as surgeon, sculptor, dissector, constructor, conductor, programmer, choreographer.⁷⁰ He is also a performer, or as Lyotard described Duchamp, a transformer: “The *performer* is a complex *transformer*, a battery of metamorphosis machines. There is no art, because there are no objects. There are only transformations, redistributions of energy.”⁷¹ *Thorax* as transformer device is certainly an apt description for a work that shuns stasis, that favors flow over finality, that mesmerizes through the kinetic.

Movement here not only occupies the realm of the perceptible but also informs the question of knowledge culled through art alluded to in the introductory paragraph. Kleist stages a dialogue in his famous short essay “On the Marionette Theater” that presents the dancer as weakened, atrophied, incapacitated by knowledge, self-awareness, consciousness. The dancer is not only prone to falls but embodies the Fall. The automatism of the marionette, in contrast, functions with a certain autonomy from the puppeteer pulling the strings (though remains ultimately controlled by the laws of gravity). What is proposed as ideal is to bypass the constraints of knowledge to a state where “grace returns after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears to best advantage in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all – or has infinite consciousness – that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God.”⁷² The two seemingly diametrically opposed options, non-knowing or all-knowing, play through movement, they coil around each other. In *Thorax* both modes are entangled

⁷⁰ Michel F. Côté, “Sharp Hearing, Raw Sounds” in *Jean-Pierre Gauthier*, Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 2007, 23–30. In this essay Côté begins to explore the notion of Gauthier’s affinities with certain choreographic sensibilities and strategies.

⁷¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod, Venice, CA: The Lapis Press, 1990, 36. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, Éditions Paris: Galilée, 1977, 39. Original: *Le performer est un transformer complexe, une batterie de machines à métamorphoser. Il n’y a pas d’art, puisqu’il n’y a pas d’objets. Il n’y a que des transformations, des redistributions d’énergie.*

⁷² Heinrich von Kleist, “On the Marionette Theater” [*Über das Marionetten Theater*, 1810], trans. Thomas G. Neumiller, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 16, No. 3, The “Puppet” Issue, September 1972, 26.

in the equivocal fact of a machine that replicates, albeit surreally, the essential tenet of being animate: *pneuma*.

Oskar Schlemmer identified two of the emblems of our time as *abstraction* and *mechanization*.⁷³ To these he adds our capacity to invent for ourselves new scenarios through the inventive use of technology. What he applied to dance and theater is clearly relevant here. In fact, *Thorax* may be the Tänzer Mensch's new breathing contraption for it "obeys the law of the body as well as the law of space."⁷⁴ Well, in so far as obey and law can be invoked in this instance, for in fact it is an unabashedly chaotic system that works the space (akin to Whitman's *ungovernable* in the epigraph). Its eurythmics evoke the morphed Samsa rather than the drab salesman that he is no longer.⁷⁵ The better term would be *follow*, for both mechanically and metaphorically *Thorax* moves according to triggers and references respectively. And, to continue with Gregor Samsa, let us not forget the monstrosity of hybridity (animate meshed with inanimate), so add clusters of feedback and short-circuits to the equation.

Lest one assume from the above that a loud ear splitting output emanates from the piece, on the contrary the sonic weave of *Thorax* is all delicate and intricate. The noise has the ominous tone one would associate with a breathing poly-tentacled machine, yet the heaving is subtle and restful. The tempered tenor permits details to proliferate in the visitor's senses; there are various different systems at work, their functioning is not always readily apparent, but one thing is certain: the machine is alive! It acts and reacts, but does not record. It sets the conditions of possibility for the singing of the body electric, but has no memory of the song, it is only of the inexorable present. Qualify the above, it has a meta-memory. It is programmed, even the aleatoric variables operate within parameters. However, the pre-determined range is a recording of the structure, not of the content. The thing is alive, but tethered to a genomic sequence—a code, a score. Composed and choreographed,

⁷³ Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure" in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, trans. Arthur S. Wensinger, eds. Walter Gropius & Walter S. Wensinger, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 17.

⁷⁴ Schlemmer, 25.

⁷⁵ Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, New York: Schocken, 1971, *passim*.



fig. 39

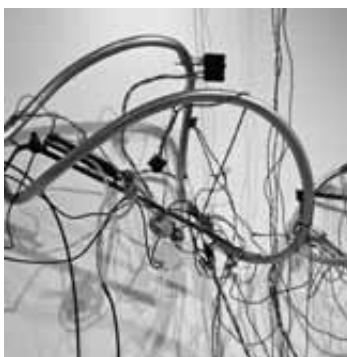


fig. 40

fig. 39–40 Jean-Pierre Gauthier, *Thorax*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

the score, once activated, generates a chimerical existence. *Thorax* exhibits partial liveness. Alone, unplugged, it shrivels.

You walk out. The door reframes the air behind you. Has the moment passed? Or is it what lingers that matters? You have no answer, but your chest now feels alien. You walk out with an added load. You're on your own but that's already quite a crowd. The petri dish with cultures of micro-electro-organisms has inserted itself into the engine that guarantees your survival. Art, life, and death. How do I get the temerity to pretend that the stakes in a mere exhibition are that high? Take a breath, exhibit the results, and see.

2.2 SPACE IS THE PLACE IS THE TIME IS THE SONG

I don't know the song of this place. It doesn't quite know its own tune. It starts with a deep full note on the mighty cedars, primeval, immense, full, grand, noble from roots to tips, and ends up in a pitiful little squeak of nut bushes. Under the cedars you sense the Indian and brave, fine spiritual things. Among the nut bushes are picknickers with shrieking children bashing and destroying, and flappers in pyjama suits. And there are wood wagons and gravel wagons blatantly snorting in and out cutting up the rude natural roads, smelling and snorting like evil monsters among the cedars.⁷⁶

This excerpt from the 1933 camping journal of quintessential West-Coast Canadian painter Emily Carr introduces us to a work by Canadian sound artist Steve Heimbecker entitled *Songs of Place*. It is an ongoing project in which the portrait of a locale (usually a city) is realized by carrying out recordings from several different points; some shots are static, others follow the ambulation of the artist through a district or main thoroughfare. The audiovisual recordings are then combined so that the resulting portrait is always simultaneously multi-perspectival. The elements in play here are rhythm and space, and at the tempo and scale of the *flâneur*. Vito Acconci situates rhythm and space as activating

⁷⁶ Emily Carr in Barry Truax, "Foreword" in Steve Heimbecker, *Songs of Place*, Montréal: Oboro, 2005, 13.

an engulfment: “music has no place, so it doesn’t have to keep its place, it fills the air and doesn’t take up space. Its mode of existence is to be in the middle of things; you can do other things while you’re in the middle of it. You’re not in front of it, and you don’t go around it, or through it; the music goes through you, and stays inside you. It’s a song you can’t get out of your head.”⁷⁷ We are undoubtedly all familiar with the phenomenon of tune that gets stuck in our minds; yet we cannot hum to Heimbecker’s songs, they are of a different sort. But they themselves in fact hum, in so far as the term can also refer to a drone. The second key difference is that Heimbecker’s songs are not inside your head but all around it. They provide an exterior soundtrack, they place you in a plural tense. Here we have songs that are not really songs – they are anomalous, they function differently and serve a different purpose: “Unlike the other drums in its drum section, this little drum does not ‘speak’. Nor does it play the metronomic role so often assigned to small drums.[...] Everything suggests that its role is to maintain a certain vibration in the air, and thus ensure the continuity of the action. In short, to establish a different order of duration. Or, if one prefers, to bring about a sort of crystallization of time.”⁷⁸ What surfaces from Rouget’s description of the role of that particular drum in a ceremony to Ogun Eyedi (god of iron) from the Nago-Yoruba territory, is the idea of time as form. Which is to say, as a spatial notion, albeit in vibrational (unstable) form. *Songs of Place* performs precisely this transposition.

A place is sung in Heimbecker’s piece through a form of ghosting or haunting. Sun Ra told his players that they were not musicians but “tone scientists”,⁷⁹ by extension Heimbecker could be dubbed an *overtone* scientist. He entwines the volume envelope or amplitude signature of one recording with another recording – technical term for this process: Dynamic Voltage Mapping (DVM). While this method of pairing does not result in overtones per say, it does disturb the supposed purity of the original and its hold to a specific time and place. In the following, Jonathan Crary depicts Walter Benjamin’s take on

⁷⁷ Vito Acconci, *Public Space in Private Time*, Vienna: Galerie Hubert Winter, 1992, 19.

⁷⁸ Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, trans. Brunhilde Biebuyck, University of Chicago Press, 1985, 122.

⁷⁹ Sun Ra in John F. Szwed, *Space is the Place: the lives and times of Sun Ra*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1997, 112.

perception in the context of modernity, this articulation could also serve to describe the kind of schizophonics Heimbecker engages in: “There is never a pure access to a single object; vision is always multiple, adjacent to and overlapping with other objects, desires and vectors.”⁸⁰ What Crary maintains for vision applies just as readily to audition. Crary’s apt articulation finds numerous echoes in Benjamin’s writings; places where he describes spatiotemporal superpositions as that paradoxical state of being which is at a standstill and simultaneously “telescoping the past through the present.”⁸¹ What ensues from such a moment in Heimbecker is indeed “a peculiar web of space and time”⁸² but it is not the aura, or the dialectical image that Benjamin conjures. In *Songs of Place* we hear a flâneur who is both idle and wanders, who observes by osmosis, who, instead of Benjamin, might in fact be more likely to encounter Satie as both ambulate towards nothing in particular. *Songs in Place*. Satie who preferred to be called a phonometrographer rather than a musician knew his *places*: “Before I compose a piece, I walk around it several times, accompanied by myself.”⁸³ This infers that the piece exists before it is composed, or at least that the territory has already been demarcated. By way of this temporal telescoping, a key notion of framing is articulated, one that finds its quintessential iteration in Cage’s 4’33”.⁸⁴ The notion is that a frame is neither an ornament nor a convention but a performance (to perform as per its etymology, *to give form*) and here *to frame* and *to name* shapes the context that enables the work to appear out of quotidian settings and actions.

Beckett in speaking of Proust, depicts time as a fluid that is “sluggish, pale and monochrome.”⁸⁵ This ambient state of glutinous consistency, which is

⁸⁰ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, 20.

⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 1999, 471 [N7a,3].

⁸² Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”, trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, Vol. 13 No.1, Spring 1972, 20.

⁸³ Erik Satie in Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 142.

⁸⁴ Satie’s influence on Cage is extensively documented (namely in Cage’s *Silence*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, *passim*). 4’33” calls for a pianist (or any instrumentalist) to not play their instruments for the duration stated in the title of the piece. By emptying the space within its time markers, Cage highlights the frame and the act of framing.

⁸⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, London: John Calder, 1999, 15.

largely depopulated in *Songs of Place*, provides the condition of possibility for moments and elements to emerge and surge to the fore out of this bed of coalesced spacetime. These are moments where there is a shuffle, however slight, a waver, a subtle shifting of weight from one leg to the other, a slippage to another location, another entry/exit point. These shifts occur from the perspective of the listener, it is the listener who determines when these protrusions will occur, and these triggers will differ with every set of ears. I hear the footsteps down Boulevard St. Laurent in Montreal; I hear the beggar exclaiming in Halifax, *Say hi to the rest of the world for me!*, I am also reminded of the voices appearing towards the end of Heimbecker's 1995 octaphonic composition *Spin Cycle*.⁸⁶ These three instances transform the anonymity of the recordings into a physiognomy.⁸⁷ My predilection is for these moments of sonic intimacy, which for the occasion I would dub, moments where sound is sung, in other words *Songs of Sound*. These are made possible by that sluggish fluid bed of sound that permeates the space of listening. The bed of sound might seem constant on the surface but it fluctuates thanks in large part to its composite nature. The multiple locations comprising this composite (*composition*) enable an enactment of space as the listener can conjure the movement and interactive relationship between the various points. As with the films of Michael Snow the viewing is rendered in movement, perception is forced to shift, to move, to *compose*. Snow speaks of the effect of *La Région Centrale* on the viewer as one that "can really move you around. If you become completely involved in the reality of these circular movements it's you who is spinning surrounded by everything, or, conversely, you are a stationary center and it's all revolving around you."⁸⁸ By this sort of process, Snow, who incidentally describes *Wave-length* as being "like a song, like singing",⁸⁹ is able to repopulate the image, to

⁸⁶ Steve Heimbecker, "Spin Cycle" in *Steve Heimbecker Anthology* (2 CD), Québec: Avatar/Ohm Éditions, 1999.

⁸⁷ A paraphrase of Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography", trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, Vol. 13 No.1, Spring 1972, 21. Original: [...] photography cannot do without people. And whoever did not know this will have been taught by the best Russian films that even milieu and landscape will only reveal themselves to a photographer who is able to transform their anonymity into a physiognomy.

⁸⁸ Michael Snow, "Converging on *La Région Centrale*: Michael Snow in Conversation with Charlotte Townsend" in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1994, 57–8.

inscribe it with a physiognomy. *Songs of Place* moves in a similar fashion, by layering each *somewhere* into an *elsewhere*, perhaps even an *everywhere*. Our ears hear in motion.

2.3 FRICTIONS: SOUND OBJECTS AND SURFACES

As stated at the very beginning of this chapter, sound art's pervasive presence in gallery and museums spaces in recent years is a welcome development but is vexed by the fact that these spaces generally provide unfavorable listening conditions. While this begs the question whether a piece needs to emit sound to be sound art (which Raymond Gervais addresses, below), the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec has the distinct advantage of having inherited a space that provides a unique and ideal context for listening. A wing of the museum is in fact a well-preserved, late nineteenth-century cell block, consisting of six cells of 1.80m by 3.6m side by side. This claustral setting, imbued with the remnants and reminders of incarceration, is the epitome of a non-neutral space. And was the perfect location for the *Frictions: Sound Objects and Surfaces* exhibit curated by Nicole Gingras in the Fall of 2004. Given a space with such a sinister past, the manipulations and gestures presented by *Frictions* amplified the site and were themselves amplified by it.⁹⁰

What is the sound of a cell, or rather what sounds are permitted in a cell? Chantal Thomas in the essay *Les Prisons* theorizes that “[t]he prison teaches us of a certain relation to the world: a relation based on the depletion of events and the restrictions on communication. Upon a base of silence and immobility, the most insignificant thing (the muted sound of a step, the imperceptible pressure of a hand) stands out with a unique intensity.”⁹² The collective soundscape

⁸⁹ Snow, 58.

⁹⁰ Curated by Nicole Gingras, the exhibition included a cell each for Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Raymond Gervais, Erika Lincoln, Daniel Olson, Rober Racine, and Jocelyn Robert; as well as an installation by Diana Burgoyne at the entrance of the cell block, and performances by Martin Tétreault and skoltz_kolgen. A catalogue/cd was published under its French title: *Frottements : objets et surfaces sonores*, Québec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2004

⁹¹ This is a stock photograph of the cell block, with no exhibition in place.



fig. 41

fig. 41 uncredited, [Les cachots du pavillon Charles-Baillairgé du Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec], undated. © MNBAQ. Photo: Les Photographes Kedl Ltée.⁹¹

emanating from the cell block of *Frictions* is docile, nothing escapes, the ears are not assaulted – the force of the work is in its meekness and muteness. An uncanny equation thus emerges between the barely perceptible of the conceptual and the insidiousness of the carceral. The degree of affect in the reciprocal amplification between site and exhibition subscribes to Thomas' following formulation: "[The] stridence of the feeblest of sounds is evidently in proportion to the weight of the silence imposed – and of the restrained screams contained therein."⁹³ *Frictions*, indeed.

Rober Racine restages *Sound Signatures* (1994), a piece first produced during the Radio Rethink residency at the Banff Center and which has had many lives since.⁹⁴ Listening to it now on a pair of headphones facing the bare brick walls of a cell, the scribbles and scrapes of people signing their names in the recording transform into aural inscriptions onto the walls. They mark the furtive plural presence of past prisoners, and the interiorized listening engendered by the headphones shifts the sensation of that past state of captivity all too comfortably onto the listener. In the cell occupied by Jean-Pierre Gauthier's *Le son de choses – Sémaphores* (2003–2004), the walls are literally rubbed, prodded, grated and scraped in a performance by six one-armed automats, all animated permutations of bachelor machines rendered in his signature hardware-store aesthetic. Gauthier's installations should be considered equally as compositions or even choreographies, for he has finely tuned the temporal sequencing of sounds and movements. Here every object is always in relation to another, every object has a role in a sequence of events – resonators, levers and springs activate the subtle sounding of the walls. This gallery cell is not merely under panoptic surveillance, with Gauthier's contraptions it is undergoing panaural and panhaptic scrutiny. One could, however, easily

⁹² Chantal Thomas, "Les Prisons" in Robert Bresson, Paris: Camera/Stylo, 1989, 13. Translation mine. Original: *[la prison] enseigne un certain rapport au monde : un rapport fondé sur la rarefaction des événements et l'interdit de la communication. Sur le fond de silence et d'immobilité, la moindre chose (le son feutré d'un pas, la pression imperceptible d'une main) se détache avec une intensité unique.*

⁹³ Thomas, 13. Translation mine. Original: *Cette stridence de plus faible son est évidemment proportionnée au poids de silence imposé – à ce qu'il contient de cris retenus.*

⁹⁴ Rober Racine, "Sound Signatures" in *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound & Transmission*, eds. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander, Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994, 140–148. The book is accompanied by a CD which includes the piece.

substitute the foreboding bricoleur warden narrative for one where the installation functions as an escape orchestra – such is the semaphoric fluidity of Gauthier's aleatory mechanical dancers.

Erika Lincoln's cell, like the remaining ones by Gervais, Olson and Robert, is more reductive, subtle, barely there. In *Shuffle* (2003), Lincoln has placed a pair of grey woolen socks in the middle of the floor. The socks contain small speakers playing a recording of the static electricity caused by the friction of these socks in contact with the floor. The passivity of the socks as displayed is the cover for a critique operating in the sound realm which asserts that static is not equatable with stasis, rather it is a field of potentialities, operative even in the quotidian of banal socks, and begging to be simply shuffled in order to crackle the atmosphere's ions.

With Lincoln's piece, the corporeality of the absent prisoner is the most present. In Raymond Gervais' *Dans le cylindre* (1994), this phantasm is thrust into another atmospheric phenomenon, this time one which points to an outside. The picture of a cyclone is perfectly placed above the conical speaker of an antique phonograph to produce a double image of a listening which has the capacity to whisk you away. This mute homage to recording's ability to pluralize the here and now is the loudest piece in the exhibition, it absorbs the subdued maelstrom emanating from each cell and cranks it up inside your head. That is the only site where sound art is heard in afterthought; rather than sound, it resounds.

Escape, or at least the outside, seems to be the desired evocation in *L'Eau de l'air* (2004). Here Jocelyn Robert presents a cell devoid of any visible object or projections. The barely perceptible glow of a hidden computer monitor hidden on top of the door entrance provides an uncanny accompaniment to the sounds of wind, waves and a Gregorian chant performed by a women's choir. The sound piece is fragile, bare, effaced; the piece invites visitors to leave it. It fosters a passing through, not an immersion. Reminiscent of Robert's *Folie/Culture* CD, in which he advised listeners to open windows while it played, here the

95 This is not a document of the work in situ, unfortunately the low-light quality of the image documenting the piece in the cell made it too difficult to see the components of the work.



fig. 42

fig. 42 Raymond Gervais, *Dans le cylindre*, 1994. Courtesy of the artist.⁹⁵

cell is ripened for dissolution; the piece instills a transient porousness.⁹⁶ With Olson's *Soundtrack* (1996–2001) the ephemeral is superceded by the repetitive. Normally, the sound of a needle stuck on the end groove of a record is tinged with the nostalgia now associated with the phonograph. In this setting, the sounding of the end in the last cell of the cellblock endlessly restating its finality, forever pacing the confining groove, is not reminiscent of a bygone era nor does it lull, rather it counts, and it inscribes the minutes upon minutes, the day after day, the weeks into months, into years. One does not need to stay that long to wish one could pick up the needle and put a stop to the sentence.

Walking up to the exhibition's entrance, I saw two gallery attendants frantically trying to find the correct pencil lines that needed erasing in order to quieten the exquisitely playful *Sound Drawings* (2000–2004) by Diana Burgoyne. The functioning principle of the drawings is based on the electrical conductivity of graphite between copper contact points at either end of the drawings. So given that the copper serves as contact point which activates an oscillator emitting tones of varying frequencies depending on the number of lines drawn, any willing visitor can make the drawing speak, can play it. Here, to draw is to connect, to activate, to sound. The participatory nature of the piece undergoes an unexpected turn as the attendants succeed in shutting it up, returning the space to one of viewing instead of listening.

The anecdote of the shushing guards resonates with Blanchot's stark phrase from *The Writing of the Disaster*: "If it weren't for prisons, we would know that we are all already in prison."⁹⁷ It emboldens visitors to consider the possible continuity between museum and prison and serves as an appropriate coda for an exhibition which staged silence and sound as partners in a frictional dance where escape proves to be a claustrophilic enterprise.

⁹⁶ Jocelyn Robert, *Folie/Culture* (CD), London: Recommended Records, 1991.

⁹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 66.

2.4 RICOCHETS OR HOW THE BULLET SKIPS TO THE TUNE OF THE PHONOGRAPH

What follows a gunshot, however momentary, is a silence. The gunshot traverses the real, it pierces through time. The silence, which follows the amplitude peak of the shot, is the trough where life reacquaints itself with death. It is the moment, however fleeting, between the gun and the gunned. It is that travel time which is unerasable. You may put the needle on the gunshot and play the record backwards, scratch the surface of the shot back and forth, but you can never undo the hole. The bullet propels itself out the barrel, finds its target and holes it: *It's Not the Bullet that Kills You (It's the Hole)*.⁹⁸ A bullet always holes more than a wound, it holes a sound, a psyche, a time. You cannot reverse its thorough *thriness*. What ensues from the shock of the gunshot and the accompanying silence? How does it affect the epistemology of the self, and of the real? The ricochets which I will track here are not always off the same shot, they are often splintered and traceable only in truncated trajectories. Some single shots resulting in multiple perforations, others missing the target altogether, a few blanks.

Put the needle on the record. First Contact. Load it up. Crank the phonograph. Cock the gun. Aim the Horn. Turn up the volume. Hear the pig squeal. An easy shot. Pointblank. The pig is sacrificed by the Leahy brothers, Australian explorers in search of gold, as a show of force. In the documentary film *First Contact* by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson the drama is doubly staged, in 1930 to enforce, in 1982 to illustrate, reflect, criticize, to distance us from *them*.⁹⁹ The lesson of the shot documented in *First Contact* was to affirm who is the Master, for “only the masters can speak.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, as Fanon states: “The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers. He

⁹⁸ Title of a 1975 performance by Laurie Anderson, *Stories from the Nerve Bible, 1972–1992 Retrospective*, New York: HarperCollins, 1994, 260.

⁹⁹ Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, *First Contact* (DVD), New York: Filmmakers Library, 1983.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Zone, 1987, 151. Fuller quote: *To speak is above all to possess the power to speak. Or again, the exercise of power ensures the domination of speech: only the masters can speak. As for the subjects: they are bound to the silence of respect, reverence, or terror.*



fig. 43

fig. 43 uncredited, [*Please Pardon Our Noise... It Is A Sound Of Freedom*], undated.

is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native *out loud* that there he alone is the master.”¹⁰¹ One of the surviving Leahy brothers testifies that the message was: “You leave our stuff alone, and we’ll leave your stuff alone. We’re just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along, that’s all we came to look *for*.”¹⁰² But evidently not all they came to look *at*. What of the look of the camera? Is it simply a memento, or does it play a mimetic role? It shoots 24 frames a second; at that rate it is difficult to keep up with the ricochets. Is truth here occurring at 24 frames a second, as Godard said? Whether it be frames or revolutions, 78 revolutions per minute, or 45 revolutions, or 33, if you are the target it becomes a relentless game of duck, hide, cover, and seek. The shot, from the gun, from the camera, penetrates, then exits, or splinters and one becomes a body-sieve. It is no longer a question of orifices, it is a question of drainage.

The sound of the phonograph in the context of the colonial encounter seems to function differently than the camera, it is used as a palliative, and as gift. Yet it disrupts the soundscape with the same force as the shot, it is a weapon, it is a sound effect, it cans life into a mimetic cycle, an effect with the power to become an affect. In a key scene, Herzog’s character Fitzcarraldo, performed by Klaus Kinski, winds up a recording of Caruso to quiet the incessant drum sounds from the *invisibles*.¹⁰³ Here we cannot help but remember the loud and consistent use of sound by the US Army versus Noriega in 1989, and the Canadian Army versus the Mohawks at the Kanessatake blockade in 1990, or the low level flights by NATO planes over Nitassinan (in Labrador).¹⁰⁴ As opposed to those armies, Fitzcarraldo had a higher purpose, he fervently believed that the beauty of the voice would be transcendent – Caruso on the front lines, a blitzkrieg of Gesamtkunstwerk, opera as universal language: “Please Pardon Our Noise. It is the Sound of Freedom.”¹⁰⁵ In this attempt to proselytize, Caruso’s disembodied voice of the phonograph eventually subsides

101 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press, 1966, 43. Emphasis added.

102 Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, *First Contact* (VHS).

103 Werner Herzog, *Fitzcarraldo* (DVD), Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1983.

104 For the latter see Kim Sawchuk, “Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan” in *Public*, No. 4/5: Sound, 1990, 103–119.

the insistence of the drums; were they swayed by Caruso's glottis? What follows is an uneasy silence: *There are silences and silences, this is the kind I don't like*, here Fitzcarraldo's trusted captain expresses his preference for a threat he knows and understands (the drums) rather than one he does not (silence). He also distinguishes between kinds of silences, one is an ominous threat, the other is merely quiet. The film *Fitzcarraldo* stages the colonial encounter as an aesthetic and sensorial confrontation, with Fitzcarraldo as the invader's cultural attaché deploying Caruso's arias as his weapons. The soundtrack of the conqueror is out to conquer the soundscape of the other. One supersedes the other, sound over sound, and the noise that results is in effect a silence without agency, a *silencing*. To be silenced, as in the sound fear makes when one is stuck at the end of the barrel. The suspension of time after the shot creates an interval where we hear, as Césaire depicts, "the monstrous atrophy of the voice, [...] the incredible mutism, [...] a death more frightful than death."¹⁰⁶

First contact, first gunshots, afterwards the soundscape of the collective body falls silent at first, then it is no longer in sync, it stutters. The shot has perforated the soundtrack, scribbled it full of holes:

SILENCES are holes in the sound wall/SOUNDS are bubbles on the surface of silence. Sound like silence is both opening and filling/concave and convex/life and death. Sound like silence may freeze or free the image. In many civilizations, definitions of music and silence are interchangeable. Music is life. But entering into LIFE is also entering into the DEATH process.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Text on a billboard near a U.S. Air Force Base. Uncredited photo in *Sound by Artists*, eds. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, Toronto: Art Metropole, 1990, 227. The photograph accompanies the essay "Listening and Soundmaking" by Hildegard Westerkamp.

¹⁰⁶ Aimé Césaire, "Presentation" in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, London: Verso, 1996, 88. Césaire's context was different but similar in spirit, he opens this one page text originally published in 1941 with: *A silent and sterile land. I am speaking about ours. And my hearing measures by the Caribbean Sea the terrifying silence of man.*

¹⁰⁷ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Holes in the Sound Wall" in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 203.

In the film *First Contact*, the sound of the shot is not real, in the sense that it has been added and synced after the fact. Up to that point the early footage was silenced, distanced – by the narration and by the documentary form. It was staged in 1930, inaudibly in terms of documentation, and restaged, montaged in 1982. Given Trinh T. Minh-Ha's eschatological bent, she extends the interrelation between sound and silence and the notion of holes in the soundtrack to bring to prominence the eros and thanatos of the sound/silence divide and confluence. The spacing of the holes creates a rhythmic, a timeline, which signifies both movement (life) and stoppage (death). After all, what is a bubble, but an empty sphere ... ready to burst.

In cases where heat is the temperature of the encounter, the Westerner from temperate climes can easily be heat stricken. Werner Herzog's delirium is exemplary: "I don't see [the jungle] so much as erotic, but just as full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base, there's nothing erotic here, just fornication and asphyxiation, choking, fighting for survival, growing, and just rotting away."¹⁰⁸ Herzog, in his best Bataille persona, is the contaminator contaminated. He is suffering from the "heat of the senses" Michael Taussig speaks of, in "those torrid zones where the mimetic flourishes."¹⁰⁹ Under the hot lights of the tropics one's pores widen, they ooze and sweat. "The body as a system of little holes in perpetual danger of becoming enlarged."¹¹⁰ The heat renders the body open, open to the contagion of the mimetic. Gilles Deleuze's body-sieve is fully contagious: "Freud had remarked that the schizophrenic was prone to view the skin as one pierced by an infinity of little holes. Therefore, there's no surface, the interior and exterior, the container and the contained cannot be delineated and sink themselves into a universal depth or revolve in the circle of a present that's ever-shrinking as it fills up. In this fracture, the word's wholeness loses its meaning. All events occur as hallucinations."¹¹¹ The meaninglessness of the real is on

¹⁰⁸ Werner Herzog in *Les Blank, Burden of Dreams* (DVD), El Cerrito, CA: Flower Films, 1982. This is a documentary film on the making of Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo*.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 220. This phrase reappears at the conclusion of this chapter (p. 222).

¹¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 342n5.

¹¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969, 106–7. My translation, another version can be found in *The Logic of Sense*, 1990, 87.,

a collision course with the realness of the shot and of the encounter. But it is not a contradictory collision, for the hallucinatory performance is an event that is rendered ever more real by its power to be ever more lacking in meaning:

And looking up, we see the hostility and boredom in the eyes of those we thought were there to be looked at, not to look back. It is at this point that we hear behind the camouflage of words and music the silence of the Freaks.¹¹²

Once we hear this silence it is deafening.

The shot has been heard, the silence which follows it as well. How does one react after the initial shock? What is the range of possible reactions? The shot, as we have seen, has the singular property of being simultaneously simulative (counterfeit) and deadly (somatic). The corresponding aftershocks are similarly palindromic, linearity being endlessly reversible once inscribed. Is this inscription an original moment? A reference point? The *sui generis* of the rupture? The rupture, however, is not a nonsequitur, it is but the overdue rupture of an existing fault. The shot causes a shock that is protracted, extended, stretched infinite. In presenting the shot as one engendering a series of ricochets, one must be prepared for the ricochet that returns, the boomerang. Benjamin's exegesis of Baudelaire turns the gun to face its owner, it mirrors the shot:

The resistance which modernism offers to the natural productive élan of a person is out of proportion to his strength. It is understandable if a person grows tired and takes refuge in death. Modernism must be under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical towards this will. This suicide is not a resignation but a heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernism in the realm of passions.¹¹³

¹¹² Leslie Fielder, "The Silence of the Freaks and the Message of the Side Show" in *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, New York: Doubleday, 1978, 283.

¹¹³ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1983, 75. It is difficult to discern from the text if Benjamin here is paraphrasing Baudelaire, or quoting him, or speaking for himself.

His extolment of suicide can be read as profound pessimism in the face of modernity: “the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock.”¹¹⁴ An exemplary case of this lowercase type of messianism can be found in Michel Leiris’ anamnestic writing, what Jeffrey Mehlman terms his “poetics of lack.”¹¹⁵ In *Fibrilles*, Leiris retells a scene where he is the target of the shot, and the shooter all in one. He depicts himself as an ambulating, convalescent, shell shocked, traumatized body. He wears the remainder of his suicide attempt, a scar from a tracheotomy, as a mnemonic agent: “The suture resumes all that is dear in my heart. This scar has remained for me the object, not of a retrospective horror, but of a disproportionate pride in a failed act. It also seems to me that it was at this precise moment [the suicide attempt] in which I embraced most ardently this fascinating thing, which one must continue to pursue for it is never fully grasped: poetry.”¹¹⁶ Passion, poetry, aura navigate in this fault which, in Leiris’ case, is localized in this intervention on the breathing tract, in close vicinity to his voice box. From a muted voice, to a whisper, to a gunshot. This anatomical fault is a transplant of a geographical lack and a transposition of a social failure. These metonymies are inscribed as patterns on a record, they can be played back and forth, the needle picking up the scratches and scars, amplifying the shot until it can be heard as the echo of every word.

This hallucinated real is the elusive signifier I have been tracking. It is a deconstructive reconstruction of ricochets which have the particular property of being self-propelled, they accelerate and chart their own course. British installation artist Cornelia Parker proposes a similar study in her 1991 work *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*. In this work which she describes as “the

114 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1968, 194.

115 Jeffrey Mehlman, “Reading (with) Leiris” in *A Structural Study of Autobiography: Proust, Leiris, Sartre*, Lévis-Strauss, Cornell University Press, 1971, 65.

116 Michel Leiris, *La Règle du Jeu III, Fibrilles*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966, 292. Translation mine. Original: [L]a fibule grâce à quoi tout ce que j’ai à cœur se résume, rassemblé par le moyen d’un signe dessiné sur ma chair même [...] Cette marque est demeurée pour moi l’objet, non d’une horreur retrospective, mais d’un orgueil disproportionné à un acte accompli seulement à demi [...] Et il me semble aussi que c’est à ce moment-là que j’ai embrassé le plus étroitement cette chose fascinante, et toujours à poursuivre parce que jamais tout à fait saisie : la poésie.

quiet contemplation of a destructive act”,¹¹⁷ she first arranged for the British Army to blow up an ordinary backyard shed. It contained garden tools, a baby carriage, a bicycle, and suitcases filled with odds and ends. She subsequently used the debris to reconstitute the shed, in the same proportion as the pre-destruction shed but this time displaying the violence that was bestowed upon it. The shards and fragments hung fully contained by their arrangement but permanently exploded and exploding. The thorough *thrune*ss of the explosion arrests time at the same time that it irreversibly fast forwards it. Sound, here again, is unsounded, it disturbs the air only if your synapses (re)stage the event. Parker’s explosion rendered as contemplation could also be said to be a recording. It has frozen time in space, this brings to fore the fact that sound is not only part of the invasionary arsenal in its playback mode, it is also a means by which to capture, encode, inscribe. Recordings of rituals, languages, ceremonies, etc. are made for study, for history, for posterity. They are the recordings of an imminent erasure.

Michael Snow released a record in 1987 entitled *The Last LP: Unique Last Recordings of the Music of Ancient Cultures* (it was reissued as a CD in 1994 with the exact same title). Two recordings on this record document with uncanniness the role of sound in the encounter as both player and recorder. First, a large extract from the liner notes to track seven:

MBOWUNSA MPAHIYA (Battle Song of Bowunsa). Performed by male members of the KPAM KPAM tribe. The KPAM KPAM are a tribe inhabiting a jungle area in the south of Angola. [...] No westerners ever encountered the KPAM KPAM until the recording crew led by eminent German trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf arrived there after an extremely difficult journey on foot, in which several of their party perished. [...] The crew had not been well received and though they spend several days trying to allay any suspicion the tribes people had, it seems that during the performance submerged hostility appeared in a frightening way. Mangelsdorf writes: “[G]ODO the tribal chief and others came closer and closer to our recording equipment. He finally hurled himself on

¹¹⁷ Cornelia Parker in Jonathan Goodman, “Cornelia Parker”, *Parachute*, No. 92, 1998, 62.



fig. 44

fig. 44 Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991. Courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London.

it and us. There was a bit of a scuffle but no one was hurt, we set up the microphone again as fast as we could and were immediately relieved to see and hear the performance continue. [...] We and our hosts were astonished to hear in the distance the sound of a helicopter, which soon appeared. We, of course, recognized the sound but the KPAM KPAM tribespeople had never heard or seen such a thing. We were frightened, angered and in a way ashamed at this invasion which after all we were a part of. However, we were present at and recorded an historic occasion. The tribal warriors bravely tried to play on against the horrifying noise and appearance of this extraordinary monster, finally they broke ranks, yelled at each other, then made a futile attempt to play again as the helicopter disappeared into the distance. They then made the most remarkable imitations of the sound of the helicopter.”¹¹⁸

The above tale could easily have been historically and factually accurate. It is a narrative that rehearse stereotypes of both players in the encounter. Further amplifying the type of stories presented, the closing piece of the record, closes itself. Its abrupt halt is caused by an extraneous instrument which joins the ensemble for a finale timed to a detonator:

RAGA LALAT. This final cut was recorded March 13, 1986 and features the young musician **PALAK CHAWAL**. He was a unique traditionalist-radical who having studied (starting at the age of eight) with one of the greatest Shehnai players, his uncle **USTAD BISMILLAH KHAN**, and though having attained an early mastery of the difficult instrument [the harmonium] turned his back on it to use instead an inexpensive and almost toy-like Japanese electronic instrument, the **CASIO**. His argument was that the **CASIO** had qualities that made it function better with the harmonium. This of course created a sensation in the conservative Indian music world and **CHAWAL** became an overnight cause célèbre. [...] **CHAWAL**’s gifts and sincerity were evident. Accompanied by **PHAL KA HALAVA** on harmonium and on tabla and playing in the

¹¹⁸ Michael Snow, *The Last LP: Unique Last Recordings of the Music of Ancient Cultures* (LP/CD), Toronto: Art Metropole, 1987 (LP), 1994 (CD).

courtyard of the Hilton Hotel in Benares, India he played his final piece, the moving morning RAGA ALAT. [...] Unfortunately we only have the ALAP (or invocation) statement of the theme of RAGA ALAT as 2 minutes and 45 seconds into this meditative piece an explosion blasted the wall at the northern end of the courtyard, just behind the ensemble. CHAWAL and his fellow musicians were killed, as were seven other people in the hotel lobby behind the wall where a bomb had been hidden. At this writing the murderers involved had not been apprehended.¹¹⁹

In these examples, the encounter is captured in its full drama. Furthermore, the capturing itself is the drama, it is a corollary to the presence of the microphone gun. Michael Snow released *The Last LP: Unique Last Recordings of the Music of Ancient Cultures* to document a double demise: the disappearance of ancient cultures and the supersession of analog vinyl records by digital compact discs. At the time of release (1987) the technological change noted by the second instance was in full deployment. The first instance is an anachronistic double entendre. Is the recording of an ancient culture an instance of the past being fast forwarded to the present? Or are Snow's recordings a fast forwarding to the past? Here Snow performs the internment of ethnography as a chronic patient – diagnosed with a case of corrupt chronologies, a condition which enforces ownership of the present and pacifies the other to a petrified, *recorded* past. “We do our field research on the premise of sharing time with our interlocutors on equal terms, we then go on to produce an allochronic discourse based on temporal distance; we construct an Other whom we relegate to times other than our own.”¹²⁰ This time *other than our own* is never a future, it is always behind us. It is a time categorized, itemized, alphabetized and shelved.

How does Snow performs the internment of ethnography I credit him for? If one were to bring the last page of *The Last LP's* liner notes to the mirror,

119 Michael Snow, *The Last LP: Unique Last Recordings of the Music of Ancient Cultures* (LP/CD).

120 Johannes Fabian, “Reflections on Ethnography” in *Power and performance: ethnographic explorations through proverbial wisdom and theater in Shaba, Zaire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, 4–5.

one could decipher the performance. On this page we have an alternate account of the scuffle and the helicopter incidents which we read earlier: “Track 7. MBOWUNSA MPAHIYA (Battle Song of Bowunsa) All voices by Michael Snow, slightly lowered by tape speed adjustments on Tascam Porta Studio. About 12 layers. 3 tuned ‘pipe’ drums, 2 sizes of tom tom, 1 gallon paint can lid, 1 plastic pail, maracas, bells. Helicopter from a ‘sound effect’ record 1986 – 7.” And on this same mirrored page, the description of the raga interrupted by the explosion which concludes the record also reveals an alternate version of the event: “Track 11 RAGA LALAT Duette Emenee Audion (toy electric organ), voice, Casio PT20 and plastic pail played by Snow. Explosion from a ‘sound effects’ record. 1987.” Snow’s deceit is revealed by the mirror, it is completed by the eye of the hearer, the punch line is synesthetic. Benjamin spoke of photography as the process which gave the moment its “posthumous shock”,¹²¹ here the reading completes the sonic moment. Snow, through this conceptual deceit of adding a self-referential layer (in short, by performing a hoax), has succeeded in recording the recording, its path and its impact. This is the epitome of a ricochet, a sound that unsounds and resounds, and hyperbolically: that disounds, parasounds, hyposounds and hypersounds, pre and postsounds.

2.5 THE ANNOUNCEMENT WHICH STOPS THE SHOT

In *Notes on the Theater Set*, Marguerite Duras writes: “The setting should be both that of loss of memory and that of vacillating memory, that is to say, a place with incidents of light, points of intense luminosity, holes of darkness, breaks. A place where things might happen that would not be announced.”¹²² The shock of the gunshot is prone to cause the break Duras expounds on. In Herzog’s film *Aguirre* the break is the moment when the arrow lands deep in the soldier’s thigh as he says, *this arrow cannot be real*; this is the moment when an arrow

¹²¹ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs In Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 175.

¹²² Marguerite Duras, “Notes on the Theater Set” in *Marguerite Duras by Marguerite Duras*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1987, 67.

¹²³ Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, The Wrath of God* (DVD), Beverly Hills, CA: Anchor Bay, 2000.

is not an arrow, when the arrows unannounce themselves.¹²³ The type of break which announces a breakdown is akin to a recording, it is dissociated from the real and from the self. The entry under the prefix *Schizo* by Allen S. Weiss describes with precision the peculiar presence the break performs:

The result of recording, as voice is separated from body, as the overtones of spoken words resonate between the vibratory pitch of the body and the echoes of the speech returned by the world, where the voice arrives from without, minus its usual corporeal thickness, so that it is restored as a hallucinatory presence.¹²⁴

Fraught with mirrored hallucinations, phantasmical jolts, the shock startles everytime; the shock of the exteriorized voice. The shock is active at the level of every pore, it might be outside but it hovers nearby, intimately acquainted with the tactics required to invade you. Case in point, Chris Burden was shot. The shot was not a hallucination, a misfire, or a blank. Nevertheless, *Shoot* (1971) can be read as a rehearsal of porosity (by way of an understated composure not dissimilar to Adrian Piper combined with a daredevil machismo inimitable to Burden).¹²⁵ The deconstitutive move this kind of body art constitutes (the paradoxical entwining of presence to absence), where pores are active in blurring boundaries rather than in delimiting them, does not function as a singular moment, it echoes, it is repercussive. In the essay “Gray Zone: Watching *Shoot*”, Frazer Ward correctly expands Burden’s narcissistic statement that “*all the audience cannot help but place themselves into my shoes*”¹²⁶ in order to identify other points of views, and other possible identifications (for instance those of the marksman, the audience there, and the audience experiencing the work through documentation). The route I would suggest would be one interested in expanding *Shoot* even further (towards the hallu-

¹²⁴ Allen S. Weiss, “Fourteen and a Half Words to Bespeak the Migone” in *Christof Migone – Sound Voice Perform*, ed. Brandon LaBelle, Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2005, 30.

¹²⁵ Photo-documentation on Burden’s *Shoot* in *Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 97; and discussed by Kathy O’Dell, *Contract With Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, esp. Chapter 1 for *Shoot*, passim for Burden.

¹²⁶ Chris Burden in Frazer Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching *Shoot*”, *October*, No. 95 Winter 2001, 9.

cinatory realm evoked earlier), would be to listen to *Shoot*, to engage in the hearsay of *Shoot*.

There are two audio moments in the contexts of this infamous performance that merit mention. In 1980 Burden presented *Show the Hole*, a performance where he took the audience one by one into a booth, showed the person his wound and added: "In 1971 I did a performance in which I was shot in the arm. The bullet went in here and came out here."¹²⁷ *Show the Hole* is thereby a recording of *Shoot* and through it Burden's wound becomes a representation of itself, turns into a splice or edit of what operates as the narrative of *Shoot*. The factual telling of the event becomes itself an event and the show of the shot body becomes an eruption in that text. The shock of the shot is heard in the show of *Show the Hole*. Secondly, in the self-produced video, *Documentation of Selected Works 1971–1974*, Burden presents an audio recording of the performance along with an eight second film clip of the shot which is the only existing moving footage of the piece. What is remarkable is how Burden chooses to present this material, here is his narrative (over a black screen displaying the title of the piece and the date and place):

In the audio tape some of the things to listen for are "Do you know where you are going to stand Bruce?" [Bruce is the shooter]. Then later right before the film clip happens, you'll hear me say, "Are you ready?" Then you will hear the clicking of the Super 8 camera. Later after the clip is over, another thing to listen for is the sound of the empty shell dropping on the concrete floor. Ok, so I think that we can go right into the audio tape.¹²⁸

What follows is a black screen save for the eight second film clip where the audio recording is synced up so that the shot is both heard and seen. In this introduction, Burden only deciphers for us what we cannot see, he skips altogether the part that we can see, the actual shot. He does not let the sounds speak for themselves, he eschews the hallucinatory potential in the imageless sound. Granted, he is trying to compensate for the poor quality

¹²⁷ Chris Burden in Frazer Ward, 13 fn.36.

¹²⁸ Chris Burden, *Documentation of Selected Works 1971–1974* (DVD), New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1975.



fig. 45



fig. 46



fig. 47

fig. 45 Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1970. © Chris Burden. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

fig. 46 Bill Viola, *Street Music* (part of *Truth Through Mass Individuation*), 1976. Videotape, color, mono sound; 10:59. Production Still. Photo: Kit Fitzgerald.

fig. 47 Joseph Beuys, *Stummes Grammophon*, 1958. © Estate of Joseph Beuys/SODRAC (2011).

of the recording, but my point is that *Shoot* is a neglected moment in sound art. Both the sound of the actual shot and the swirling narratives that surround it constitute a telling case study of sound functioning as a witness and as a frame markedly wider and grayer (to evoke Frazer Ward's title) than the one provided by image.

Another work that might interestingly amplify the shot in the art context is a lesser known work by Bill Viola (both in terms of his own work and in comparison to Burden's *Shoot*). *Street Music* was performed at 8 a.m. on Sunday, September 26, 1976, when Viola fired a rifle into the air several times on the corner of Cedar and Nassau streets in the Wall Street district of New York. He aimed at the sky (an eerie location, position and action in a post 9 – 11 context), and the shots were recorded on several stereo audiotape recorders with various miking configurations.¹²⁹ The record method ensures a spatializing of the shot, and enables the reverberations generated by the shots as they hit (sonically) the skyscrapers and deserted streets. *Street Music* is one part in the piece *Truth Through Mass Individuation* where “three abrupt and violent actions are seized and suspended in time by video disc memory.”¹³⁰ The unheard recordings are contained and heard in the stilled violence of the image. The lack serves as amplifier. We are left with a soundfull image.

To conclude our listening to recordings abundant with mortal firings and shoot outs: take the needle off the record. The volume drops, the soundtrack is muted. The arm of the needle in Joseph Beuys' *Stummes Grammophon* (mute gramophone) is a bone. The body of the mimetic is now dead. The pig's squeal is indistinguishable from the shot which muted it. They have cross faded into each other. Both are now indelible, permanent ricochets. They are like scratches on the record, they interfere and interrupt. The record then either skips in arrested time or jumps forwards or backwards. Time is holed. And the tune has killed you.

¹²⁹ Bill Viola, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, 49.

¹³⁰ The full artist statement is as follows: “*Truth Through Mass Individuation* refers to Carl Jung's writings on the individual and the mass. Three abrupt and violent actions are seized and suspended in time by video disc memory. Tension is regularly held then released as the figure is seen on the verge of frustrated aggression against the environment. In the fourth and final stage, he passively surrenders and is absorbed into the screaming mass of 40,000 people at a night baseball game.”

3. AS IT EMPTIES OUT

Before the time when things began to fall, before the fall. Before the time when we knew things could fall. Before the rise, before the flight, before the letting go. Before the sadness or the loss. Before the words, before the longing for the words. Before the mouth, before the lips, before the yearning thighs. Before the empty images, the grey. Before the flash, the harsh, before the waiting dark. Before the sharp departing and before the riddled flight. Before the birth, before the break, before the photograph. Before the thought of break, before our brutal, innocent conception, and before the night. Before the want, before the cry, before the awful knowing. Prior to the touch, before its loss. Before the quick undoing of the flesh. Before the need for solace and for words. Before the separating and before the time of grief. Before the death, before the birth, before the separation into two. Before the time of parting and before the time of wanting to go back. Before the break, before the cut, before the need to make a word for loss.¹³¹

These *befores*, the whole list of them, relentless. All befores, not matter how many, point that it is after; resolutely absolutely invariably, after. Always after, always too late, cannot go back. You cannot go back *to*, there is nothing there, not even the memory of you. Nothing, not even traces, remnants, ashes, leftovers, these are always with you now, either with you or they are not. Before has always already ended, relentlessly. Sometimes it is better to begin by the end. To revisit and remember in the case of Proust; to rewind and dismember in the case of my methodology here.

Rewind to 1922, the last year of Proust's life: "In September his health deteriorates [...] He refuses the advice of his doctor to get some rest and eat

¹³¹ Rebecca Brown, *The Haunted House*, London: Picador, 1986, 101.

well. November 7th, his bronchitis is followed by pneumonia. The 17th he feels better. The 18th, he becomes delirious, sees ‘a large black woman’; at 3 o’clock he speaks to his brother Robert, at 4:30 he dies.”¹³² With this very curious apparition on the 18th, day of his demise, had Proust, at the moment of delirium, reversed the flow of his, as Benjamin puts it, “Nile of language”?¹³³ Had he retraced the source of his Nile, via this final instance of *mémoire involontaire*, to a haunting echo of Rimbaud’s famed *I is an other*? Was Proust homesick for the home away from home,¹³⁴ home of the progenitive, matrilineal torrent of words? Was this feverish moment occurring in one of “those torrid zones where the mimetic flourishes”?¹³⁵ Was he at that moment at the end point of a decantatory process or at the start point of an incantatory one? The endlessness of both the geographical Nile and the Nile of Proust’s language are paradoxical. The river originates at a source and eventually sheds, it begins and ends, yet it does so endlessly, an endless descent.

The concomitance of finitude and infinitude is a fitting figure, for life is an oscillation, a rhythm, a stutter between birth and death. A momentary burst of sound, activity, noise. A rhythm on a landscape of before and after. A rhythm of before and after on a landscape. *I am dead* is the impossible utterance that exemplifies the simultaneity of before and after. *I am dead*, impossible in the present tense, as it negates the *presence* implicit in the act of uttering in the present. The question is, of course, whether this could be voiced, but also whether it could ever be heard. This is perhaps a question of tuning, some believe that “the other world to be a wavelength into which we pass when we

¹³² Jean-Yves Tadié, “Chronologie” in Marcel Proust, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1987, cxlii. Interestingly this apparition is included in Gallimard’s Pléiade edition but elided in Gallimard’s more affordable Folio edition. The very curious apparition Proust has and its curiously (selective) disappearance from the chronology is a thread which merits further study.

¹³³ Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust” in *Illuminations*, 201. Full quote: [...] the syntax of endless sentences (The Nile of language, which here overflows and fructifies the regions of truth).

¹³⁴ Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*. New York: Routledge, 1992, 149. *Anthropology was always a homesickening enterprise. [T]he anthropologist is likely to become homesick for that home away from home where being a stranger conferred certain powers.*

¹³⁵ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 220. An additional pertinent (and sinister) note: Michael Taussig’s acknowledgments in *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, xv–xix) provides the usual perfunctory list of thank-yous with the singular addition of (*now dead*) to all those since deceased, of the ninety-six names thanked, twelve were (*now dead*).

die.”¹³⁶ To communicate with the *living impaired*, as Edison dubbed the deceased, has long been the fascination of the *death challenged*, a particularly evocative staging of such desire is presented in a 1996 installation by Douglas Gordon.¹³⁷

In 1905 an experiment was performed in France where a doctor tried to communicate with a condemned man’s severed head immediately after the guillotine execution. “Immediately after the decapitation, the condemned man’s eyelids and lips contracted for 5 or 6 seconds ... I waited a few seconds and the contraction ceased, the face relaxed, the eyelids closed half-way over the eyeballs so that only the whites of the eyes were visible, exactly like dying or newly deceased people. At that moment I shouted “Languille” in a loud voice, and I saw that his eye opened slowly and without twitching, the movements were distinct and clear, the look was not dull and empty, the eyes which were fully alive were indisputably looking at me. After a few seconds, the eyelids closed again, slowly and steadily. I addressed him again. Once more, the eyelids were raised slowly, without contractions, and two undoubtedly alive eyes looked at me attentively with an expression even more piercing than the first time. The eyes shut once again. I made a third attempt. No reaction. The whole episode lasted between twenty-five and thirty seconds.”¹³⁸

The above text is the central component to Gordon’s installation whose title, *30 seconds text*, refers to the fact that on average it should take between twenty-five and thirty seconds to read the above text. As the text recounts, it also refers to the length the decapitated Languille remained conscious. Accordingly, the installation has a timer which, after this allotted time, turns off the single bare bulb lighting the space. The viewer is then plunged in the dark and is left with the chilling specter of Languille’s eyes and lips contracting, and of those eyes *fully alive* implicitly declaring *I am fully dead*.

¹³⁶ Carl Michael von Hausswolff, “1485.0 kHz” in *Cabinet*, No. 1, Winter 2000, 57. According to Hausswolff this belief was held by Sir Oliver Lodge, one of the leading contributors to radio technology and Sir William Crooks, inventor of the cathode ray tube.

¹³⁷ Thomas Edison in Carl Michael von Hausswolff, “1485.0 kHz”, 57.

¹³⁸ Douglas Gordon in Katrina M. Brown, *Douglas Gordon*, London: Tate, 2004, 60–63. The text uses notes on the experiment by Dr. Baurieux on the criminal Languille taken from the Archives d’Anthropologie Criminelle.

This inclusion occurs despite the fact that the sonic material, given the stutter, is satiated with gaps and stops. The resulting hesitations and silences contain volume regardless. They form part of the soundtrack. The fullness of the body rhythms the sound. As the composer Alvin Lucier has stated regarding his stutter: “sometimes I have to stop talking and let a word empty out.”¹⁴¹ Chances are that word will be an unsound: a *Merdre!*, *vibb-brrrrrrrrrrrrrrre*, or *Crritic!*

¹⁴¹ Alvin Lucier in *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language*, eds. Brandon LaBelle and Christof Migone, Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001, 199.

CODA

Rhythm is a time and rhythm is without a time. I have written this theory book based upon everything I'm speaking about; the only reason I haven't put it out is that I've been too busy performing it.¹

ORNETTE COLEMAN

¹ Ornette Coleman in Ben Watson, "Mixed Messages", *The Wire*, No. 205, March 2001, 37.

1. STATEMENT ON THE STATE OF SOUND ART

SPEECHWALLS, space inwards –
spooled in upon yourself,
you holler yourself through all the way to the lastwall.²

Paul Celan's speechwalls delimit a place which houses speech, and a condition of self-reflexivity, of self-hearing which should aid in confirming the constitution of a sentient self. However, the stability of this constitution is continually under question, after all, these walls of speech suppose an interiority which is in relation to an outside, one purportedly beyond speech. Might this outside be composed of noise, silence or the *inarticulate moan*? All three, I contend, the speechwalls behave like sieves rather than ramparts. Furthermore, as Novarina asserts, "[h]e knew that his head was opened by the word. The word is nothing else than the *sonic modulation* of an empty center, than the dance of a singing air tube."³ The word reveals an outside, one going as far as one outside of itself, outside of language. The various recurring parallel and intersecting dichotomies that have been probed throughout this book have followed similar scripts of a continual insiding out, one where a term paradoxically seeps into its opposite. This conclusion shall revisit these paradoxical intersections and attempt to distill from their exposition an account of the theoretical polemics facing contemporary sound art. A fitting and telling illustration to begin the task of recapitulation would be Marconi's "S", a historical transmission which, by its very letter, encapsulates sound and silence, as well as speech and stutter. The *dot dot dot* which stands for "S" in Morse code foregrounds repetition and rhythm,

² Paul Celan, *Threadsun*s, trans. Pierre Joris, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 2000, 227.

³ Valère Novarina, "Pour Louis de Funès" in *Le Théâtre des paroles*, Paris: P.O.L., 1989, 129. Here Novarina is describing Louis de Funès, a famed French comic actor reputed for his gesticulations and verbal gymnastics. Translation mine. Emphasis added. Original: *Il savait qu'il avait la tête ouverte par la parole. Que la parole n'est rien d'autre que la modulation sonore d'un centre vide, que la danse d'un tube d'air chanté.*

and more broadly, the protodigital binary code (dot/dash) metaphorically highlights the back and forth of these dichotomies through its rudimentary and reductive protocol. A poetic element permeates the oscillations of these pairs, in fact, we might dub them one of the basic components of poetic play. Similarly, we should take note of Marconi's own curiously poetic depiction of this first wireless transmission of 1901 across the Atlantic from Poldhu, England to Signal Hill, Newfoundland; he said the letter "S" had been successful in "serenely ignoring the curvature of the earth."⁴

The signal also entwined these key terms under yet another alliteration, *space*. Space between continents, and space between dots. Novarina also evokes space with his notion of an empty center, one where two recurring figures of the book, the *swirling cloud* and the *I sans quotation marks* might reside. Here the nascent sounds emerging out of the thinking mind are conjured, but Novarina's *sonic modulation* could also readily be recruited to describe the sort of theoretical moves I have attempted throughout the text. Which is to say that *sonic modulation* could label not only sonic production that can be heard but also conceptual turns that reflexively evoke a sounding and a hearing. In other words, a study in the tracking of changes (be they air pressure fluctuations or epistemic shifts) occurring under the sonic sign. The cleavage between these two channels is not as pronounced as it might seem, in fact, my aim has been to continually point to moments where they intersect. Keeping this in mind, let us return to the issue of space. Sound animates and activates space, sound's invisibility enables it to act upon space as if it was space acting upon itself. This reflexivity is embedded in my interest throughout this research in exploring how notions of the self, identity, space and language are shaped and simultaneously disrupted by sound. Sound is the echolocator as well as the echodislocator. The disturbance is often realized with the aid of technological tools that enable amplification and transmission, but it can be accomplished just as easily through a conceptual turn. A case in point is Cage's experience in the anechoic cham-

⁴ Guglielmo Marconi in Degna Marconi, *My Father, Marconi*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962, 107.

⁵ Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 236.

ber where the space acted as amplifier of heretofore unheard sounds; here the interrogation discerned by Kahn (“the inner speech interrogating the two”⁵ other sounds Cage heard) adds the questioning or feedback loop which is, in fact, the step which has enabled us to receive this event as the oft-told anecdote transformed into the paradigm shift it has become.

The inclusion of the inner speech reflects a crucial move for it opens the door to sounds we can only think about; in this case, solipsistically and literally, it is the sound of thought that is *called to mind*. Another instructive work is Alvin Lucier’s *Music for Solo Performer* (1965) where the brain’s alpha wave activity (whose frequency is 8–12 hertz, whereas our hearing range is 20 Hz to 20 KHz) is sent to electronics which convert the signal and is then routed to percussion instruments which vibrate sympathetically.⁶ In performance, we are confronted by the solo performer seated and still with electrodes on his scalp and face. All the rhythmic activity of the percussion instruments the audience witnesses is a direct result of the rhythmic activity inside the performer’s head. Hence, the notion of what it is to perform is extended by way of a reduction to its degree zero. The mere fact of being alive, of having an active brain, sounds, activates and performs. Lucier’s composition also instructs us that brain activity produces electric current and therefore can be found on the electromagnetic spectrum. In other words, the brain is an emitter at least as much as it is a receiver. In fact, alpha waves are just below audible range, they are infrasounds, but sounds nonetheless. It is indeed the intent here to depict the relationship between what is audible and sound (and by extension sound art) as one which is complex rather than facile. The electromagnetic spectrum itself is a continuity which ranges from the low frequency, low wavelength of radio waves to the high frequency, high wavelength of gamma rays. What we hear and what we see is found within those poles (along with microwaves, x-rays, infrared and ultraviolet). Novalis goes as far as saying that we should look to the “acoustic nature of the soul where we would discover a new affinity between light and thought – for both are united by oscillations.”⁷ In this context, synesthe-

6 Alvin Lucier, *Reflections*, Köln: MusikTexte, 1995, 300.



fig. 48

fig. 48 Alvin Lucier, *Music for Solo Performer*, 1965, for enormously amplified brain waves and percussion.

sia could be conceived as a manifestation of harmonics at work across significant shifts in wavelength.⁸

The purpose of pointing to the physics of sound in the context of the electromagnetic spectrum is to elucidate how our attempts to delimit phenomena which are in fact intrinsically connected bespeak our desire to comprehend and harness the world (both interior and exterior). This laudable quest, fraught with unknowables, is where science and art meet, where researchers of all stripes revel in the preeminent questions. Mark Whittle, astronomer at the University of Virginia's Department of Astronomy, researches what he has dubbed Big Bang Acoustics and in his writings, amongst the specialized technical particulars, one finds passages that closely echo in both form and content the spirit of the writing here (and even the Romanticism of Novalis), for instance:

The Sound of Opening Silence

The sound which grows as the Universe awakens is the sound which this project has focused on, and tried to render audible to human ears. But what about the initial scene, when all the amplified quantum variations were in place, frozen, waiting to move. Although all is deathly quiet, there is present throughout the entire Universe an exceedingly rich latent sound ready to burst forth, simply waiting for gravity's order to arrive. In a sense, space was filled with *silent sound*, a silence so rich that within it all future sounds were already present.⁹

The *silent sound*, a sound, muted but containing noise forevermore, stands as the potential of sound, or we could say, as its concept. In its translation

⁷ Novalis, *Le Brouillon Général*, trans. Olivier Schefer, Paris: Editions Allia, 2000, 91. Translation mine. Original and fuller quote: *C'est ici un regard profond et instructif que nous jetons sur la nature acoustique de l'âme, en découvrant une nouvelle affinité entre la lumière et la pensée – car toutes deux s'unissent par oscillations.*

⁸ The literature on synesthesia is extensive, I shall mention just one notable and relatively recent essay: James Peel, "The Scale and the Spectrum: a history of color-music", *Cabinet*, No. 22, Summer 2006, 24–28.

⁹ Mark Whittle, "The Sound of Opening Silence." <http://astsun.astro.virginia.edu/~dmw8f/sounds/aas/sounds_web_long.pdf>, the passage is in section 14, page 126 of the pdf file, accessed 23/06/11. Emphasis added.

from potential into kinetic, from concept to actuation, our ears momentarily resound. At other times, it is, as Whittle characterizes, “a formless hiss spanning notes too low and too high to hear.”¹⁰ There are, however, tactics of transposition which make audible what is beyond our range (not only of audibility but also of temporality), Whittle, for instance produces sound files which “take the first million years of cosmic sound and compress it into 10 seconds.”¹¹ The sounds rendered with these vertiginous reduction ratios sound like nothing more than a synthesized jet engine taking off, but it is the unmitigated immensity of the scale shift that seduces. The expansion of space or its diminution is frequently the *modus operandi* of sound art, here it is the time axis that undergoes a similar manipulation.

Another tactical shift, this time one deployed in the linguistic register and performing a transposition which, by its reductive didacticism, makes the text (re)sound with its phantomized voice:

This is an example of a voice speaking now on Academy Street, between Seaman Street and Cooper Street.

This is an example of a voice speaking now on Delancey Street, between Allen Street and Orchard Street.

This is an example of a voice speaking now on East 3rd Street, between Avenue A and Avenue B.

[...]

The next voice you hear is something like a voice speaking now on Academy Street, between Seaman Street and Cooper Street.

The next voice you hear is something like a voice speaking now on Delancey Street, between Allen Street and Orchard Street.

The next voice you hear is something like a voice speaking now on East 3rd Street, between Avenue A and Avenue B.¹²

¹⁰ Mark Whittle, “The Hiss of the Quantum World.” <http://astsun.astro.virginia.edu/~dmw8f/sounds/aas/sounds_web_long.pdf>, the passage is in section 14, page 128 of the pdf file, accessed 23/06/11.

¹¹ Mark Whittle, “Big Bang Acoustics”, <http://astsun.astro.virginia.edu/~dmw8f/sounds/aas/sounds_web_download/index.php>, accessed 23/06/11.

¹² Vito Acconci, *Language to Cover A Page: The Early Writings of Vito Acconci*, ed. Craig Dworkin, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, 399–400. Both pieces contain 10 identical sites.

The first half of Vito Acconci's untitled text offers us a peculiar present tense, one where the *This* points, but towards what? To a missing signifier, one unheard but echoing. One might say that the phantom voice (or body) haunts all writing, and indeed it does, but here the reductive ploy amplifies the presence of its absence. Furthermore, the recursive cartography of the text aids in placing ourselves out of the page and into the street, or conversely, it enables a reading of the street by way of a literal reading of the page. The second section of the text astutely considers the caveats of recording, the *[this] is something like* colloquially and succinctly implies that the constructed recording or memory that the text performs is now subject to gaps and approximations. Subject to the failings of the media it is imprinted on (be it synaptic or electromagnetic – the two are not that dissimilar, as I have alluded to earlier). Lermontov characterized this process of recording bent on erasure as *the veil of forgetfulness* in a passage that depicts sound as an inchoate informe pregnant with meaning yet unassailable by structures such as language:

If at a marvelous special moment
In your long-mute soul you happen to discover
A still unknown and virginal wellspring
Full of simple and sweet sounds,
Do not listen intently to them, nor give yourself up to them,
Draw the veil of forgetfulness over them:
Through measured verse and icy words
You will never convey their meaning.¹³

The tension implicit in transpositions from formless to form has often been operative across these pages; sound's physical properties lend themselves to nebulousness, consequently the theorization and historification of sound art must be undertaken with a certain apprehension. The concern is not only for the implicit loss of essence in the coming to form, but also for the fetishization of the formless in being subjected to this loss. This double-edged

¹³ Mikhail Yur'evich Lermontov in Viktor Shklovsky, "On Poetry and Trans-Sense Language", October, No. 34, Autumn 1985 [1916], 3.

proviso has been one of the main motivations behind the plethora of overlapping terms and neologisms I have advanced in the text (*unsound*, *taciturn-tablism*, *stutterance*, just to name a few). The underlying intent of such a scattered and disparate methodology has been to respond tactically to depictions such as the following:

There is no history of a self-described and autonomous [sound] art in the way one might think of the history of sculpture, no facade of a purposeful unity and linear continuity, no ongoing biographical intrigues and libidinal exchanges of influence. As a historical object, sound cannot furnish a good story or consistent cast of characters nor can it validate any ersatz notions of progress or generational maturity. The history is scattered, fleeting and highly mediated – it is as poor an object in any respect as sound itself.¹⁴

Thankfully, it is precisely the paucity of the sound object which yields its richness. A object deemed valuable, in other words, a pinnable object, has a diminished capacity to reposition itself, its movement becomes hindered by the institutional armature which unfailingly ossifies its foundations. The above statement made in 1992 by Douglas Kahn at the opening of *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and The Avant-Garde*, arguably the tome which inaugurated the scholarship on sound art, could be read either as articulating the failure of a field of study at the moment of inception or an opportunity to devise a scholarship which contends with the peculiar vicissitudes of its object of study.¹⁵ Of course, Kahn was merely mounting an argument for a history of sound art in a context of the glaring lack of one, in a context where the combined weight of music and visual cultures suffocated the potential for a discourse on sound proper. I have approached these issues via a circumnavigation whereby the scattered history of sound translates into a

¹⁴ Douglas Kahn, "Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed" in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and The Avant-Garde*, eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 2.

¹⁵ The editorial introductions to other foundational publications from the same period, *Radio Rethink* (1994, eds. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander) and *Sound by Artists* (1990, eds. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier) also bemoaned sound's invisibility from critical discourse.

mapless topography,¹⁶ an expansive territory rather than one defined by narrows. In other words, this text has explored and exploited sound precisely because of its scattered and fleeting attributes. This tactic echoes a statement made by sound artist Rolf Julius in 2005: “Today’s sound artists are more open, they don’t care whether they are working with sound or visual; they mix everything. Thanks to the people who came before, they have realized that sound is not such a big deal – it’s just a material like any other.”¹⁷

Aside from the commonality of sound with other material, in this book sound has been materialized through its consistent anchoring to the somatic – from the ignoble *Merdre!* to the euphemistically dubbed *South Winds*, from the foreign pores of the collective activating the stutter to the amplified presence of *I am sitting in a room*. The entwine of the sonic with the body, or the *bodily*, as Aaron Williamson has proposed,¹⁸ is itself entangled in the intertwined pairing of sound and silence. The second pair contributes the conceptual, critical and theoretical framing structure, and the first provides the material groundwork. An apposite illustration of a meeting between both pairs would be the still and mute body, a body that is just *there*, as André Lepecki writes, *there* in a state of “restless, vibrating stillness.”¹⁹ A body at its degree zero presents a fitting endnote to the *sonic somatic*, for it is the condition of possibility for the noise that invariably ensues. It is the state of a body that Sol Yurick aptly describes as “a congealed

¹⁶ A reference to Peggy Phelan’s depiction of a “topography we could never map” in regards to the animated power of words, cited first (and fully) in Chapter 1, p. 17–18.

¹⁷ Rolf Julius in Rahma Khazam, “Cross Platform”, *The Wire*, No. 261, Nov. 2005, 83.

¹⁸ Aaron Williamson, “The Body” in *Live Culture*, ed. Adrian Heathfield, London: Tate Publishing, 2003, 56. Williamson’s argument for using “the bodily” as articulated below resonates sympathetically with my intentions throughout the text of offering an array of pluralizing and expanding definitions:

[I]t must be registered that the danger inherent in any deployment of the term “the body” is one of hypostasis: which body, whose and in what ways can it, as a term, be thought constant through critical usage? Perhaps, given that no single attribute of the body is essential to its existence (taking into consideration the dead body) we should speak of “the bodily”; a collection of parts that, being indefinite as a composite and abstract category, allows a plural, ever-evolving register that expands rather than closes definition.

¹⁹ André Lepecki, “Still: On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance” in *ReMembering the Body*, eds. Gabriele Brandstetter and Hortensia Völkers, Hatje Cantz, 2000, 338.

electromagnetic wave”,²⁰ one always ready for a thawing (which takes on the form of an activated mode of transmission and reception). It has often been the case here of potential rather than actual (kinetic) sound, of *unsound* rather than air pressure fluctuations, but the terms are not antonymous as much as simply pointing to contrasting states of materiality. Silence is also present here in the plural, from the impossibility of absolute silence to the trough in the rhythmic interval, from the idealized empty space to the stutter interruption, the conceptual and corporeal meet in the expansive sonic somatic. The intent of deploying such strategies has been to present a set of theoretical avenues through which one can study sonic performances. The kernel of the problematic which arose during this undertaking (as much expository as exploratory and experimental in nature) has been to delve into the peculiar condition or position in time and space described by Artaud as one of a “speech anterior to words”²¹ and a “unique language half-way between gesture and thought.”²² The sonic somatic permeates this peculiar state through the aporetic character of these formulations, in the sense that they stage a sound where none can be heard. The sonic somatic is precisely that, a sound where there is none, a sound despite itself, a sonic state of silence. Furthermore, Artaud’s expansion of these notions in the following passage resonates strongly with the abundant stagings of the sonic somatic throughout this research:

This language can only be defined in terms of the possibilities of dynamic expression in space as opposed the expressive possibilities of dialogue. And what theater can still wrest from speech is its potential for expansion beyond words, for development in space, for a dissociative and vibratory effect on our sensibilities.²³

²⁰ Sol Yurick, “The Great Escape” in SF, eds. Rudy Rucker, Peter Lamborn Wilson and Robert Anton Wilson, *Semiotext(e)*, Vol. V, Issue 2 (#14), 118. Fuller quote: “[H]uman flesh is a congealed electromagnetic wave, a soft crystal composed of a multiplex of frequencies, each organ, each protein, nucleotide having its own little rhythm, the whole body being a tune of tunes, a meta-song, a Found Chord, harmonic of the as-yet-uncomputed music of the spheres. The body is a transmitter. It broadcasts electromagnetic waves (weakly) and receives them.”

²¹ Antonin Artaud, “On the Balinese Theater” in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, 220.

Let us close with an image, a sound image, one resolutely dissociative and vibratory, one that offers a window to sound, or rather, an *unsound*. A window that opens both in *and* out. The site is the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock where, on August 29, 1952, David Tudor was the first to perform Cage's 4'33".²⁴ In this site where the pastoral and the formal adjoin, Tudor's performance *of* silence, *in* silence became, through inaction, a collective performance of a paradigm becoming unhinged.²⁵ The audience, despite displaying their dismay and exasperation, were bound to become attendant to their own sonic signature. At that moment, the unknown in Feldman's statement, "We were concerned with sound itself. And sound does not know its history"²⁶ became known. The audience became self-aware. And silence as a concept became audible, became somatized.

To conclude, we can frame this historical moment from the perspective of the rustic backdoor, observing from outside, out amongst the breeze and the birds – those who are always performing 4'33". As a musical composition, 4'33" was beholden to face the audience. As an *unsound*, as a sound art performance, 4'33" propped the backdoor ajar. The *sonic somatic* is now intent on holding that door wide open.

I wish to hear the silence of the night, for the silence is something positive and to be heard. Silence alone is worthy to be heard. Silence is of various depth and fertility, like soil. Silence rings; it is musical and thrills me. A night in which the silence is audible. I hear the unspeakable.²⁷

²² Antonin Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)" in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 242.

²³ Antonin Artaud, 242.

²⁴ The original concert program is posted here: <http://www.maverickconcerts.org/history.html>, it was the penultimate piece in a program including compositions by Boulez, Feldman, Wolff and Cowell. The image is not of the 1952 performance, but a current promotional picture of the site where it occurred, it is posted here: <<http://www.maverickconcerts.org/Contact.html>>, accessed 23/06/11.

²⁵ This does not, by any means, signify that the audience acclaimed 4'33". A paradigm shift, almost by definition, rarely meets with approval or comprehension at the outset.

²⁶ Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art" in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000, 22.

²⁷ Henry David Thoreau in Henry Golemba, "Unreading Thoreau", *American Literature*, Vol. 60 No. 3., Oct. 1988, 401.



fig. 49

fig. 49 Steven Lee Miller, [*Maverick Concert Hall, Woodstock, New York*], undated. Courtesy of Steven Lee Miller/The New York Times/Redux.

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Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body

Christof Migone

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This book delineates a territory of investigation for sound art and its various manifestations through historical, theoretical, polemical and critical analyses of artistic, musical and literary works. In doing so, Migone gives radical definition to an auditory study that includes the complexity of silence and mutism, identity and abjecthood, and language and its stutterances. The recurring site of these stagings is the somatic under all its forms: embodied and disembodied, fragmented and amplified, vocal and mute.

Concrete sites that are investigated include: Antonin Artaud's writings, Alvin Lucier's recording *I am sitting in a room*, Erik Satie's composition *Vexations*, Marina Abramovic's performance *Rhythm 0*, Adrian Piper's *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, Melville's short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's documentary film *First Contact*, and John Cage's composition *4'33"*.

"For all those who wish to hear anew, you need consult the microphage, sonobrut, statictician, parasitist, glissomaniac, salivatrope, rhythmologist, anticrooner, petomane, slurpophile, melophobe, stutterist, phonophone, linguadrome aka Christof Migone. Sonic Somatic is not only an extensive historical survey and an intensive theoretical analysis, but also a do-it-yourself guide to disarticulation and dissonance, aphasia and schizophrenia, glossolalia and deliria. This book is a must for anybody involved in experimental sound, music, performance."

Allen S. Weiss, Performance Studies and Cinema Studies, New York University

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