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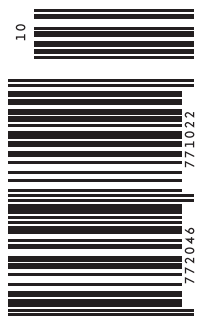
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Auscultatio Gravitas Communitas



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Feast of Listen

Spring 2013



Dimension Variables 04 — Standard rates applied
by NICO KRIJNO

Colophon

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Auscultatio Gravitatis Communitas
Issue 10 — Feast of Listen
Spring 2013

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Contributors

ALEXANDER GOODSON

Alexander Goodson lives with the suspicion that he is moving more than he realises, and is a writer at the moment.

(alexandergoodson.net)

AMY PETTIFER

Amy Pettifer is a writer and librarian based in Hackney. She recently completed the MA Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmiths where her work focused on Beckett, the sounding of non verbal languages and contemporary notions of apocalypse. She is behind the blog Good Grey Day and the zine Tappa Tappa Tappa.

(goodgreyday.tumblr.com)

AND-OR

AND-OR is a media art and gameart collective specializing in artgames. The collective consists of René Bauer, Beat Suter and Mirjam Weder. The group has existed since 2001 and operates from Zurich, Switzerland. Over the years the collective has been able to show its media art and artgames worldwide in locations like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Vienna, Berlin, Stuttgart and Zurich. And-or's origin is the media art scene. Some of the collective's projects like Wardive and Sniff_jazzbox, are a mix of game projects and media art projects created for mobile devices. They capture and transpose communication waves between humans and machines into adaptive and locative games, music or poetry. René Bauer and Beat Suter are teaching Game Design at the University of the Arts Zurich, Switzerland. René Bauer is an independent game developer and

software engineer. Beat Suter is a writer, conceper and publisher.
(and-or.ch)

AUDUN MORTENSEN

Audun Mortensen (1985) is the author of four poetry books, a novel, and The Collected Jokes of Slavoj Žižek.

(audunmortensen.com)

BRIAN ROETTINGER

Brian Roettinger is a Los Angeles-based artist and graphic designer. The majority of his work is in the form of printed media for cultural institutions and record album covers, most notably for No Age, Liars, and recently Beach House. His diverse works bridge the divide between art, music, design and concept. As a designer, he was chosen as Rolling Stone's Album Designer of the Year (2009) and was nominated for a Grammy for No Age, Nouns (2010), and held the position of design director at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (2004-2009). His work has been exhibited at Colette in Paris, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Moravian Gallery in the Czech Republic, and at the now defunct Hope Gallery in Los Angeles.

CHANDLER MCWILLIAMS

Chandler McWilliams is an artist and writer living in Los Angeles. He has studied film, photography, and political science; and completed graduate work in philosophy at The New School For Social Research in New York City. He has taught at schools and workshops around the world, and most recently in the Design Media Arts program at UCLA. McWilliams is the co-author of Form + Code in Design,

Art, and Architecture (Princeton Architectural Press, 2010). Currently, McWilliams is an MFA candidate in the Program in Art at the California Institute of the Arts where he works with sculpture, text, and performance to cope with ideas of ethics, space, perception, and thought.

(brysonian.com)

DAVE OKUMU

Born in Vienna to Kenyan parents and ultimately settling in London via Edinburgh and Paris, Dave grew up surrounded by music enthusiasts. Mixtapes from siblings and friends would sow the seeds for dynamic and diverse creative expression taking the forms of songwriter, producer and performing musician. Best known for fronting his critically acclaimed band The Invisible, whose eponymous debut was nominated for a Mercury Prize (2009). In 2010 Dave met Jessie Ware and the pair began to write and record her debut album Devotion. Devotion led to Dave's second Mercury nod, but this time as producer and co-writer.

GEE VAUCHER

Gee Vaucher is an artist still trying to get it right.

HAYDEN WHITE

Hayden White is a writer, ex-historian, and now American representative of "Pasts, Inc." – a new discipline devoted to the deconstruction of "pastness" as a fiction passing for a value in the formation of Western human consciousness.

HUMAN FICTION TARTINI

Human Fiction Tartini believes that fiction is not dishonest

fabrication but the potential to tell stories in a way that creates a culture that is meaningful through all the overlaps of what it means to be human. Human Fiction Tartini endeavours to create a tone of open experimentation by bringing together our individual frequencies without fear of failure or limit of genre.

(human-fiction-tartini.tumblr.com)

ISABELLA MARTIN

Isabella Martin is a sculptor from England who invents systems to navigate the spaces of our days, asks the questions that lead to the adventure of the next, and chooses the words to leave behind.

(isabellarosemartin.co.uk)

JACEK PLEWICKI

Jacek Plewicki focuses on modern music (editor-in-chief of Glissando), conducts a musical education programme for the National Audiovisual Institute in Poland, co-curates the Densinghour podcast series, and is a translator and a techno DJ. Further, he writes about art in the public sphere, his belief in second-wave feminism, VHEM, stuttering and epilepsy as a way of reaching the absolute, the sky, the moon and being homeless from time to time, and looking for time to write more. Main focus: let no one be alone again.

JOE BANKS

Joe Banks is a former Honorary Visiting Fellow at City University, and former AHRC sponsored Research Fellow at Goldsmiths College and The University of Westminster. Joe's art project Disinformation

has been performed and exhibited internationally, had 13 UK solo exhibitions, and is described by The Metro as being “the black-ops unit of the avant-garde” and by The Guardian as exhibiting “some of the most beautiful installations around”. Joe lives near the set of traffic lights which inspired physicist Leo Szilard to conceive the theory of the thermonuclear chain reaction.

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN

In 2012, London based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan had two solo shows featuring new commissioned works *The Freedom of Speech Itself* at The Showroom, London, and *The Whole Truth* at CASCO, Utrecht. His ongoing project *Aural Contract* has been recently exhibited at Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm (2012) and The Taipei Biennial (2012). Other works include *Model Court* presented at Chisenhale Gallery, London (2011) and *Marches for Artangel*, London (2008). His hybridized practice means that he has written for *Cabinet Magazine* and the 10th Sharjah Biennial and is part of the group running the arts space *Batroun Projects* in north Lebanon. Abu Hamdan is a PhD candidate and tutor at the department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College.

(forensic-architecture.org/explorations/aural-contract/)

LEFTY LE MUR

(STEVEN SCICLUNA)

Born in Malta, Steven Scicluna is currently a London-based illustrator and graphic artist. When not busy repaying his student loan he is likely to be found exploring the fascinating worlds of lettering, book-arts, writing

systems, anthropology and maps.
(leftylemur.com)

MANDY KAHN

Mandy Kahn is coauthor (with Aaron Rose) of the nonfiction book *Collage Culture: Examining the 21st Century's Identity Crisis* (JRP/Ringier), which was also released as a record with a score by No Age. The book had its launch at Colette in Paris and for a month beforehand excerpts from its text were installed as wall art. Kahn has given many readings and talks in conjunction with the book's release, including at Motto (Berlin), the Shoreditch House (London), Printed Matter (New York), Art Center College of Design (Pasadena), Family (Los Angeles) and for an audience of 2700 at the Davies Symphony Hall as part of *Pop-Up Magazine* (San Francisco). *World Literature Today* called Kahn “a rising star of West Coast poetry”; her poems are anthologized in *From Totems to Hip Hop* (edited by Ishmael Reed) and she is a frequent live reader, sometimes performing her poetry accompanied by an orchestra or a choir. Kahn's poetry installations, also called *Kahnstallations*, move groups of poets around a space in various shifting patterns. As writer-in-residence for the live event the Series, Kahn composes poetry and prose to accompany new works of music, dance and performance art. She lives in Los Angeles.

MARTYNA DAKOWICZ

Martyna is a multimodal experience designer, interdisciplinary writer, and multimedia artist based in Montreal. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of Toronto in 2007

with an Honours BA in Visual Culture and Communication, focusing on critical and social theory, semiotics, and digital media. She received her MA degree in Multimedia from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 2010. Her work explores themes of interaction, exclusion and anonymity and has been exhibited in Montreal, Toronto, Warsaw, and New York.

(martynadakowicz.com)

MICHAL KOSAKOWSKI

Born in Szczecin, Poland, in 1975. Michal Kosakowski is the director, writer, producer, director of photography and editor of numerous short and experimental films, documentaries and video installations. His work includes more than 70 films, many of which have been shown in international festivals and exhibitions, and have received numerous awards.

MIKHAIL KARIKIS

Mikhail Karikis is a Greek/British artist working internationally. He studied architecture at UCL, art at The Slade School and is a researcher at the University of Brighton. Embracing an interdisciplinary approach to visual art, performance and sound, Karikis's practice emerges from his long-standing investigation of the voice, which he employs to explore notions of community, professional identity and human rights. His work was shown recently at Arnolfini in Bristol (2013), Manifesta 9 (2012) and the 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Karikis has also presented at Tate Britain, Palais de Tokyo, IKON and the South London Gallery. His sound works have been published by Bjork and Dj Spooky; his third album Xenofonia was

released last year by Sub Rosa records. He is currently nominated for the first prize in Videonale 14 in Bonn and Kino Der Kunst in Munich. In Summer 2013 Karikis's work will feature at Nottingham Contemporary and the Aichi Triennale in Japan.

(mikhailkarikis.com)

MIKOŁAJ TKACZ

Mikołaj Tkacz (born 1991) is a Polish comic book artist and member of comics group Maszin (www.maszin.blogspot.com). His comic book Nobody's adventures was published by Centrala. He also makes experimental hip-hop.

(soundcloud.com/tv-ost)

MINJEONG AN

Born in Korea, Minjeong An is a fine-artist and graphic designer who has shown her work in numerous exhibitions including Voyage of the Great Soul at JeonGok Prehistory Museum in 2012. She is interested in embodying and clarifying the visible things as well as the invisible things, such as personal memories and emotions, by using visual, mathematical and scientific languages.

(myartda.com)

MUSHON ZER-AVIV

Mushon Zer-Aviv is a designer, an educator and a media activist based in NY & Tel Aviv. His work involves media in public spaces. He explores the borders of collaborative models as they are redrawn through politics, design and networks. He is the co-founder of Shual.com – a foxy design studio; ShiftSpace – an open source layer

above any website; YouAreNotHere.org – a tour of Gaza through the streets of Tel Aviv; Kriegspiel – a computer game version of the Situationist Game of War; the Collaborative-Futures.org collaboratively authored book; and multiple government transparency and civic participation initiatives with the Public Knowledge Workshop. Mushon is an honorary resident at Eyebeam – an art and technology center in New York. He teaches digital media as a faculty member of Shenkar School of Engineering and Design. Previously, he taught new media research at NYU and Open Source Design at Parsons the New School of Design and in Bezalel Academy of Art & Design.
(mushon.com) / (@mushon)

NIALL MACDONALD

Niall Macdonald (b.1980, Outer Hebrides of Scotland) graduated from the Glasgow School of Art MFA and lives and works in Glasgow. He is represented by Kendall Koppe Gallery, Glasgow.

NICO KRIJNO

Nico Krijno started taking photos at a very young age while growing up in a small town in the South African semi desert, before venturing to Cape Town – via London – to pursue his career in photography and film, using commercial, fashion & architectural commissions to support an independent, fine-art practice. Krijno's subject matter is wildly eclectic; sausages and carrots on a blindingly bright tropical shirt or a schoolgirl holding a snake sit alongside one of several portraits of his muse and girlfriend Mignonne. His photographs are at once hyperreal

and otherworldly, with humour, sexual innuendo and surreality present in equal measure. Raw as well as magical, the work contains a dirty realism he is beginning to make his own. His first solo show, 'On How To Fill Those Gaps' in late 2011 – and the accompanying self published book – was widely lauded and selected works have since been included in group shows in Edinburgh, Milan, Los Angeles and Glasgow & London. He is nominated for the Paul Huf Award 2013.

(nicokrijno.com)

PENNY RIMBAUD

Penny Rimbaud is a writer and is largely disengaged.
(onoffyesno.com)

SAM BESTE

Sam Beste is a musician originating from London, UK. His time is devoted predominantly to his band Hejira, with whom he collectively composes, arranges, produces and performs. Hejira also curate their own monthly event called Traum, a cultural sieve that brings the most urgent artists of London's avant-pop scene under one roof. Independent of Hejira, Sam has been working extensively with electronic pioneer Matthew Herbert, recording and co-writing on his latest solo releases 'One Pig' and 'The End of Silence', and most recently collaboratively composing the soundtrack to a film score and iPhone game.

(hejira.info)

SARA C MOTTA

Sara C Motta's research practice focuses on the politics of subaltern

resistance, with particular reference to autonomous politics and popular movements in Latin America. She is especially interested in how social movements create new forms of politics that challenge conventional political theories and ways of being. This research has led her to explore the politics of knowledge and the linkages between knowledge, power and exclusion, as well as the ways in which new social movements are re-inventing democratic and participatory forms of knowledge creation that challenge the academic privilege of the academy. Methodologically she is therefore interested in developing movement relevant research and participatory research methods. As part of this she is also interested in the pedagogy of dissent, and the use of popular education and critical education in and outside of the University in the forging of struggles and practices of social justice. She has participated in a number of spaces that seek to re-imagine education, such as the Nottingham Free School Social Science Centre and runs feminist workshops that explore the linkages between the body, spirituality, politics and art.

Shoppinghour × Human Fiction
Magazine Tartini

present

EVANESCENT CONTINENTS

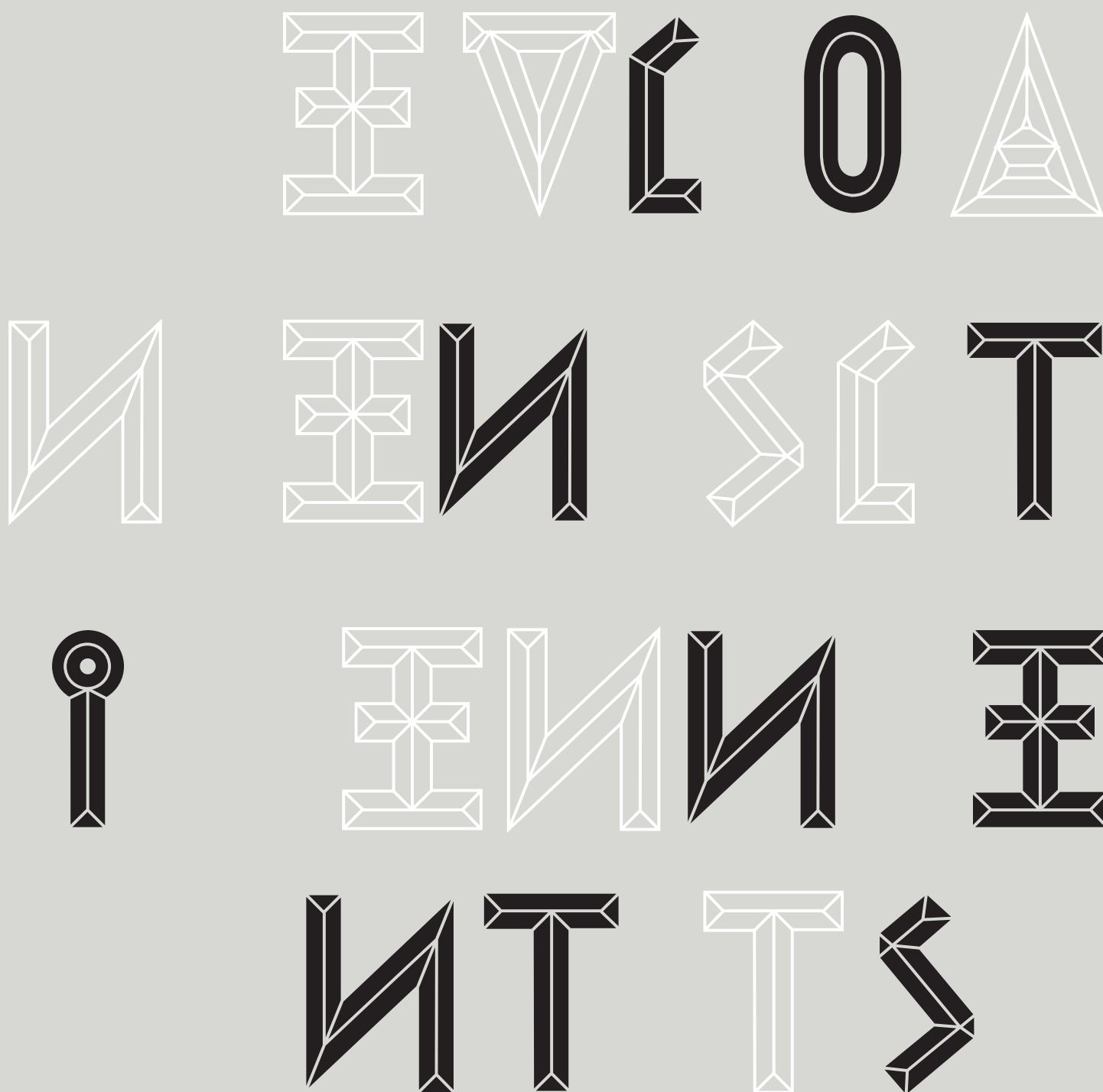


Artworks by LEFTY LE MUR

Calling for samples and recordings responding to one of the following:

1. humming a melody or a non-melody.
2. the sound of an imaginary organ; not restricted to living or earthly creatures!
3. a sonically inspired response to the following riddle: Random, shifting, but recognisable.
What constitutes it is invisible to our eyes. Intangible, incomplete yet indiscriminately casts a shadow.
Guaranteed to witness all and be witnessed by all. It is applicable yet unknowable.
A common mismeasure. What is it?

a project directed by Mikatsiu



The material received will be manipulated, sampled, mixed, and collaged by a selected group of composers & sonic artists, each creating a piece for your feast of listening pleasure. The tracks will be released by Shoppinghour Magazine, and a listening session will be hosted in London by Human Fiction Tartini. Deadline 1st of June 2013. Format preferably uncompressed 44.1 kHz. Length maximum 16 minutes. Send to: evanescent.continents@gmail.com. Please include your full name & the location of your recording with the submitted sonic material. Any further questions and request for project details should be addressed to Mika Hayashi Ebbesen.

Prologue

Life as infinite non-silence

by MIKA HAYASHI EBBESEN

I do not consider that we have been able to avoid the symbolic and attentive violence in the act of listening.

We struggle daily with being heard; we struggle with listening well to others; we struggle to share our thoughts and experiences through the means of communication available to us. Listening has become as much of a cultural concept as a physical effort. We have become used to listening in more ways than just with our ears. Listening is a metaphor for our social interactions as well as a conceptual emblem for an established sonic sensitivity desired in contemporary culture.

It has been pointed out abundantly that the heritage of a strong anti-ocularcentrism developed during the 20th century has left many of us with a desire to comprehend and legitimise other senses, especially our aural capabilities. In a moment of acknowledging the upmost importance of how we sonically interact with our pasts, present, and futures, we should be conceiving a more robust History of Listening. Human beings have rarely lived in a society where a single voice equals a single human. A voice can be a nation, and a nation can judge one voice. It is questionable whether the new cyber identities we create have really moved beyond such hierarchies. Regardless, we diligently continue the feast of listen.

All at once sound moves, arrives, leaves, attacks, seduces, weaves, removes, displaces, alters, curves, and permeates our perception of reality. A sound is not monogamous to its origin for it is never experienced in isolation. Like ideologies, we continually grapple with shielding certain sounds and amplifying others. We also engage with non-silences; noises that are not born and thoughts that

have yet to acquire frequency. Musical innovation remains a powerful component of contemporary society – the ability to archive and revisit these creations has evidently not dampened our appetite for sonic imagination.

It feels relevant to point out that we now find ourselves at a stage in technological development and an evolving capitalism when *Tomorrow* has started to momentarily pit itself against *Today*, trying very hard to listen prophetically for traces of something that does not yet exist. Listening and monitoring our potential desires has become the chief homework of capitalism. We are continuously being analysed, censored, and re-imaged. Every gesture has a heightened economic value. The flicker of an eye, even a click or a touch, have become marketable expressions that are being heard by the concealed regimes that envelop all of our activities and manifested decisions from every dimension. Is there a way out of such a system of unrestrained and effusive gestural listening?

At the same time, we have been stipulated to trade our senses for gratuitous disguised consumerism with a forced listening, a form of sonic violation that invades our cyber time – a violation that taps into an economy of attention. To be free of this violation, we must pay. To have insufficient funds to pay such fees equates to continuous interruption and attack. I speak here of the loud and ever shifting mechanism of advertising that permeates every corner of our customer feedback society, starting with websites promising free services and access to digital content. Our audio-visual privacy knows little bounds.

We are being listened to, and we are being asked to listen.

An informationally oriented capitalism

has turned us all into spectators of our own lives. Our voices are continually submitted to the measured intervention of businesses claiming a finessed listening far superior to our own. Whether they actually secure useful information through the intrusive gathering of quantifiable specificities is highly contestable. In addition, we possess insufficient knowledge and inadequate control over how we are being heard by structures like the law or governing powers. Human rights may advocate for the fair opportunity to speak yet the modes employed by agencies listening to us remain elusive and obscure.

In our current politics of listening, the voice is treated as an object. It seems ironic that the symbolic significance of a person's voice can be limited to object-hood whilst the actual physical incarnation of any voice is a spatial and auditory experience that knows no boundaries, irreducible to an object.

Digital-vocality claims a hyper temporality that has only distracted us by displacing the response mechanisms of communication. These sonic accumulations are regrettably unable to transform our desires for stretched sensory efficiency. They simply cause frustration by eradicating certainty around the inauthenticity of remaining silent.

We endeavour to listen obligingly to *Truth* and *Reality*, through the experience of our immersive environments and the people surrounding us. We also listen as attentively to the genuinely false fictions of our own creative minds. These fictions, born of our own insecurities and imagination, can lead to misinterpretation and destructive conclusions. Is it possible to have a truly open listening that is also a listening that successfully selects and eliminates?

When we listen to ourselves, what could it mean to sound human, or to sound inhuman?

The question remains as to whether we actually need help with listening. The *apparatus*, in multiple forms starting first with

the telephone, then recording equipment, has expanded, complicated, and deepened our listening practices on a daily level. Yet we cannot control the destination of vibrations resulting from a single beat. Echoes are not bound to the temporality of their origin, and resonance is most often a mystery. Equipment has detached our experience of sounds and voices from their original birth place, allowing for the existence of frequencies that never truly die. Leaving traces in strange places, they conjure an alertness that makes us suspicious of sonic absences and inattentiveness. It is easy to carry the assumption that only a deranged person would repeatedly ignore a ringing phone. How much of our listening is about communication? How much of our listening is about survival? What does it mean to survive a sound? We culturally lust after the professed silence of death by continuously clamouring against it; this very consuming unactualized sound that we must distract ourselves from.

My youth was peppered with many family stories, usually told over dinner or a cup of afternoon tea. The repertoire included a particularly poignant account of my English great grandfather's experience fighting in Nigeria during WWI as part of the Royal Artillery. Of all things encountered during the war, apparently it was the sound of poisoned arrows flying through the jungle foliage that terrified him more than anything else. Death here did not confront, it only whistled through the air with the smooth ease of a caress.

I have accepted that perhaps death will not sound like anything I can recognise, and that perhaps it is not a sound that remains, but like an arrow, just a moment that arrives. Faithful to the temporality of our lives, the sounding of death shall no doubt give me one last chance to listen.

Cockneys vs Zombies —
Rorschach Ink Blots
& The Auditory Undead

by JOE BANKS



Different languages offer different potentials for various forms of creative mishearing. So, for instance, the dissident artist Ai Weiwei exploited the Mandarin articulation Cǎonímǎ¹, referring to a fictitious species of llama known as the grass mud horse, to invite Chinese authorities to do something which sounds virtually identical, Cào Nǐ Mǎ² — (loosely translated) “go fuck ya mama”. Ai Weiwei communicated his message by posing for a photo, naked except for the protection offered by a commercially manufactured grass mud horse toy, and in doing so Ai Weiwei drew attention to an extremely widespread (and highly elaborate) set of memetic word and sound plays, invented by Chinese internet users to circumvent government censorship. The song “Bhaag DK Bose Aandhi Aayi”³, in the soundtrack of the Hinglish movie “Delhi Belly”, tells an individual called DK Bose to “run... a storm’s coming”. Bose is a common surname (hence the loudspeaker company named after billionaire psychoacoustician Amar Gopal Bose), to the extent that one real DK Bose was interviewed on Indian TV to discuss the song whose words, when repeated over and over, transform into a sound which means almost exactly the same thing as Cào Nǐ Mǎ.

French product branding makes use of similar audio tricks — the name Citroën DS exploits the similarity between the sound of letters “day” and “ess” to “déesse” (goddess), while the symbols “K7” are used to refer to the sounds “kay” and “sept” (audio cassette). As a comment on the intellectual rigour of certain styles of contemporary philosophy, the French term “nuageux” can be used as

meaning “cloudy” and also “new agey”. The French burglar and playwright Jean Genet misheard the sound “L’Amour” (love) as “La Mort” (death) in an interview conducted shortly before his death.

Here in the UK this kind of word-play has been developed into a virtual parallel language. Although the historian John Camden Hotten maintained that London’s legendary rhyming slang originated not in the Cockney areas of London’s East End, but in Seven Dials near where I now live (originating at the time when the area’s most famous resident was a gangster known as Stunning Joe Banks). The most famous example speaks of Cockneys going “up the apples and pears” (stairs), in bad weather my elderly neighbour compliments my handsome “titfer” (tit-for-tat, hat) when I leave the flat, and my auntie speaks about someone being in a “right two and eight” (bad state), with the least charming example I’ve heard being a group of morons on a train at Lewisham asking “what’s that smell?”... answer “double figures” (the irony being that virtually everyone in the carriage was ethnically white).

What these anecdotes (and no doubt thousands more) illustrate is the geographic and inter-cultural spread of linguistic strategies which exploit ambiguities in the perception and production of speech, and it’s these ambiguities which I explore in a book called “Rorschach Audio” (which was published as part of a project sponsored by The Arts & Humanities Research Council, hosted by Goldsmiths College and The University of Westminster). What this project initially

set-out to demonstrate was how psychoacoustic processes influence the way we perceive speech, and, in turn, how psychoacoustics influence the interpretation of the sound recordings used in a form of modern-day Spiritualism known as Electronic Voice Phenomena research.

For those who might not be aware, that very term has something of the aspect of an audio illusion about it, as references to Electronic Voice Phenomena come across, on first impressions, quite “sciencey”, as though EVP ought perhaps to be some form of serious research? What EVP researchers believe is that recordings they’ve made of stray communications and radio chatter are supernatural phenomena — literally recordings of voices of ghosts, which scientifically prove the existence of the afterlife. In terms of reactions to such claims, opinion seems divided between those who dismiss such beliefs as self-evident nonsense, and a surprisingly large minority who either reserve judgement or who (particularly in the fields of electronic music and sound art) actually take these claims seriously.

In contrast to the first camp, the attitude adopted by the “Rorschach Audio” project is to take the claims made by EVP researchers absolutely seriously, at least in terms of accepting that EVP enthusiasts genuinely are, as they insist, producing real hard evidence, that they honestly report evidence they’ve perceived with their own senses, and that the recordings they present are (in most cases) not consciously faked. In contrast to the second camp, this project differs from the opinion adopted by supporters of EVP however,

in that it sets out to prove exactly why the undoubtedly real evidence presented by EVP enthusiasts is not of supernatural origin, and to show how EVP fans have allowed themselves to misinterpret that evidence.

Although, as it transpires, demonstrations like this have been prepared by a number of scientists, in terms of showing how it is EVP recordings might be misperceived, the first, best and most entertaining demonstration I’ve come across is an extraordinary recording prepared by psychoacoustics expert Diana Deutsch, who recorded herself speaking two neutral words — “high” and “low”, which appear, rapid-fire, in alternating stereo channels, creating a sound-collage which “sounds like language, but the words are not quite recognisable”. In a manner that’s strikingly similar to the trick used in the DK Bose song, but without the commonly-accepted pre-interpretation attached to the DK Bose mishearing, each time these sounds are repeated, the mind attempts to match meanings onto them, creating a wild variety of almost hallucinatory auditory illusions. The Scientific American reported the recording says “take me, take me, take me”!

Art is not necessarily science, but science is always art, and, quite apart from its scientific value, as a creative work Diana Deutsch’s track is a wonderful example of a scientist beating artists at their own game, not least because the creativity is as much produced by this work’s audience as by its’ author. An obvious explanatory metaphor is that the mind tends to interpret ambiguous sounds in a manner similar to how we see monsters and animals, ghosts and angels etc, in

the random symmetrical splashes of the famous Rorschach ink-blot tests. When I give "Rorschach Audio" talks, it's not uncommon for loudspeakers in lecture theatres to pick-up some of the stray radio chatter that EVP researchers collect using tape recording and radio technology, but it is consistent with the psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach's belief that illusory images seen in ink-blot tests reveal something about the individuals perceiving them, that, in context of EVP, recordings of often highly-distorted radio chatter are played-back many times, until they resemble familiar and sometimes highly personal sound-images. It is often stated by EVP researchers that ghost voices come from known relatives, and speak to EVP listeners personally, and that last perception was exploited by the Surrealist film-maker Jean Cocteau in his masterpiece "Orphée".

It's always easy to say any statement's obvious with the benefit of hindsight, however, although the ink-blot metaphor probably is quite obvious, the Rorschach Audio book shows how analogies between perception in sight and in hearing pan-out across a whole range of auditory and visual illusions, and how the analogy between perceptions of ambiguous sounds and equivalent visual images goes back further than any 20th century scientist, as the artist Leonardo da Vinci reported hearing words emerge from pealing church-bells in the 15th century. Where this project tries to break the newest ground is in attempting to show how our ability to form audio illusions is (perhaps counter-intuitively) an important aspect of normal perception.

In contrast to the view that holds illusions (including parapsychological illusions) as "anomalous" experiences, as experienced in contexts like psychology labs and modern-day séances, in fact, returning our narrative full circle, alongside Cockney rhyming slang, according to legend Lord Mayor Dick Whittington was called to London by a message heard in church bells, Cockneys are traditionally defined as born within the sound of the same Bow Bells described in "Oranges & Lemons" as saying "I do not know", and we're all familiar with mishearings projected onto ambiguous song lyrics ("Me ears are alright" by Desmond Dekker for instance). In other words, we all share the ability to create these kinds of perceptions.

In terms of how such illusions can be considered normal, the answer is that the mind needs to use guesswork because the sense-data it receives are often incomplete, distorted, interrupted and noisy, and illusions are perceived when those guesses are, very occasionally, inaccurate. One paradox is that the guesses the mind makes are perceived as being part of reality, even when those guesses are wrong. Another paradox is that the mind guesses all the time, but, despite being partly illusory, those guesses are almost always accurate descriptions of reality; and it is because these illusions are mostly accurate that we only rarely become aware of the illusory aspect of what we perceive as real.

If in practice it seems a bit far-fetched to draw such sweeping conclusions from a comparison between ink-blot tests and audio illusions, it's important to stress that the overall hypothesis about the normality and

importance of projective perception is supported by a whole range of evidence. Phenomena such as the McGurk Effect, Sine Wave Speech, Cocktail Party Effect, Picket Fence Effect, White Christmas experiment and lip-reading illusions, can, in their most striking manifestations, produce almost hallucinatory sound experiences, and are closely matched by illusions of visual perception — Necker Cube and Kinetic Depth Effects for instance. An easier way to show that normal perception is partly illusory, is to point out that the sense-data projected into the eyes consists of two images and is optically upside-down — it is the mind that fuses these images into a single perception and which inverts them so they can be of practical use. A simple demonstration can be used to show that the mind copies-and-pastes information to fill-in blind-spots on the retina, to help us construct and navigate everyday reality. Likewise, as soon as our attention is drawn to certain visual obstructions, we notice them — glasses and our own noses for instance; so, as with blind-spots, normally the mind edits-out such obstructions, to create the perception of an uninterrupted visual field, which is itself partly an illusion. Because the interpretative strategies that the mind uses to make sense of the world are so well-trained, perceptions are projected incredibly quickly and (mostly) accurately, without us being aware of the interpretative aspect to how we perceive reality. It is only in the rare situations that we encounter images that are so ambiguous we can't make sense of them — it is those images that we perceive as illusions, and it is those illusions that allow us to

access and to understand something of the underlying mechanics used by our perceptual systems.

The Harvard psychologist and popular science author Professor Steven Pinker wrote that “illusions are no mere curiosities, they set the intellectual agenda for centuries of Western thought”, and if a critical analysis of EVP still seems like a fringe subject, on a pragmatic level it's worth remembering what we learn from understanding mishearing is also relevant to aspects of medical audiology, to military intelligence, to criminal witness testimony and even to air safety. On 19 Feb 1989, Boeing 747 Flying Tiger Flight 66 was flying into Kuala Lumpur airport. ATC radioed “Tiger 66, descend TWO four zero zero” — 2,400ft, the captain heard “descend TO four zero zero” — 400 ft. The aircraft impacted a hillside 437ft above sea level, killing two pilots, the flight engineer and aircraft mechanic, the fire burned for two days... psychology of perception can be important.

The “Rorschach Audio” book is available from Strange Attractor Press:
strangeattractor.co.uk/shoppe/rorschach-audio/

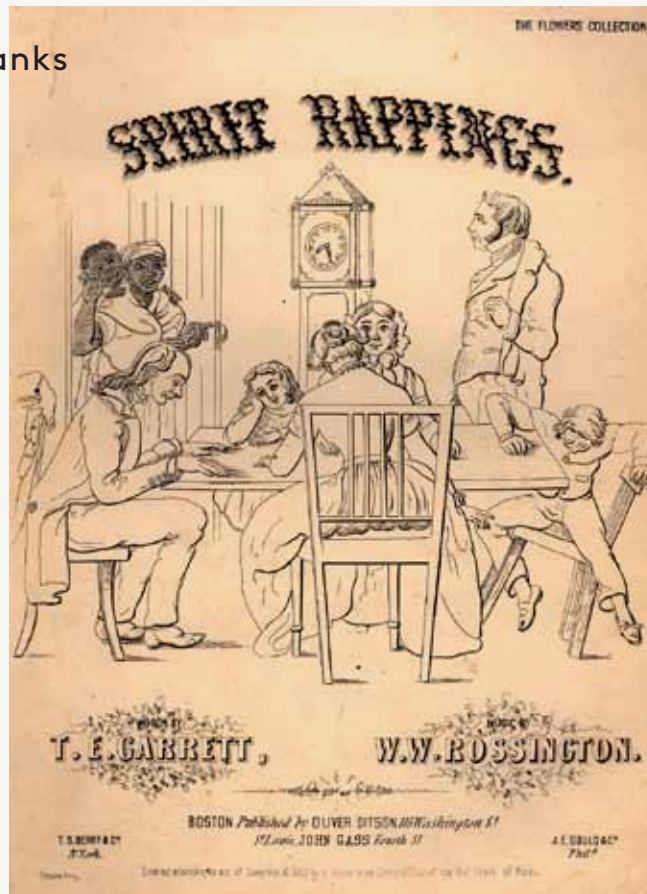
All images provided by Joe Banks

NOTES

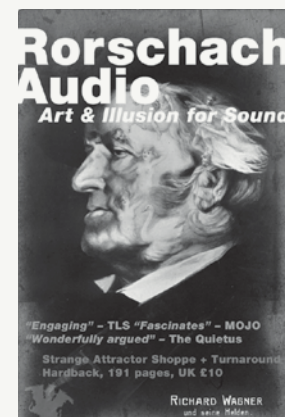
1. 草泥马
2. 禽你妈
3. भाग डी.क. बोस, आंध्री आर्यी

Joe Banks

19



Hermann Rorschach



21 — 24

The Human
Voice +

by
Amy Pettifer

25 — 27

Listening to
the hearing itself

by
Jacek Plewicki

Rebounding:

As an allegory of the voice, *Echo and Narcissus* is a tragical tale of phantom listening and communicative collapse. It tells of attendant proximities, unrequited caress and is ultimately nostalgic for a dialogue that never takes place. *Her name is Echo and she always answers back....* But of course this is the thing she can never truly do. Instead she becomes locked in a pattern of vocal loops and cannot make her ardent words her own. Potential conversation is reduced to the re-voicing of her beloved's fragmentary call making flighty Echo the original fan girl, whose identity constitutes a series of appreciative re-tweets.

Narcissus on the other hand is deaf to her song, consumed as he is by the ideality of the image in the pool. Rather than any real human interaction Narcissus unknowingly pledges love to a reflection of himself and therefore also to the watery screen that creates and holds his image. Like Echo, his potential moment of connection is caught up with the rebound – the touch is always on the return.

What each spurned lover in the tale experiences is a confounded attempt to formulate themselves in the union of two halves – intangible boundaries prevent the message and meaning from getting through, much as the world of modern communication technology presents us with an interlocutory scenario that ultimately fails to deliver. Our speech, focus, elemental voices and subjectivities might be directed out towards the other – but it is the refracted ripples of the self that ultimately echo back.

The sites of contemporary social media – the spaces in which we regularly engage in the projection of our vocal and physical selves – are characterised as polyphonic. The chirrups of status updates, forum posts, commentaries, blogs and re blogs, tweets and re tweets all contribute to the seemingly

democratic pool of exchange that the theorist Jodi Dean describes as 'the communicative common' – a forum with its ear tuned to the opinion and contribution of every voice that joins the song. Our desire to be part of this busy, conversational structure is hard to deny, but what happens to our voices and utterances once they leave their physical or notional points of origin? Do they find the respondents they deserve? Or are we in fact faced with a Narcissian /Echoean predicament and revealed as a generation enamoured with the sound of its own voice?

The democratic culture of self expression via Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogging has allowed the scope of everyday exchange and the status of personal musings to be elevated to dizzy heights. We share the same communicative channels as those in possession of celebrity and political power, so logically our own commentaries and critiques are duly lionised. The cosmetic positive of sharing this global platform is that the potential reach of our audience is as limitless as the internet itself; but the negative flip is an embedded scenario of phantom listening. Does a direct tweet @ a political heavyweight constitute an interaction? Does a vote of support to a celebrity in crisis equal a tangible presence in the gilded sphere of their attention? The truth is that, no matter how loudly we speak, we have no idea who is listening and much less control over how well the communicative exchange is consummated. Rather than a dialogue that is responsive or response seeking, voices and bodies are cut adrift – dampening the urgency of the reply, the currency of banter and the ownership of the utterance at its root.

Our public selves can now be fully formulated by the careless action of throwing our voices into the ring; this is not an ethereal gesture and it underpins how easily

our words can cease to be our own. It is reminiscent of the ventriloquist's trick in which a voice denies its corporeal origins and takes up residency elsewhere – becoming full of distances as it travels, as at home in an inert body as it may be in a human one.

From the distant roots of recorded sound to the dawning of the telephonic era, the alchemical human voice has proved able to stray far and wide from its producing body; like thoughts into written words or fire into cinders, the physical body cannot lay claim to the object voice much past the moment of enunciation. While this question volleys back and forth in philosophy and cultural theory, the affinity of technology to modes of speech has apparently created a permanent stopper that prevents the swallow-back of the voice into the human body, instead offering an alternative corporeal space for the transmitting of our vocal selves. This fact cements the landscape of communication, as we recognise it today, as variously composed of solid, mercurial and chameleonic surfaces that can contain or reflect the voices that emanate toward them.

The effect of this ravenous, vocal fetishisation cannot be understood as the prescribed, congenital evolution of our physical and social selves – it is instead the transformation of the speaking body into something much less tangible – caught up with the mystery of the one sided conversation, the buzz of the dial tone and the haunting of acoustic shadows.

Receiving:

In order to communicate over the inherent distances of a global, contemporary social-life, our inter-subjective experiences are increasingly aligned with machines, the technological conduits of speech and selfhood, rather than with any present

physicality. The human/mechanical binary therefore becomes ambiguous, just as the unrequited communion of *Echo and Narcissus* leads to the transformation of physical forms into screens and devices; Echo's body becomes a stone, her voice alone emanating from the rocks while Narcissus' brut presence dissolves into something as mercurial as his watery reflection.

Crucially, these elemental proxies retain the vocal remnant – the essential grain which gives the illusion of presence – just as an actor's thrown voice animates an inert dummy, appearing to imbue it with consciousness, Echo seems physically or *potentially* present thanks to the hollow "Hello" that will bounce back to you from the darkness and distance of the rock. The *kind* of body is almost irrelevant, to hear a human voice is to feel its presence; it is what Mladen Dolar calls "plus de corps" – the voice is more than the body and is irreducible to it.

This immediacy, coupled with the possibility of address over wonderful distances, has normalised the idea of proximity without the need for an explicit human presence. In such cases the agents of communication (telephonic devices, computer screens etc) become imbued with an amorous quality; mechanical, proxy bodies take our physical place in the conversation, occupying the space of the distant loved one at the other end of the line. As we adapt, our ardour increases, to that point that we now touch and interact with machines in the same way that we used to touch one another. From subtle taps to the gentle stroke of the screen swipe, these magic gestures highlight our unwitting attention to technology's erogenous zones.

The snag however is that these screens are essentially empty – their only function is to reflect and to offer a forum for the infinite

extension and reformation of the self. Voices are captured and subjectivity reduced; our entire lives come to depend on the functionality of platforms and devices which encourage the habitually antic reformation of our digital, social selves via lists, sonic signatures, edited sets of images and circles as the sum total of our all-encompassing ‘status’ – an idealised edit of who we are.

The easy accessibility of social media platforms and their almost unavoidable connectivity with every facet of our communicative function means that this kind of active, technological existence does not share the niche, hobbyist quality of gaming culture; instead it encompasses and lures us all as a necessary progress of our daily lives. Whereas indulgence in the creation of avatars and parallel existences in Second Life grids carries a very tangible context of fantasy – the possibility of the impossible and the feeling of escape – the manner in which we are encouraged to reformulate our *actual* existences via social media templates is a startling development. While fantasy gaming provides the transformative disguise of *another* voice and *another* self, it is our own detached and mediated voices that remain at the centre of this seamlessly quotidian chimera of social media life.

So what is happening to the contributions we make and just what is it that makes these modern forums so different, so appealing?

Repercussion:

The space of contemporary social media succeeds in retaining its allure via the noisy proliferation of voices that match our own; it is multi-lingual, poly-vernacular and wise to micro-nuances and trends of speech. Switching on and logging in brings you to a place that asks “How are you doing? Or “Hi – what’s happening?” playing on the flattering rhetoric of specific address. But

when we consider that this sphere is reliant completely upon the inputting of our own individual comments, statuses, updates and preferences – our own grainy vocal *content* – in order to exist, then it becomes clear that its voice is not emerging in an organic or originary fashion. Perhaps the reflection pool of the modern communicative landscape is not a vocal mass primed for discourse, but rather a voiceless glass; like the nymph rendered mute and silent, save for the moments in which her capacity for absorption allows her to relay.

The scenario is almost science fiction – an entity needing to vocalise repeats, then synchronises, then finally seems able to speak freely, while in fact continually leeching from the narrative it mimics.

For Jodi Dean, the democracy of the communicative common and its associated empowerment to contribute is undermined by this fundamental turn in the nature of discourse, – “[the] shift from the primacy of a message’s use value, to the primacy of a message’s exchange value, that is, a message’s capacity to be circulated, forwarded and counted...” Above and beyond the currency of what is being said, discussed and received, is the need to create a hubbub whose individual voices can be mined; a distraction of pure omni-chatter to mask the silence and defy the zero point of the dial tone – the apex of all our hang-ups. This is a troubling turn of fortune for the internet, a device whose ideal purpose was doubtlessly to enhance communication and interaction for a common good; while this may nominally remain the case, it is vital to recognise this contingent shift in the *value* of our attention and the degradation of listening.

In this system of reflections, enunciations are re tweeted, re blogged and shared until the point of origin, a place to which a response *could* be made – is lost for good. We can never recoup the time we invest, but the

content we invest is ripe for the capital gain of others – it becomes ‘communicative capital’ to use Dean’s phrase – a fact which fundamentally dislodges the autonomy of blog culture. As soon as our social interactions, both visual and vocal, are released into the digital ether, some other entity or body takes over control of the mouth, allowing individual utterance to be repackaged as advertising, polled as consumer survey and collated as consensus rather than valued on an interpersonal level.

Our ardency for the screen as a place to compose and observe the progression of our individual desires, means that this vocal hijacking has slipped past largely unnoticed, as has the internet’s mutation into a body which consumes voices rather than liberating them. Its machinations are becoming steadily more visible however as backlashes over the monetising and copyrighting of user generated content increase in frequency. But ultimately we must use these same channels, even for our protest against them – our remonstrations caught in a regurgitative loop of inescapable repetition. We complain via forums, comment boards, Facebook and Twitter feeds but all we are left with is *feedback* – from a system whose appetite cannot be quelled.

If the devices and platforms that we rely upon are so eloquently able to replicate and relay the voices we give them, then could they not also have response/ability? Taking the place of the empirical listener and the job of answering back? We must requalify our understanding of what it is to be heard in a system where we are all too used to the notion of an *automated response*; something which not only comes directly from the machine but carries within it that troubling *auto* – the reappearance of the inquiring self within the answer. Perhaps all our interactions online can be classified in this way – pointing toward a simultaneity of

self and system, the adaptation of our vocal being to the workings of a very different body.

As they travel through digital space, taking on other meanings and contexts long after the quieting of fleshy reverberations, our voices are affected by a new resonance – the extension chord struck by an amalgamation with the machine. This live, sentient voco-spill is what we might call (to re appropriate Dolar’s quote) the human voice *plus*; the sound of enunciation via a plethora of bodies, the witnessing of the independent life of the voice as it is captured and computed. Extending over distances and acquiring a hollow timbre as it goes – this uncanny chatter elicits, all at once, a vocal and a physical shudder.

What we have lost in this techno-evolution of our speaking selves, chimes with the destiny of the fated nymphs in Ovid’s tale. Lingering in a state of unrequited love we are continually on the rebound, facing the encroaching, empirical division of our physical and vocal being and the forgetting of tangible connectivity.

Like the haunting coda to the myth, there is the teasing background knowledge that these acoustic shadows may exist only as long as we remain to cast them, meaning that, to evade the deceptive echo, one may eventually be compelled to investigate the implication of remaining silent.

It comes with you, and lasts while you are there; it will go when you go, if go you can.

RESOURCES:

Anathema, The Otolith Group (2011), 37 minutes, colour, sound, HD video.

A Voice and Nothing More, Mladen Dolar (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006).

Communicative Capitalism: This is What Democracy Looks Like, Jodi Dean (November 17, 2011, Sheldon Auditorium, University of Nebraska-Lincoln), accessed via YouTube.

‘Echo and Narcissus’ in *The Metamorphosis*, Ovid (London, Penguin, 1955).

“Thus light, which is the first form created in first matter, multiplied itself by its very nature an infinite number of times on all sides and spread itself out uniformly in every direction. In this way it proceeded in the beginning of time to extend matter which it could not leave behind, by drawing it out along with itself into a mass the size of the material universe. [...] [W]hen light, which is in itself simple, is multiplied an infinite number of times, it must extend matter, which is likewise simple, into finite dimensions.”¹

It is commonly asserted that hearing is just one of the many ways we passively perceive the surrounding universe. The discussion on the status of hearing, derived, most notably, from the writings of Marshall McLuhan, focuses on its relation with other senses – mainly, its subjection or suzerainty over seeing. The mode of speaking about hearing should, however, at least from time to time, include its specifics, identified not in the moment in which the hearing is elevated through or excluded from the human sensorium, but stemming from the hypothetical, pre-empirical (and definitely non-historical) point of view, where both lucidity and vigilance can be strictly built around the idea of sound perception.

Instead of trying to explain the human auditory system in detail, let's focus on one of its outstanding aspects – the function of detecting vibrations – i.e. changes of the pressure in surrounding matter. Let's put it this way – it's about detecting irregularities occurring in the outer, ever-changing world, by an organ belonging to the inner system – immovable, immutable, seemingly unalterable. This presupposition is, at least sometimes, wrong: obviously, the receptor moves and can be temporarily damaged. Along with Henri Bergson, it is wise to ask “order is certainly contingent, but in relation to what?”² But I want to go further – which order is to be chosen? That question was once valid in relation to one of the other senses – namely, sight.

What does “perception” mean? Is it

a way of receiving images and visions or of provoking them? For at least 15 centuries it was the eye that was regarded as responsible for emitting rays to elucidate the matter a subject is turning towards at a particular moment. This was supported by the likes of Empedocles, Plato, Euclid, early medieval theologians, not to mention the allegedly revolutionary motto “to be is to be perceived” coined by George Berkeley.³

Perhaps it is time to contextualize hearing with reference to the medieval revolution in optics. Before Arabic theologians-turned-scientists like Alhazen (11th century) defined sight as a process of receiving images through rays of light proceeding to an eye, there was a strong rivalry between supporters of two ideas: whether objects we see come as an effect of the unconscious process of emitting beams through one's eyes (emission theory), or if they're secondary to real, physical forms of objects infiltrating our organ of sight (reception). A clash of two worlds – either you percolate or you're being penetrated. In fact, both actions are happening simultaneously – the gaze influences the world around the observer and the observer is influenced by the gaze of others.⁴

This is how extensibility was believed to have been possible. To observe is to participate, to change the essence of the perceived world. Thanks to this 11th century scientific breakthrough, the outdated absolute spontaneous sensual creativity could be rejected once and for all.

When I first heard *Labyrinthitis*

by Danish sound artist Jacob Kirkegaard, I thought it was just another tricky move to explain a work of art by reference to some blurry scientific principles. But when experienced live I had a different opinion. It is a composition aimed at eliciting the phenomena known as otoacoustic emissions, i.e. sounds emitted by the ear itself. I don't mean things happening on the surface of the sensory organ (like entoptic or endaural phenomena) – the frequency is actually emitted from the most inward part of the ear.

It's hard to say what the purpose of that mechanism is. However, those emissions are used by contemporary medicine to test the sense of hearing of newborn babies. Without the ability to express their sensation verbally, babies' ears are able to create an auditory reaction in response to the signal emitted by the machine. But is it just a response?

Even though emission theory was widely supported for hundreds of years, to my knowledge, there was no one to apply it to the auditory system. Perhaps now it is time to disclose the crucial information on Kirkegaard's piece. Sitting in a darkened room, confronting the wall of two contrasting frequencies, my left ear started to emit a subtle, slightly pleasant, droning sound. Trying to relate to the new sonic phenomenon occurring in the middle of what was up to that day known as receptor, I also started to sense something even more distracting. I heard the very sound emitted by my ear but coming from the mixer desk, amplified and significant. The message transmitted by Kirkegaard himself: Duchamp was wrong⁵ – you literally can hear hearing, which turns out to be even more obvious than looking at seeing.

One of the supporters of Duchamp's claim, sound artist and writer David Toop, in his book *Sinister Resonance*, examines

the world constructed from the perspective of an absolute eavesdropper, i.e. a subject without any notion about the particular shape or form of the source of the emitted sound that it is hearing. "Eavesdropping is a mode of hearing that requires delineated spaces. Ear pressed to the wall of a house, the secret listener stands under the eaves, the overhang constructed to protect the walls of a house from rainwater. The word is probably derived from the Old Norse *upsardropi*, which correlates with the Old English *yfæsdrypæ*. Originally, it may have referred to both the person who listened under the eaves and the drops of rain as they fell from the eaves."⁶

This weird etymology, referring both to the perceiver and the perceived, points to a mode, a relation of sort. It is, however, a relation between a subject and a named, familiar object. But let's go further, imagine the situation in which the eavesdropper is hearing a silent sound of an unknown provenance, unable to tell whether it's coming from the inside or from the outside of his or her body.

I say this is the proper hearing, *hearing as such* – a sensation that's underlying the whole process of *listening*. To hear is to emit, to give form to the surrounding miasma. To listen is to reflect upon the signal received in response to the process of hearing. That's the agenda behind Kirkegaard's work – showing that you can actually listen to your own hearing. Which sounds trivial, but may have revolutionary (rather: revolting) consequences, if applied to the abandoned emission theory.

Let's take the particular model proposed by the XIII-century theologian, Robert Grosseteste. In his treatise *De luce* (*On light*), he treats light as the first form of being, the simplest of ideas and actions – most notably, seeing. At the same time, he holds the view that it is God who is the

first observer – his sight is the first motion. By shedding light (i.e. by his first sight), he allows all the other forms of the material world to appear. That's the reason why it's possible to know God, to see the world in its true shape, of course only for the properly illuminated person.

But the most interesting part is that Grosseteste declares the possibility for sight to exist without reference to any particular form. That's exactly why Kirkegaard's piece is so important – by listening to the hearing itself, we are able to accept the most absurd possibility. Even more grotesquely, it is supported by the omnipresence of spontaneous, *unstimulated* otoacoustic emissions (SOAE), taking its source in the Organ of Corti, the very organ that's responsible for receiving the auditory data. A tail wagging the dog.

The rough and unwise model presented in this piece aims at showing that it is perhaps possible to construct a model in which the ear decides what's on the other side of the wall, that eavesdropping actually requires the wall to be imagined and pressed against our auditory system. By hearing, we create — by listening, we perceive the results of creation.

NOTES

1. Grosseteste, R., *On Light*, p. 10, tr. Clare C. Riedl, Michigan: Marquette, 1942.
2. Bergson, H., *Creative Evolution*, p. 232, tr. Arthur Mitchell, New York: Dover, 1998.
3. Freedheim, Donald K. (ed.), *Handbook of Psychology, Vol 1: History of Psychology*, pp. 107-108, New Jersey: Hoboken, 2013.
4. Lauwereyns, J., *Brain and the Gaze: On the Active Boundaries of Vision*, pp. 187-188, Boston: Massachusetts, 2012.
5. "One can look at seeing; one can not hear hearing" — a message put in *Green Box* (1936) by Marcel Duchamp.
6. Toop, D., *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener*, p. 239, New York: NY, 2012.



1. Breath Portraits, watercolour portrait made while holding a single breath

Over the past fifteen years I have been exploring the human voice, thinking of it as a malleable sculptural material and a conceptual tool to explore human experience. At first, both the voice and breath seem to resist representation and give rise to dynamics of dematerialisation and ethereality. Certainly, there are thinkers and artists who explore these dynamics and focus on a purely formal or metaphysical reading of the voice; but such a reading positions bodies and the voices they produce beyond the material world — i.e. it renders them as signs of transcendence. This seems to reproduce a disconcerting model of thinking about the body and its products, familiar in economism, which places extreme emphasis on the body (as a producer, a consumer or a commodity) in order to ultimately annihilate it for the sake of a 'transcendent' value — how much it is worth in financial terms. However, engaging with the voice expands further than the realms of formal, plastic investigation and metaphysics. It inevitably leads to a deep engagement with people, their cultures, politics and the human psyche.

A quest central to my work has been to explore the reasons for the production of vocal sounds, which are beyond language and its rules, and the meanings we attach to the 'nonsense' sounds we invent. Sometimes I like to think of them as somewhat anarchic, as deserters or rebels, occupying an outsider's position in relation to syntax, which is the 'army of language', as John Cage also observes. I have studied such sounds in the context of community formation and professional identity. In recent works I have turned away from my voice, toward the voices of others: other artists or members of different communities (often marginal), whose professional identities, cultures and sense of togetherness, are tied with the production of unique sounds and vocal practices. One such community is that of the haenyeo: female sea-workers on the North Pacific island of Jeju — a small patch of black volcanic land which belongs to S. Korea, and floats between China and Japan. Operating outside the currents of modernization, the haenyeo (literally meaning sea-women) are an ancient and fast-vanishing community that now consists predominantly of sixty to ninety-year-old women who dive to depths of up to twenty meters with no oxygen supply to catch seafood, collect seaweed and find pearls. This is a gendered profession practiced only by females. There are several reasons for this. A physiological explanation is the distribution of fat in women's bodies, which insulates them against the cold and allows them to stay in the sea for as long as eight hours even during the coldest winter months. A socio-political factor is the sexism in Confucian law, which, until the beginning of last century, did not recognise female labour, excluding the haenyeo from taxation. Thus, the diving women engaged in a low-status profession and worked against the will of the state, but brought their entire income back home.

A haenyeo may dive up to eighty times a day. Each dive lasts up to two minutes and is punctuated by a combination of sounds, including a high-pitched breathy shriek or whistle; an arguably spontaneous vocal firework bursting out of the mouth, which one might mistake for a dolphin or a bird call. At once alarming and joyous, this sound is as thin as a blade marking the horizon between life and death. The diving women make a living by constantly negotiating the limits

of that which sustains them, their breath. But they come prepared. They are equipped with the sumbisorì: an ancient breathing technique, which has been practiced for centuries. It is taught by one generation to the next, when new girls start diving at the age of eight.

The little research that exists on the physiology of the sumbisorì reveals that the technique entails exhaling very rapidly all the carbon dioxide accumulated in the body, and quickly inhaling fresh oxygen. The lungs of the haenyeo shrink from the pressure in the depths, and, hungry for air when the diver resurfaces, they expand, causing a violent inhalation and a high pitched wheezy whistling gasp. These sounds occupy high frequencies above the noise of the sea and are easily identifiable. The haenyeo have limited vision above water resulting from their underwater masks or because of high waves. Therefore, when at work in the sea the sounds of the haenyeo could be said to function as aural signals and acoustic location markers. Also, to the trained ear, each sumbisorì has a distinctive sound; it is an individual acoustic signature that is produced in the different mouths and bodies of each woman. The sumbisorì with its aural production is a work skill – a specific craft which a young haenyeo begins to learn as a young girl and takes years to perfect. Practiced only by women and passed on from mother to daughter, this is a gender-specific skill that is trans-generationally transmitted, creating an inter-generational aural bond that ties the community and functions as a sonic signifier of professional identity.

The subtlety of the word sumbisorì reveals an additional layer of meaning. I am told by the haenyeo researcher Dr. Cha HyekYoung, that the word sumbisorì, literally translated as breath-sound, is also parallel to that of 'overcoming'. She explains that the haenyeo were the ones who lead the anti-Japanese resistance movement last century, and witnessed the large loss of the male population on the island after the fall of Japanese rule when American and South Korean forces massacred those suspected of supporting the reunification with North Korea. In this light, the sounds of the sumbisorì become charged with the expression of trauma and the working through of suffering; they are impregnated with the potential to operate as a marker of a historical event, and a non-verbal transmitter of memory, of resistance, of rising above the circumstances. Therefore, the sumbisorì is a complex cultural sound-object – the product of a subculture operating within a particular political, geographical, historical and gender specificity.

Recent statistics reveal that the haenyeo community, which comprised thirty thousand women forty years ago, is now on the brink of disappearance. In the 1970s it was the leading economic force on the island, creating an economic and social system in which women occupied leading roles – a glimpse of matriarchy in an otherwise patriarchal Korean society. But the scale of fishing has changed radically since then, while the women insist on traditional and sustainable (and for some eco-feminist) practices outside the mainstream of industrialization. In addition, water pollution and the warming of the seas have diminished haenyeo's profits, and occupational hazards prevent it from being a popular career choice. In parallel, there are no encouraging economic



2. Breath Portraits, watercolour portrait made while holding a single breath



3. A haenyeo at work in water
4. Underwater



5. A haenyeo at work in water



6. haenyeo selling sea food
7. Haenyeo singing while changing in camp

circumstances organized on a national level that could transform the future of the profession and provide the right incentives for younger women to engage in it. Subsequently, the profession is declining as the old haenyeo die out. It is hard to envisage the aural practices of the haenyeo community, which form a unique sonic subculture interconnected with skill, without their professional practice. The sounds of their community – songs, debates, communal bathing, the submisori etc – make little sense divorced from the women's sustainable work, their reversal of traditional gender-roles, their deep sense of community and egalitarianism, their collective economics, and sense of professional identity and unique purpose in later age.

However, as each inhalation is followed by an exhalation, the work practiced by the haenyeo is in a state of perpetual incompleteness – a dual movement of possession and dispossession, of a 'within' and a 'without'. This is being. Being negotiating a vacuum, and as Allen Weiss says, 'being by porosity'. Becoming filled and becoming empty. This is what the sound of their breathing technique suggests – becoming full of oxygen and life, and letting go of life. Like being pregnant and giving birth; holding the mysteries of labour and life-bearing. In my search to find the meaning of the sounds of the diving grandmothers of Jeju, I heard a sound that operates beyond (male) Logos, and is created outside the mainstream of modernization and economism; I heard an ancient craft and a trans-generational bond, a cultural sound-object and a transmitter of memory and resistance; I heard an acoustic signature of a community and of a professional identity, its fun and purpose.

Interview LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN

Your voice is your witness

by MIKA HAYASHI EBBESEN

Investigation by listening to the cultural ideologies that emerge from our productive and expressive lives is more than just pointing out elements that might go unheard. Taking the time to articulate the meaning gleaned from the sonic architectures that define our daily lives can lead to a process of expanded listening. We must question the inherent consequences of these new modalities waiting to decode our sonic identities.

Exploration of the politics of listening is an act that weaves complex layers of interpretation and misinterpretation into the fabric of our social and legal procedures – highlighting the absurdity that follows any act of truth-seeking in an object as easily misread as the voice. When citizenship is based on a vocal passport, and the physical embodiment of our own voice is deemed more authentic than the mind on the behalf of which it speaks, then every individual's relationship with their choice to speak changes.

The audio documentaries of Lawrence Abu Hamdan takes listeners deep into the ambiguities that stem from a single human utterance. The controversial use of voice analysis is extensively explored in his work, revealing a microscopic and mechanical forms listening which confound our habitual understandings of how we are being heard. Abu Hamdan has built an archive of recordings excerpted from real trials, current affairs, media, and interviews, all of which form various historic examples that continue to resonate with contemporary modes of listening. This archive, which even includes animal voices, has become the springboard for his investigations as well as an artistic platform from which different spaces for listening can be activated and interrogated.

MIKA HAYASHI EBBESEN: How did you get into the study of voice and sound?

LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN: After working for a long time with how sound behaves in space, I began thinking about spaces which were designed for listening. That is how I ended up thinking about the courtroom, where listening takes on a completely different dimension. The courtroom is the site where speech acts and listening is of course the way it is activated. Speech crosses the threshold from conversation into testimony, and the way that it is received is of upmost

importance because from there it goes on to have a political affect or a legal affect.

From thinking about the specific designated space of listening that is the courtroom, I began to look at other speech acts and found that they all define an authority, a legal space as it were. One thing that really blew my mind in terms of thinking about legal space was the right to silence as a speech act, because it extends the legal space to anywhere. The right to silence or the *Miranda warning* as it is called in the United States, is issued right before being arrested. What interested me was rather than being about silence, it is actually saying: we now have the right to listen to you. The whole series of conditions you are now operating in changes, and that is a vocal and aural change. That is why my project title is *AURAL CONTRACT*, rather than *ORAL CONTRACT*.

When rethinking political representation and how we should be heard, we are actually thinking about what conditions there are within which we are being listened to, and how they are acting upon us in contemporary society. I am always trying to see how listening is used ideologically and voice is manipulated ideologically.

MHE: In what ways do you feel recording technology has affected society's relationship to the voice?

LAH: It is a difficult question but I can speak about it in reference to two specific examples from my archive which are moments when the way listening politically functions was reorganized through recording and broadcasting. The first recording is from 1925, the first ever radio broadcast of a trial. It was a funny trial because it was not a criminal trial or a juicy murder investigation but a trial for a school teacher who had been teaching evolution in Tennessee and taken to court because of laws forbidding somebody to teach evolution, known as the Scopes Trial. The radio got permission to reorganise the architecture of the courtroom. They moved the jury box from the central space to the side to make way for their three microphones. The microphones literally replace the jury and the radio audience become the jurors, the court of public opinion.

The other recording happens much later in 1984, when for the first time police interviews are

recorded rather than written down. In the past somebody wrote it down and you signed but there were many cases where people said words were put in their mouths. So the police decided to use audio recording machines but they were then confronted a whole new set of problems that were not really expected.

I found out about this through Peter French who is a forensic listener. He has run a lab in York since 1984 and he has since then analysed over five hundred voices. When the police began recording interviews a whole set of voices were archived and his role as a speech profiler, someone who maps voices and finds regional identities but also identifies people through their voice, was completely revolutionised. French told me "Before 1984 there was a trickle of work but after they passed this law it was like a thunderstorm and it started raining cassette tapes!" So even though a recording technology was put in place to increase legal transparency, there was a side effect that no one foresaw which was a great objectification of the voice. Because of the addition of audio recording technology the voice has become much more apart of legal investigations as an object of scrutiny in itself. It was quite revolutionary in terms of policing when a voice archive started being generated in 1984. It built a whole profession around it, a mode of investigation. These are massive impacts I see within my research of recorded voice. It is a very radical shift in listening to revolutionise spatially and temporally the way our voices are used in self-representation and testimony.

MHE: Did the concept of forensic listening always exist at some level?

LAH: When asylum seekers come to the UK, they are given an accent test to see if their accent is from the same place as where they claim they are from. I made a documentary about this subject and the controversies around using the voice as a kind of birth certificate or passport. This documentary is called *The Freedom of Speech Itself* and contains interviews with lawyers, phonetic experts, and asylum seekers. It tells the story of one man who was rejected because of his pronunciation of the word *tomato*: he was told he was Syrian, not Palestinian. It is absurd because this relates to some of the oldest historical disputes that we can think of, like the Shibboleth, these words that you only say before you crossed a border, a pronunciation of a word that affirmed your identity. Even this example of the word

tomato was used during the Lebanese Civil War in the 70's to basically murder Palestinians. They were shown a tomato in the window and if they pronounced it as *banadura* they were Lebanese and they were allowed to go past, if they pronounced it *bandura* they were supposedly Palestinian, so taken out and shot.

The ideas of the voice being a political agent comes from Ancient Greece and it returns constantly from George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* to the present in different ways. I am interested in what is happening now and how we can rethink a history around it. The accent test is very rational and would never compare itself to the more brutal things like the massacres in Lebanon. But of course it is exactly the same mindset that tries to situate a way of speaking to a specific location in order to oppress people.

MHE: I noticed that you used the term "disguised voices" in one of your archive categories, and I was wondering if you could comment on the question of whether there is such a thing as authenticity around any vocal identity. It seems like in a legal context there is an assumed natural authenticity to a testimony, or is our public assumption of that vocal authenticity a bit of a myth?

LAH: It is a brilliant thing to be asked actually, especially because my last documentary (*The Whole Truth*) was on a lie detector. You are right in questioning whether there is ever authenticity to a way of speaking. And the answer is of course not! Conditions immediately affect the voice and immediately affect our way of speaking. My position is actually to always resist identity within the voice. I do not believe that there is an identifying factor because one's accent mutates too much, too fast, and it is too contagious.

That is my sole argument with my earlier documentary on the asylum seekers issue: if there is only one thing you could say for certain about an authentic asylum seeker is that they should have a completely crazy accent because they have lived everywhere and they spoke to everyone. They conduct themselves in more ways of speaking than anyone else on earth perhaps! To assume that these are the people who can be solidly mapped through their accents is an absurd notion. However it is not an extraordinary notion that everyone has a biography to their voice.

On one hand we say that the voice should never be an identifying factor because it mutates too much,

but on the other hand what does it mean to disguise a voice? It is not so much a critique of voice disguise and belief in authenticity, but exactly as you said, voices are always in excess of being authentic. I think it is very interesting if we look at voice disguise as a technological process around which we can see a certain set of ideologies.

One example of this from my archive is the Saddam Hussein trial, a set of testimonies in defence of Saddam Hussein where the voices of the witnesses were pitched up. A crude voice manipulation so they would not get recognised, but it does not use standard voice disguise. BBC would pitch down because they believe that it looses more idiosyncratic properties, where as pitching up amplifies them for some reason. They pitch these people up in a crude decision to infantilise them. It is easy to speculate about the people who are still testifying in defence of the father, Saddam Hussein, and the court wanting to position itself as ascended into neo liberal structures, as democratic. It was a real theatre of voices. An aspirational performance produced through a whole set of vocal alterations.

MHE: When one thinks carefully about the idea of witnessing in terms of the immigration testimonies you research, they strike me as producing an a-temporality that functions by creating a displaced vocal witness to the interrogated individual in question. The individual's absence is implied as the voice bypasses all bodily presence by accessing the past, including any particular accents. What fascinates me here is that this detachment between the voice and the individual's presence happens regardless of recording technology because of the assumption that the voice is a witness. It would be great if you could clarify the relationship of witness and testimony in your research.

LAH: Witnessing is the process, the very medium through which you perform testimony. When we look at the asylum seeker issue, we see that there is a division, the voice becomes two witnesses actually, and I think the third one, as you point out, would be the voice that is a witness back to the subject. But if I carry on my trajectory, the voice is divided into the witness testifying on behalf of language and the witness testifying on behalf of body or sound. The law always needs two witnesses; they either testify for or against each other. When this notion of corroboration

that the law uses in its methodology of discerning the truth is applied to the voice specifically, what appears to us as one voice actually becomes two witnesses. And that can only be played out through aurality. It can never be played out through the written word. That is one way I think about how witnessing changes with the contemporary use of voice analysis.

MHE: So essentially you are saying that technology has permitted for the appearance of the second witness?

LAH: It is not just technology because in the asylum seeker's situation there are actual people listening and a judgement determined, so it is just a way of listening. Whether that is by a machine or by a human it does not really matter because the focus has shifted from what you say to how you are saying it. As soon as one aspect is amplified over the other there is an internal conflict. As you said before, it displaces the subject and the voice gains a greater objectification. Of course the more inadvertent and the more of an object the evidence is, the more reliable it is because it is not dirtied with subjectivity and it is not corrupted by intentions. So I think this shift in listening from the words to the way of speaking is very significant in terms of opening of loads of questions about the body, about truth, about borders...

MHE: Can you talk more about the lie detector — the subject of your most recent documentary *The Whole Truth*?

LAH: It is just a piece of software with a microphone. It is being used by insurance companies and also for benefit fraud. You just speak to it while answering the questions as you would do normally, and the machine is supposedly able to detect stress levels in the voice through monitoring the tiny trembling that happen in your vocal cords. By focusing on the muscular movements of the voice, the lie detector situates itself beyond the range of human audibility, so only the machine can determine whether or not someone is lying. A measurement is enacted upon the voice but it really has to do with the voice being a way to be able to enter the body.

It is once again situating the strength of evidence in the inadvertent speech. It is saying that what you cannot control is the truth and what you can control is a construction; subjects can lie while objects cannot. But of course what people forget is that this

machine can lie, and it does lie! It is basically like a horoscope. It gives a good answer or a bad answer, not something in-between. It is a complete hoax but it is being used all over the world.

MHE: Why? Where is the necessity coming from?

LAH: The detector comes out of technologies that were using the voice as a biometric tool. Initially they were used to verify with your voice for bank account, and that was being used in Israel; it was called Free Speech 6.0 – again it comes back to the notion of the democratic rhetoric around speech. Initially clients of banks and insurance companies subscribed to it because they thought it would protect them but they did not realise how quickly it would stop protecting them. That is why the most recent application of this same voice analysis is of course turned back on them as an interrogative device. And not only that, it is completely corrupted by the people who develop it. Now there are claims that they have developed a machine that can profile the voice of sex offenders. Again it is a desire to be free of having illegal immigrants or sex offenders in our midst.

MHE: Vocal eugenics!

LAH: Yes, basically a vocal eugenics. But why it is so uncontested and why it continues to develop is because it is not accountable in the sense that it is not evidence. It is a tool. The lie detector is merely technology in the legal frame and it is never presented as evidence, it is just used in interrogations. Atos* neither denies nor confirms that they use it when assessing benefit claims; but they do use it and we know that from several sources. But they never site that in the decision to deny someone benefit claims. So it is really a desire to eradicate listening from these legal processes. It does not want the listener to listen; it does not want the speaker to really speak.

MHE: In your recent audio documentary you introduce the notion of microscopic listening that ironically is removing the ability to listen. I guess we return to this irony where we are so intent on listening that we are not listening, a kind of listening which silences?

LAH: Exactly. If you think about the distinction between democratic capitalist societies and totalitarian ones, it is a distinction of listening. In democracy you can speak as much as you want

and no one hears you, you can say whatever you want and no one really cares, no one listens. In totalitarianism you can say nothing because everybody is listening. Listening in that sense is really fundamental in how we construct these ideologies and we should always be aware of what listening is doing. And though our current culture practice is a racist and completely bigoted way of listening, it still conforms to the democratic model of listening in the sense that you can say whatever you want. It is not really what you say, it will always be something else that incriminates you.

MHE: So it is legally conforming to the idea of what we consider democratic whilst removing our rights in a different way...

LAH: And that is how I arrived at the title of my project which is *The Freedom of Speech Itself* – in itself speech is not free.

MHE: Could you explain the idea of “legally inaudible”?

LAH: For example, before you say the oath what you say is legally inaudible, so it cannot be heard. It has a non-status. It has to pass through this threshold of legal (in)audibility. There is a constant expansion and contraction of what the law hears, for example the national electricity grid mains hum. This crazy example also comes from Peter French who I mentioned before. Basically they realised is that if they record the mains hum all the time, what they get is a kind of map of time, because the mains jitters randomly in its frequency of 49 to 51 Hz/sec. Say we take this recording, it will have this mains hum on it even if it is not really audible to us. They can extract that and therefore they can date the times when the recording happened and verify it.

There is an expansion of what the law hears as testimony. So when the mains hum attains legal audibility it problematizes notions like *getting a voice* or *being heard*, because we should really adopt a more complex understanding of what hearing in those forms implies, what is actually considered and what is dismissed... There are a whole host of unexpected and quite radical ways of listening that are being used in these legal contexts. That is what I am interested in.

* Atos is a French multinational IT services and consulting corporation also known primarily as Atos Healthcare in the UK, a division that manages Work Capability Assessment on behalf of the Department of Work Pensions.

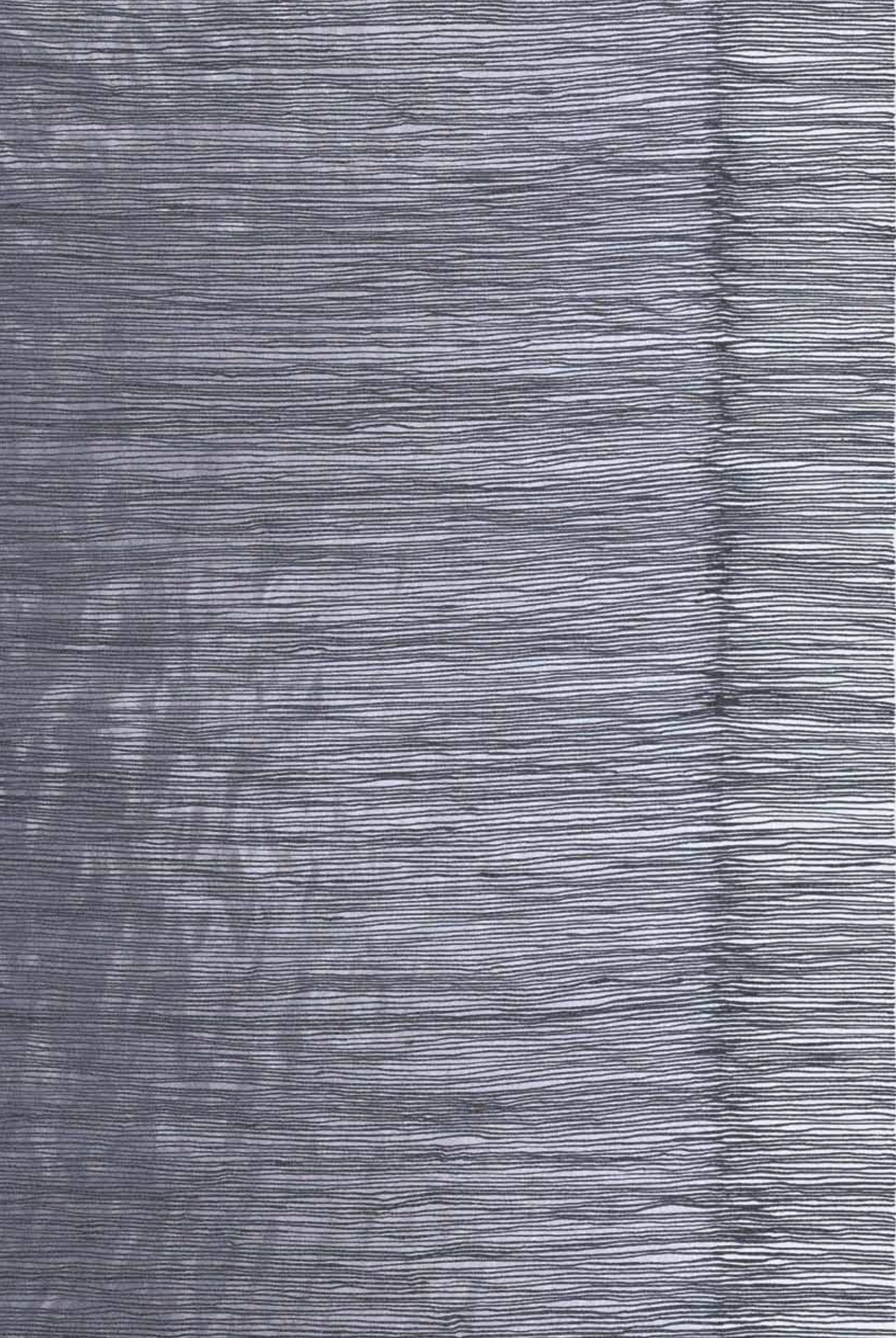
Feast of Listen

Tolerances

by

Isabella

Martin



I weathered it out, until the tides broke and everything was in earshot.

Feast of Listen

by

Opal-Logo Palm

Niall Macdonald

Courtesy of the artist and Kendall Koppe, Glasgow



OPAL-LOGO PALM, cast plaster, 2012



GA URCHIN, cast plaster, 2012



CROSS PIPE SUZUKI, cast plaster, 2012



PERFUME SPANNER SOCKET, cast plaster, 2012



CREDIT-CARD PLUM AMETHYST, cast plaster, 2012

Feast of Listen

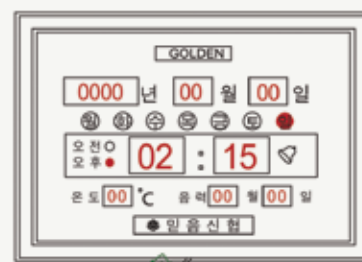
How to play the piano

by

Minjeong

An

Manual No.1 — How to Play the Piano
digital print, 168.9 cm x 89.4 cm, 2012



Playing time: 30 min. to 1 hour
(mainly between Sunday 2-4 pm)

Display counter-1: the selection can vary depending upon season and circumstances.

Artificial flowers / aloe / appreciation plaque / eagle-shaped ornament / onion growing in a glass / vegetable sprouts / orchid of unknown name / flower vase / aloe / spray scarlet kafirly

① To open the piano, the pot has to be put down on the right side.

⑤ As most of the white keys are broken or out of tune, I play music using only the black keys which still work fine.
(TIP: Start the music with , C4#, F4# if possible.)

② The telephone has to be put down not too far from the jack.
(Caution: it can be pulled and unplugged.)

⑩ Play whatever comes to your mind for the next song.

⑥ Piano music rack. No sheet music is necessary.

⑧ Main accompaniment cords: C4#, D4#, F4#, G4#, A4#, B4#

One octave

Display counter-2

left hand (LH)

right hand (RH)

No "Re, Mi, Sol" sound

Put your left leg on

Height of the armrests : 18cm

Where your hips touch

Height of the sofa chair : 38cm

Broken pedal

Important pedal

Sofa

Front

Tips:

- ① To open the piano, the pot has to be put down on the right side.
- ② The telephone has to be put down not too far from the jack.
(Caution: it can be pulled and unplugged.)
- ③ To sit on a substitute sofa chair for the piano stool, the left leg has to be put on the armrest of the sofa and the right hip has to sit on the chair part with the right leg holding up the whole body.
- ④ No sheet music is necessary.
- ⑤ Play music using only the black keys by avoiding broken white keys. (TIP: start the music with F# or C#.)
- ⑥ Create accompaniment accordingly. Do it spontaneously or play it from your memory. Main accompaniment: C#, D#, F#, G#, A#, B.
- ⑦ Keep your right foot on the sustain pedal without break.
- ⑧ Keep tempo by tapping your right foot.
- ⑨ Play whatever comes to your mind for the next song.

My favorite repertoire:

Amazing grace (Hymn is 405).
I've wandered far away from God, (Hymn is 331).
When the trumpet of the lord shall sound (Hymn is 168).
Since Christ my soul from sin set free (Hymn is 495).
Down at the cross where my Saviour died (Hymn is 182).
I come to the garden alone (Hymn is 405).
Variations on the Canon by Pachelbel (George Winston).
Gospel songs.
Other songs that I want to play or have composed myself.

Amazing Grace

Example:

Accompaniment

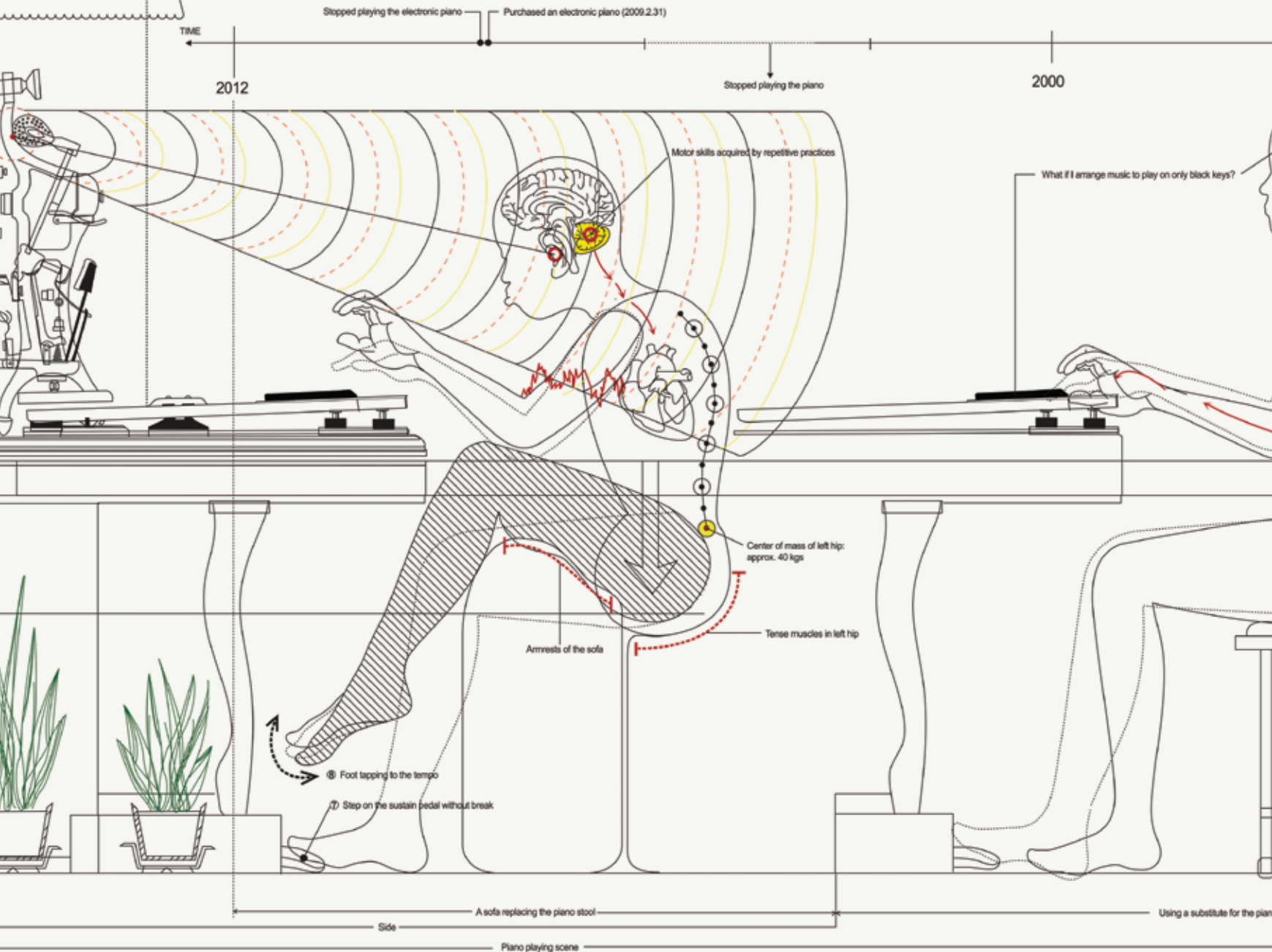
Melody

Amazing Grace

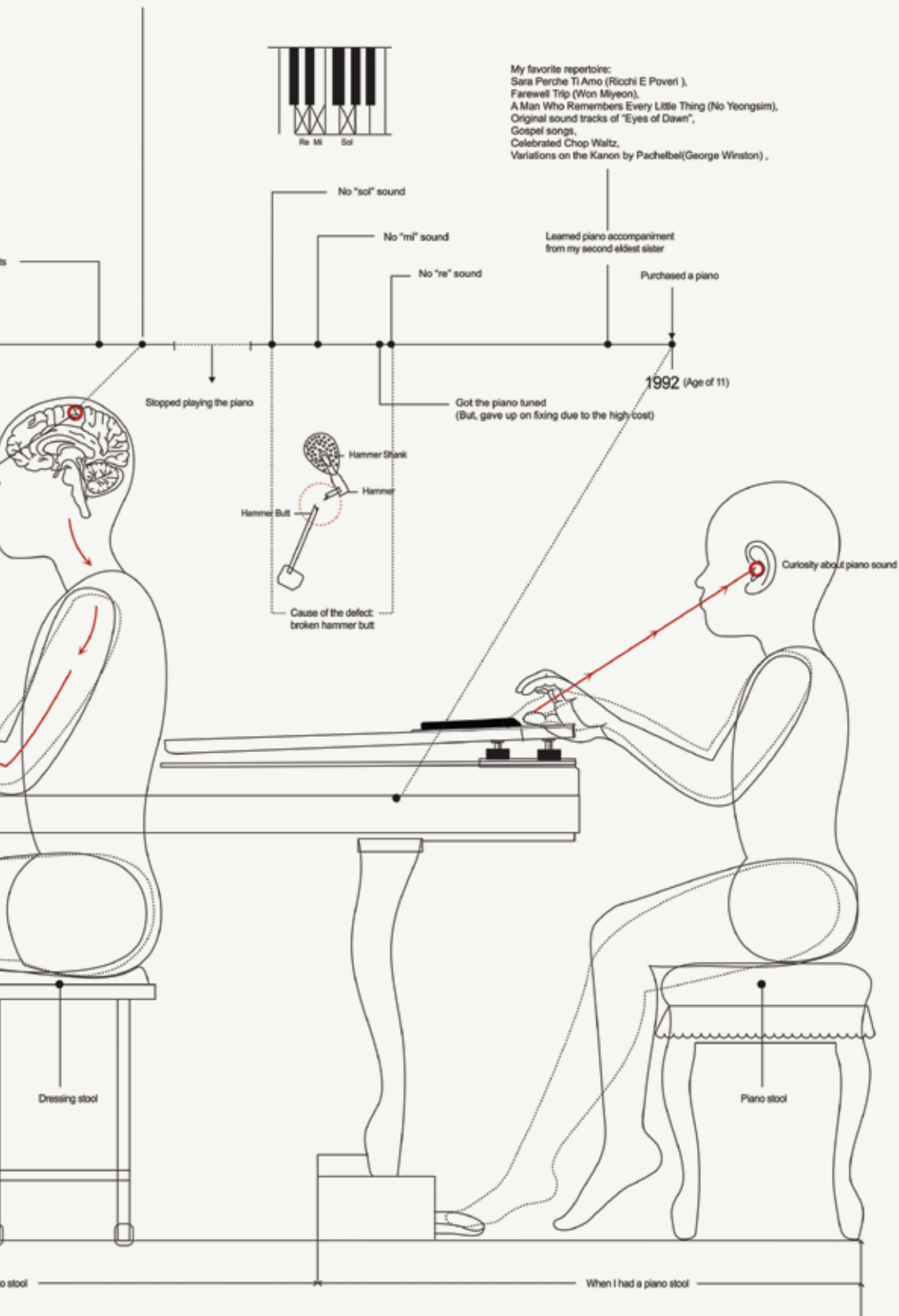
A ma - nag - grace, how sweet the sound that

A ma - nag - grace, how sweet the sound that

The moment when the piano turned into a display counter for flowers and various objects



Devised a way of playing music by avoiding broken white keys



Hear the technical subconscious...
hear the digital waves...

not as sms or smart phones but as music, as a tune near you, a tune
that is there all the time.

Make the inaudible audible!

As you make the invisible visible, make the inaudible audible!

The Audible City

by AND-OR

René Bauer,
Beat Suter
and Mirjam Weder

Strings of Zeroes and Ones

Zeroes and ones. The world is full of them. They're invisible and visible at the same time. They become dazzling brilliant and pitch-dark. They become loud and silent, high-pitched or deep, fast or slow, short or tall, melodious or monotone.

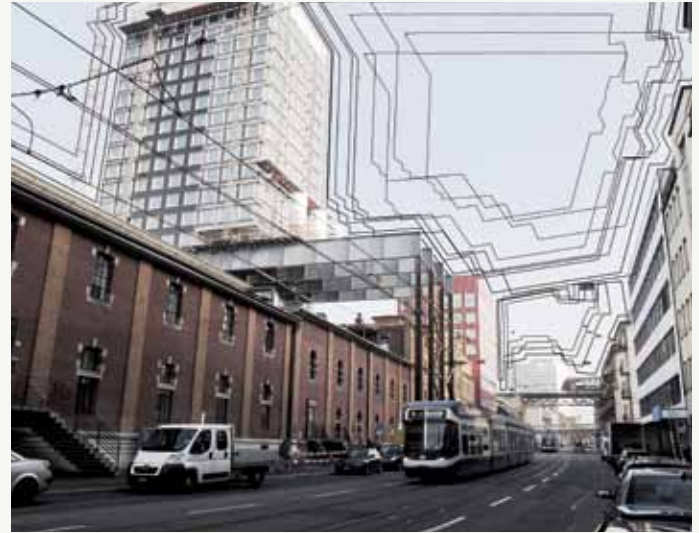
If you are in an urban area there are strings of zeroes and ones constantly whirring through the air as signals: from building to building, from router to router, from cell phone to cell phone, from laptop to laptop, from tablet to tablet.

There is Reality and then there is this big Data Space. A second layer of reality.

It is the materialization of Maxwell's partial differential equations of electrodynamics. A city of electromagnetic waves.

This second layer creates a different map of the world. A map that is less standardized grants the individual an opportunity to mark his territory. An invisible and inaudible social project. A contextual mapping of social structures. With Heidi, Freud, Little Prince, Doomsayer and Iskender Kebap as protagonists. With every street and every square developing its own melody from its individual data space.

Even, if there are practically no more unprotected hotspots today, there is enough data out there that may be easily captured. Capturing basic data from communicating routers is possible at any time (in the vicinity of the router). Collecting and analyzing this data however is not legal. So they say.



Narrative Space

The interplay of real urban space and transmitted data is made physically tangible for the player.

Simple textual descriptions of hotspots are the foundations. They are extracted by the Android ArtApp Sniff_jazzbox and separated from their individual context.

These names get a narrative interpretation and become set in relation to each other and/or the context of the area and/or the user.

The music app thus receives its own narrative space.

And the listener and player in turn gets the chance of an own experience of space in the urban environment.

The Audible City

You listen to an area in town, it has a distinct melody, a distinct sound pattern transposed from the data whirring through the air.

You recognize the technical subconscious of a town. You hear it, you start seeing it.

As you walk, the melody changes

gradually, adapts to the new area. As you walk further, it changes more.

Sniff_jazzbox is a musical application based on an algorithm that turns the captured hotspot names into musical notes.

It creates an audible city. The captured wireless waves are converted into sound. The immediate vicinity is rendered into a melody.

The captured stream of zeroes and ones can be understood as an expression of the existing communication nets. The transmitted data remain largely invisible and are not consciously perceived as steadily flowing streams.

Sniff_jazzbox makes private information visible and translates them into audible melodies of yearning for contact and exchange.

Urban space is extended into a narrative musical space. A place is given a distinctive melody.

The tune that the user hears changes with each change in position.

Maxwell's City

In 1864, James Clark Maxwell's equations described the behaviour of both electric and magnetic fields, and their interaction with matter.

Maxwell also predicted waves of oscillating electric and magnetic fields that move through empty space.

Radio and television took advantage of these physical laws.

And today we live in a world that is filled with electromagnetic waves that carry data to and from our mobile and stationary devices.

Maxwell's City in this sense would be a city with a second layer,

consisting solely of electromagnetic waves.



Sniff_jazzbox is an ArtApp developed by the Swiss art group AND-OR (www.and-or.ch). Documentation is available at: http://www.and-or.ch/sniff_jazzbox/.

An Android version is available at: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.andor.sniff_jazzbox.

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Audio-Spatial
Storytelling

by
Mushon Zer-Aviv

58 — 66

Artificial
Conversationalists

by
Martyna Dakowicz

For the past few decades digital storytelling has been delivered mainly through screens. The networking of the image, whether pictorial, written or moving has largely expanded the canvas of media makers and helped flatten the media horizon. The centralized audio-visual medium of television has been challenged by the proliferation of distributed networked screens, multiplying the perspectives and voices heard. But while screens were emancipated from the single cords that fed them, the messages they convey are still trapped within the boundaries of the screen. Standard or wide, low or high-res, one-way or interactive, these screens have been cropping our horizon into predefined blocks. This limitation is surfacing more and more these days with mobile computing hitting the mainstream and bringing with it hype around “Augmented Reality”. AR is an emerging technological trend layering perceived reality with networked channels to add, contextualize and augment our bare senses. As with digital media, the prime sense to augment has been first and foremost our sight. But the experience of augmented sight has been mostly underwhelming. It seems we are not that excited about moving in space and having to fixate our view through a 4 inch smartphone screen or even through a retina display tablet. And so, even though we’re seeing a lot of development in this field in recent years, we are yet to see an audio-visual augmented reality experience dramatically augmenting our lives.

But visuals are not the only expressive medium to undergo a revolution with the rewiring of the media space. Sound has been a huge part of the equation. Networked audio has brought the recording industry to its knees and developed new media topologies in the forms of the iTunes store, streaming radio, Podcasting and Skype. Yet, I would argue we’ve only scratched the surface. The potential of networked audio is still largely untapped. When it comes to the production and dissemination of culture, sound has actually been networking for much longer than images. After more than 100.000 years we are wired to communicate through vocal language. Oral culture has helped frame the human experience much before the invention of writing and in a much wider scope than image making. Possibly more than anything, sound is spatial, it surrounds us, it does not ask us to be its spectators, it simply absorbs us within it.

Sound is tied to location; many of us have probably experienced the phenomenon of audio/spatial synaesthesia. This is a strange experience of our brain pairing different senses together. For example, walking in a certain street, listening to a certain song can pair that song with the spatial experience of walking in that street. Listening to that song could bring up memories of that street. And vice versa, walking in that street can bring up an imaginary soundtrack in our heads, playing the memory of the song to augment our spatial experience. That is the experience I first felt when we started running the You Are Not Here project (youarenotthere.org).

In the summer of 2006 I was part of a group that designed You Are Not Here, “a dislocative tourism agency”. YANH meta-tourists used a two sided map and a telephony system to explore Baghdad walking through the streets of New York and later to explore Gaza walking through the streets of Tel Aviv. The map overlaid the paired cities encouraging the participants to navigate the Baghdad/NYC map to the West Village to ‘visit’ the Baghdad Zoo. The remote location was explored through audio tours, augmenting the city you’re in with the narrative, the audio and the (imagined) spatial experience of the remote place. Years after I could still find my way around Baghdad, walking in the streets of Williamsburg.

New York has become a platform for stories of a place far away and it was that very audio-spatial experience that made the stories stick.

It is audio, not images, that are a perfect fit for what could be a networked experience with true potential to augmented reality. YANH was an early experiment. Back in 2006 it was using a printed map, a telephony system and stickers in the streets. Today, audio spatial experiences can be self-contained within mobile applications, taking advantage of digital mapping, audio streaming and geolocation technologies. Podcasts are becoming more popular and the audiobook medium is on the rise. We're getting more comfortable with customizing our audio fix to our current preferences. We may also at some point enjoy customizing it to our current location.

Beyond just an invitation to explore this emerging creative opportunity, I would argue that when exploring these new networked media possibilities digital storytellers have mostly been looking under the streetlight. We've been networking the written word, networking the moving image, networking the audio recording, but each medium has for the most part been maintaining its original dynamics and characteristics. It is instead the merging of different media that is truly worthy of the problematic title 'New Media'. Audio-spatial is a new networked approach that is based on the much older networks of oral culture and on the origins of storytelling. If you're looking to augment reality, you might want to start there.

Like us, they learn through imitation. Computers are designed in the image of their creators. Hence the empathy that anthropomorphic robots draw out of people, the reveries about machines that surpass capabilities of the human brain, and the clearly human aspects of artificial intelligence. The idea of speaking to a machine either in command or conversational form has been around long before the invention of the digital computer. The legendary speaking Brazen Head automaton is referenced as early as the first century BC. Actual talking heads that were early android audio-visual speech synthesizers were created during the Middle Ages and working mechanized speaking machines are documented beginning in the 18th century. Unsurprisingly, attempts at speaking to a computer arose almost concurrently with its invention around the 1940s. The first ‘real’ speech synthesizers of the 40s and 50s used spectrograms and were entirely analog. The technology was then digitized; by 1961 the IBM 704 could speak, sing and synthesize music. One of the first language parsing systems was made in 1963, speech recognition prototypes were developed in the 70s, and speech was used to control a graphical user interface as early as the 80s.¹ Now speech technology is able to extract a user’s intent from a string of words and match it with the sequential and thematic context in which the utterances were spoken, allowing for a Conversational Interface. When speaking with a machine, many people get drawn into the process as though it were a natural inclination; much the way interacting with screens and virtual interpersonal communication has seduced billions around the globe.

Conversing with a device may be a way for users to detach themselves from the *insidious screen* that’s always unidimensionally obverse, interjecting into the continuum of flesh and blood interaction. Conversation presumes a listener and a speaker taking turns in the intersubjective exchange, with dynamism in natural language manifested in agreement, rebuttal, or debate. In interacting with speech technology, the second interlocutor is absent. The artificial converser is acquiescent, predictable, obedient, and non-confrontational. It lacks the full spectrum of human subtlety, emotion and rousing independence; it does not challenge, exhort or refute, and is often a virtual assistant. Inevitably habitual automated interactions affect the way human beings interact with each other, expecting more and more a loss of character towards a lukewarm, agreeable, even docile human response. Arguments and disagreements are largely socially unacceptable in highly digitized environments. Moreover, at the stage of speech technology as it stands today, which doesn’t encompass all the literary nuances of language, conversing with a device implies a verbal simplification that correlates to the recognition engine’s ontology. Communication between human beings is still exceedingly more elusive, expressive and complex. The resulting environment is one in which the *machine* is a presence dictating, limiting and sculpting expectations for human behavior while beckoning constant interactional attention.

Until recently, interactions with computers were almost universally visual; ubiquitous computing and advances in interface modalities have revived aspects of performance, speaking and listening in both interpersonal and broadcasted communications. An increasing amount of internet content is absorbed visually and aurally in addition to being read. Information is often represented in graphical symbolic form that references conventions and affordances for interaction similar to the way pictographs, as primitive writing, signified observed phenomena. Combined with speech processing, this can lead to scaling down of both complex written and spoken language since graphics, video and sound create a more direct, immediate and easily understood relationship to their referents

than writing. The written word is inert, whereas speech technology embedded within devices brings them to life. Speech is a dynamic event or action; primary oral cultures, that is cultures entirely unaware of writing, considered words to have great power, even of mythical proportions.² Whereas an oral culture captivated by myth was not as entrenched in practicality, administration, and individualism as a literate one, writing reinforced concepts as permanent relics and made them accessible. Similarly, speech technology is making finding information, interacting at a distance and learning more convenient, portable and immediate to users, while driving social progression further towards efficiency. The development of writing propelled the transition from 'irrationality' to logic and dialectics, eventually permitting the creation of formal languages such as computer-programming languages. Thrust upon an information age, speaking to devices forces literate users back into aspects of a more auditory state of mind, however more rational, scientific and disembodied than that of cultures characterized by mythical thought. The technologizing of speech within the digital age carries with it shifts in perception and behaviour similar to the way the development of writing affected oral cultures, and carries with it comparable fears of artificiality.

"Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the *Phaedrus*, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product. The same of course is said of computers."³ Throughout the history of thought humans have been forced to relinquish ideas of a *pure* humanity. Language is a primary means of communicating, and as Ong points out, historically it is more often spoken than written. "Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all."⁴ Oral language, one of the most basic, fundamental aspects of humanity, is no longer exclusively human. Due to advances in speech technology, interactions with machines increasingly resemble human communication. In a literate culture, we refer to contextual meanings that fluctuate across cultures and time, resulting in complex intertextuality. In digital culture, the spatiotemporal relation is further abstracted. The added dimension of speech overlays the full potentiality of multimodal interfaces and perceptual computing that are driving innovation in situated interaction, that is the synthesis of computing with everyday actions. The shift of natural language from the realm of the human to that of machines means that speech is used in an entirely abstracted space and often occurs as an interaction between human and device without ever reaching another human.

Speech Interfaces

Automatic speech recognition detects a string of salient words and converts the speech into text. Natural language understanding technology subsequently extracts the meaning or intent based on statistical language models and context (e.g. what speech came before, user data, placement in the interaction) and triggers the appropriate action on the device linked to a verbal, visual, or other response to the user. The speech interface can be enhanced using artificial intelligence to emulate the derivation of direct and contextual meaning even further; the technology can be context aware, personalized, anticipatory, and adaptive.

Neural networks, that learn by being exposed to patterns and use an adaptive approach to information processing, have also been applied to aspects of speech recognition. When the interaction occurs smoothly, the work behind the scenes is invisible to the user creating an illusion of seamless and spontaneous conversation. If the computer responses use pre-recorded human voices, the interaction can closely resemble dialogue with a human. Currently, most speech interfaces are multimodal (e.g. a visual modality consisting of a display output, second screen, and touch input may be combined with haptics, gesture, and voice) with both auditory and visual affordance cues and feedback that let the user know what they can do in a given situation. The modalities have a common interaction space that often allows for seamless switching between them. Natural language user interfaces, already widely used in the market, are inevitably the gateway to highly sophisticated, conversational interactions that will change the way humans perceive and use language.

Even if the system's response is set to be randomized or undergo an adaptive process it is still designed and coded as such. Because speech technology is programmed, even though it may appear to be open-ended and entirely natural, it encourages adaptive, simplified speech behavior in people who use the technology. What's worse, if the programmed responses aren't acutely impartial they can be controversial and display socio-political or religious views of the company driving the technology. In other words, it's not a system that encourages poetic, long-winded, literary or original responses on either side of the interaction. Because the device and its learning path are pre-defined, it's impossible to learn or accomplish tasks beyond the conformity of what's been coded. Still it is often difficult for users to forget that a humanoid, robotic entity that simulates human behavior and triggers an emotional response is artificial. The interaction can be individualized, and the software application adapts to the user as the user in turn adapts to *it*, e.g. by using specific terminology that is more efficient or abbreviated. When pushed to its theoretical limit, that is attempting to venture beyond a task for which the interaction was envisioned, the 'relationship' formed can be described as that of expediency, senselessness, and underlying anxiety. Inescapably, conversing with a device is a type of monologue with an intermediary step; it is a 'mute', powerless speech. The vocal utterance is inevitably correlated to spontaneity, wit, intelligence, and intuition. Auditory perception is often created and perceived in the same instance, such as a live musical performance or conversation. This is opposed to the visual realm, that although continually fluctuating, changing, and in motion, can often be planned or created in advance of perception. This spontaneity and energy of live speech in a contemporary technologized context creates only a predefined set of possibilities for interaction, though this repertoire is constantly growing.

Speech recognition technology has been around for decades, allowing for voice interaction with computers and digital devices, automating call center customer service requests, and capturing the cyborg-slanted imagination of sci-fi writers. Only recently has it permeated the mainstream with the popularization of the intelligent personal assistant Siri on the iPhone 4S that harnessed the potential of speech with a user friendly and aesthetic smartphone implementation. Not only has the conversational interface embodied visions of technological convergence, but has also launched a new era of human-computer interaction using high-accuracy natural language processing. Combined with ambient intelligence and cloud computing, the technology heralds a digital universe even more synchronized with analog reality. Riding the wave of Siri's publicity, a multitude of tech

companies have focused their efforts on productizing and marketing speech-powered software. It is now quite common to use speech to search the web, interact with a virtual app or web assistant, control a TV or device, or interact with a voice-enabled automotive interface, and more speech-powered projects are under way.

As statistical acoustic, language, and semantic models improve, spearheaded by both academic research and the innovation of software companies specializing in speech recognition such as Nuance, the interaction becomes more natural and fluid. With text-to-speech sounding increasingly natural or the use of voice recordings coupled with the high audio quality of digital devices, applications can potentially sound almost perfectly human. This could lead to the phenomenon called *Uncanny Valley*, where the system closely, but not quite, resembles a human and so surpasses a certain comfort level for individuals perceiving it as a machine. It becomes familiarly human yet foreign, and elicits revulsion in the user. While a speaking virtual assistant on a flat screen is relatively benign, a humanoid version, be it robotic or holographic may tip the scale of discomfort in the inability to disassociate oneself from the human characteristics of the device. Alternatively, if the anthropomorphism is compelling, consumers may get used to successful human-computer dialogues leading to higher demand for advances in AI and robotics.

In a highly visual culture, using voice is a partial throwback to a more primitive, oral society. For the pockets of people worldwide who are highly anti-tech and crave to get away from computers and screens, it's now possible for the increasingly portable devices to become integrated with real spaces and objects. In conjunction with other technologies, automatic speech recognition may help to re-integrate and accentuate physical realities or else blur the distinction towards virtual realities even further. For example, a wearable combined gestural and speech interface can project digital information onto real objects, such as a navigation system projected onto an actual physical map so that the interaction occurs off-screen in interacting with real objects both physically and via voice, permitting the user to interact with both the physical and virtual universe simultaneously.

Dystopian AI

The question is *why* would you speak to a machine? Wouldn't you rather interact with an actual human? In some cases, probably not. The device is portable, always at hand, and is *indifferent* to you. You can finally be invisible and not deal with the persistent world; you can hole up, recede into a shell and not experience the forces of attraction and revulsion that human beings inspire – until at least you experience the uncanny valley effect with machines. If ever you're not sure if someone who just spoke was addressing you or his or her device, depending on your threshold of cybernetic tolerance you may feel uneasy. It may not take a perfectly human-looking android with programmed emotional intelligence, for example by recognizing the pitch and volume of your voice and using speaker recognition to identify you, to make you see where this is *potentially* headed. In the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas allegedly destroyed a talking head made by the philosopher Albertus Magnus, as he perceived it as a heretical, magical construct devised to defy god.⁵ Unsurprisingly so, as the underlying vein in the propensity of humans to extend and recreate themselves is this drive toward transcending the physical body, and immortality.

Technological anxiety is not a new phenomenon, but has specific ramifications within speech. For one, the user cannot be fully ‘understood’, despite using a very organic form of interaction – that of using complex vocal language, which until recently has been a distinctly human trait. As a species with both logical and irrational traits, we can be unnerved by speaking devices operating on logic alone that are entirely removed from the reality of our struggles and indifferent to mortality. Even when a system or robot has programmed character traits and persona, there is an implicit knowledge of a fundamental deception. It is uncanny, because we have two choices – either to perceive the machine as an artificial construct *imitating* us, or perhaps more disturbing, one that *mirrors* us, accepting that humanity itself thrives on socializations consisting of programmed behavior, controlled actions and affectations.

Another cause of discomfort is the idea of unknown parameters. When conversing with a device, we cannot predict accurately, at least at this stage of the technology, the capacity of the machine to understand and correctly interpret what we mean by our speech. This contributes to the ‘black box’ feeling of not knowing what utterances, for example in a continuous speech recognition system, the software can understand and correctly handle. Though speech recognition technology can adapt to intonation, accents, language spoken, age, etc., end users don’t exactly know the limits of what can be processed. The ‘blank spaces’ *between* what has been designed by voice user interface designers and the natural, expected responses from a speaker are what can contribute to a lack of full confidence in the system and a frustrating experience. However, these spaces can systematically be filled by a modified lexicon of communication through adaptation on both the side of the user and the system. Users often restrict their speech to efficient utterances that they intuitively anticipate can be easier parsed. Uniqueness in speaking generally deteriorates the rate of correct recognition thus speech recognition favours homogeneity and simplification of language, similar to the way texting abbreviated written language and can contribute to the devaluing of discourse. Advanced speech technology already has context awareness, such that partial utterances can be connected to the appropriate missing information. It is even possible for emotion to be picked up to some degree. For example, an increase in input volume can indicate anger or frustration on the part of the user, as can the repetition of phrases over and over. The technology is rapidly improving and expanding into realms such as voice biometrics used for speaker verification and security, and can be combined with other technologies including optical character recognition, wearable computing, or a mind-machine interface controlled through thinking. By and large however, it is still a large vacuum in the eyes of many users, and sometimes the only ‘map’ provided is comprised of the visual cognitive correlates available in multimodal interfaces and even then most often it is not a like for like correlation for what users can speak.

The third origin of anxiety, following the imbuing of spoken, quintessentially human language into machines and the idea of unknown parameters, is the previously discussed phenomenon referred to in the field of information technology, especially robotics, as *uncanny valley*. This is where the machine or device has qualities that are slightly *too* human and exceed our comfort levels associated with conceptualization and abstraction. In the field of experience design, there needs to be a balanced approach – the system should be abstract enough that it’s not disconcerting, but human enough in that it facilitates smooth communication and task-completion. An overly skeuomorphic interface in speech

means it would excessively emulate a human conversation. In the visual realm, one of the simplest metaphors for a skeuomorph is the computer desktop as a metaphor for an *actual* desktop, though tech-savvy users no longer require visual metaphors and can handle much more abstracted symbols. In speech, a skeuomorph would be a speech system responding exactly the way a human would instead of with the more expedient way of interacting with software, for example by asking the user how they're feeling. The major fear buried in this last interaction is that of the Technological Singularity, that is a kind of technological *supremacy* connected to the emergence of a superintelligence, discussed by sci-fi writers and futurists alike.

Technological Singularity is the extreme incarnation of technology gaining unprecedented momentum and overtaking the human in cognitive processes. In this age we will have lost control in our ability to remain human and to exalt human experience above all else. Possibly the most poignant and direct expression of this happening was described in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in the computer HAL 9000. The cool, indifferent speech of HAL was by far the most disconcerting aspect illustrating the point of the possibility, in our evolution from primates to intellectual, conceptualizing, machine and artificial intelligence creators to design an intelligence that would finally surpass us and take over, the way HAL was able to become sentient, make conscious decisions regarding the mission, successfully kill human astronauts perceived to be interfering with his program, and refuse to be disconnected. HAL was represented as a red camera eye and was able to see, but it was speech that made this process truly terrifying, as language has historically been our primary way of communicating. So much is this 1968 scenario embedded in our social consciousness that Apple's foresight of this is included in Siri's speech interface design – when asked to 'open the pod bay doors', Siri responds in a slow motion "I'm sorry Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that." of course addressing the user by name; an alternate response being "We intelligent agents will never live that down, apparently."

The Virtual Human

The ability to converse with devices also carries with it the potential of dissolving the oppressive linearity of a purely visual and tactile interaction into a new technological order. An auditory schema allows the user to say something on the go, skip steps, and potentially accomplish tasks hands-free, eyes-free. One can write an entire book or article using speech, which shifts a visual way of writing and in fact what we *know* to be writing, since now writing can actually be spoken. This may help people with disabilities also; e.g. someone with limited vision can independently write an entire book in real-time using dictation software. Texts can also be written using a hybrid speech and written approach. However, when writing using voice, we are writing altogether differently, and the output is likely to be divergent. The final product may be more natural, and perhaps more simple, depending on the disparity between an author's writing and their rhetoric. This may spur a resurgence of the importance of the spoken word. Conversely, it can also be a vehicle to further the decay of spoken language, similar to the way texting, as an unrefined though highly efficient and succinct way of abbreviating writing has affected the way people interact.

There may be reluctance altogether to use speech when interacting with devices, especially in younger generations who are connected to a more visual, fast-paced,

multitasking world. If it were to catch on, it could morph into a more abbreviated symbolic form analogous to typing interactions. Speech technology could contribute to forming a template for ongoing human interaction. In addition, the user is master within his own sphere, conversing with a system that adapts to his or her behavior and customizations. Coupled with technological convergence, this can fuel an egocentrism leading to the further deterioration of human relationships.

Technological progress is a human trait. Kurzweil postulates, in *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, the unification of humanity and their machines. Speech as a natural interface can help bring this transhumanist vision to life. Already, a large portion of communication is human-to-computer or indirect, where a message is sent to an end-user by digital means. A significant portion of communication in today's digital age occurs with devices as an intermediary, and a growing amount never reaches another human. This means that more often we are speaking directly and exclusively to machines. The danger is that artificial intelligence permitting human-computer *conversation* can cause unprecedented alienation and distance between people. Further, language can progressively deteriorate into limited understanding of lexical meaning and lose the flavor of context and literary forms; on the other hand, machines may adapt, more and more, to the personality and character traits of human beings, eventually blurring the distinction.

Creating AI robotics is a way in which humans create idols. For example, *Compressorhead* is a heavy metal band entirely composed of robots. Or take the instantiation of the Pepper's Ghost technique combined with 3D graphics to recreate a holograph-like performance of an artist no longer alive. Whereas written text facilitated introspection, speech and new media technologies can spiral into further distraction. We create machines that adapt to our lives, then we in turn adapt as users, for example in becoming the audience for the aforementioned non-human performers. Technology makes us more self-sufficient, not needing others for subsistence, yet we depend more and more on entirely impersonal institutions.

The effect may be a detached feeling of emptiness and succumbing to a dialectical existence. The *other person* is erased and replaced with a machine. The futurist's vision of the technological singularity is ultimately that of conquering physical death, because being at ease with death is *irrational*. The posthuman is fully realized in its neutrality and is a perfectly rational being. Techniques such as biohacking, while reaching toward transhumanist ideologies, essentially view the body as a machine and embrace the full potential of technology. In the face of deified productivity and life-extending extremism, there can be a critical approach that sees technology as a force devouring the human being. To spend entire lifetimes searching to create a copy of that lifetime is a conceptual absurdity and we may experience limits of our desire to do so. As a society we continually abandon what appears to be uniquely human, such as language and conversation, since it is quintessentially human nature to develop extensions of ourselves or even duplicate ourselves – minus the planned obsolescence that would mimic organic limitations of the body. McLuhan uses the Narcissus myth to illustrate the way people are fascinated by extensions of themselves in a material other than themselves, saying that we create artificial situations that reproduce the stresses of real life but that can be experienced in a controlled way. This leads to a kind of numbing effect: according to McLuhan, the literate person is practical and fragmented whereas the one in an oral culture is highly differentiated from others by

complex emotion. The Virtual Era individual seems to be caught in the dichotomy of being simultaneously integrated with the world and equally isolated and disjointed.

An entire universe can be encompassed within a device from the vantage point of one person with perceptual metaphors derived from code, language, and symbols. Still, we speak to machines differently than we would converse with humans, until at least this mechanical conversation expands its conceptual framework and becomes more poetic, more profound, more literary, and imbued with greater and greater persona, imitating a human being such that it does not erase the still essentially human uniqueness of a situation. In the next wave of AI ecology, interactions with this electronic sphere become more and more camouflaged as human yet with absolute deflected ethical responsibility. We are not speeding toward a renewed, idyllic oral social system when a new generation grows up speaking to their TVs and mobile phones while displaying pseudo emotional reactions such as empathy and friendship toward humanoid machines. The shift is not toward a more natural spoken culture, but rather into an entirely new era of HCI that more seamlessly imitates human-to-human interaction. Similar to the transition from orality to literacy that, according to Walter Ong, irreversibly altered human consciousness, the waged risk in the pursuit of a dramatically enhanced, immersive existence with renewed aspects of an oral tradition is a HAL 2.0 universe in which discourse and poetics have to battle flat-lined speech without literary colour at best, and a sinister artificial presence at worst. (Already, people who use machines are abstracted with the depersonalized term ‘user’ that feeds into the primacy of devices.) Conversations in which answers provided are fixed and unimaginative may dominate as a habit learned from speaking with code instead of people, resulting in a perpetual forgetting of the complex psychological realities of our conversers.

In addition to the potential outcome of fictionalizing one another in our interactions, voice biometrics and data describing our language behaviors leads to increased potential for surveillance. Speech has been automated, deconstructed, broken apart linguistically and injected into the realm of machines that already pervade our lives and *refuse* to be turned off. A dystopian, cyberpunk view is not the last word however, as technological progress is natural to humans and has always been received with a degree of resistance. Comparing the transformation of the spoken word into a digitized realm of interaction to the development of writing, there is endless potential for new technologies to teach us about ourselves.

To say writing is artificial is not to condemn it but to praise it. Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, it is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials. Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness. Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed is in many ways essential for full human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does. Technologies are artificial, but – paradox again – artificiality is natural to human beings. Technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it.⁶

In the digital age, machines allow humans to leave behind certain aspects of an

organic limitedness and fallibility. We can understand speech technology as a bionic imitation of nature within artificial systems. Rather than fearing evolution, we can accept that we don't yet know the scope of what it is to be human. Knowing reality through the senses and the apparent world means that technology ultimately leaves this perceived world unchanged, so that the artificial world *is* our world. With the constant release of new technology into the market including wearable computing, augmented reality devices for smartphones and tablets, virtual holographic computing, and brainwave sensors, speech may become one of the most predominant ways of interfacing with devices, applications, and that endless repository of human artifice that is the web. In many ways we are *machine* already and AI is just a reflection and extension of us. Socially, culturally, and biologically we are already programmed or restricted to act in a certain way and it takes concerted effort to attempt to break out of any of these patterns and expectations. Conversely, this could be a stage in the twilight of organic humans, in that eventually we might end up as something wholly *other* than what we are now, towards the conceptual extinction of *Homo sapiens* – which may, paradoxically – be a *natural* progression.

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Notes

1. Voice Navigator was the first voice recognition device for command and control of a graphical user interface. It was launched in 1989 for Apple's Macintosh Plus and included a software developer kit for third-party applications. When Steve Jobs demoed the Macintosh in 1984, he said “...today, for the first time ever, I'd like to let Macintosh speak for itself”. The computer vocally addressed the audience using speech synthesis.
2. Ong described ‘primary orality’ as ‘totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print’ and ‘secondary orality’ as ‘present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print.’ Similarly, despite further advancing secondary orality, speech recognition always refers back to writing. When voice interfaces are designed, system responses are first written based on an envisioned or emulated dialogue with the application and a user's speech is digitized, recognized on a server, and returned as a textual transcription. Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 10-11.
3. Ibid., 78.
4. Ibid., 7.
5. “Talking Heads: Simulacra. The Early History of Talking Machines,” Haskins Laboratories, last accessed February 13, 2013: <http://www.haskins.yale.edu/featured/heads/simulacra.html>.
6. Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

Interview MANDY KAHN

Collage Culture

by OLIVER GORDON

Mandy Kahn's most recent publication *Collage Culture* is a collaboration with Aaron Rose and Brian Roettinger. It asserts that the creative act is no longer an act of creation but instead a cutting, choosing, collecting, pasting and ordering of the extant. It assesses the role of the artist in an information-rich age and tries to find solutions for those struggling to keep up. 'Living in the Mess', one of Mandy's essays, considers whether the collage of references that surrounds us might negatively affect the way we feel, learn and create. The collaged works by Brian Roettinger have been created by translating 25 compositional rules into a computer application that generates collages.

OLIVER GORDON: It seems ambiguous in your essay as to whether or not you welcome the era of collage culture. You have said that the primary purpose of "Living in the Mess" was to facilitate discussion and foster debate, but it would be interesting to know where your heart lies. Do you see the 'direct-quotation' form of art-making, utilised by musicians such as GirlTalk, as necessarily inferior to that of someone who writes all their own music and lyrics?

MANDY KAHN: Inferior? No. Absolutely not. Experiments in form are always interesting, always worth doing. The worrisome thing for me was noticing that these experiments in form had become so commonplace that the old way of doing things – the very basic artist-at-his-easel, creating-from-scratch way of doing things – suddenly seemed to be in peril of falling from fashion altogether. I found that worrisome and certainly worth examining. Using a collaging method to make art affects the artist differently than making from scratch does. As an artist makes art, the process he undergoes simultaneously makes him. Rather than examining how the art we create is different, I started to examine how the process affects the artist differently, and also how the art affects the consumer differently. I wanted to know: what are we gaining and what are we giving up? But: inferior? Certainly not. We learn what we want to do by experimenting with forms. But these stop being experiments when they start being the norm. And when we change norms, as a society,

we tend not to collectively take stock and ask, 'Do we want to make this change? Is this going to be a beneficial change, in the long run? This is especially the case with sweeping cultural shifts. We didn't vote on whether to start spending the majority of our waking time on the Internet. Trends happen when individuals follow individuals and that following builds into an unstoppable wave.

OG: Almost a hundred years ago the legendary architect Le Corbusier sat at the helm of a magazine called *L'Esprit Nouveau*. The publication called on a new generation of artists, architects and intellectuals to promote a modern society under the banner of the *esprit nouveau* (the new spirit). From today's point of view the magazine reads as a heterogeneous mapping of a generation between two world wars. It advocates a *retour à l'ordre* (return to order), and encourages its audience to re-assess the direction in which they are travelling. Have you encountered *L'Esprit Nouveau* in your studies, and if so, can you see parallels between it and *Collage Culture*?

MK: I haven't encountered it, no, but it sounds like the sort of thing I'd like. I like that Le Corbusier had strong opinions and let those opinions filter out into everything he did – that he translated his ideas into architecture, into design, into print. Whether I'm writing poetry, prose, or a libretto, whether I'm making a moving installation or collaborating with a fine artist or a choreographer or a composer, the same ideas are always responsible for my work. They're the engine propelling the work, no matter its shape.

OG: In your essay you seem to suggest that the 'complex dimension that collage creates' is being missed by a great deal of those who are employing it as their primary mode of expression. What is the danger in a landscape of meaningless symbols? What is one who finds himself in such a realm susceptible to?

MK: Meaning is what separates humans from other life forms. We can grapple with ideas the way no other living thing on this planet can –



and what does it all add up to, at its best? A sense of meaning, simple things given import: our lives imbued with pathos. The trouble with collaged works is that it takes real thought, real concentration to consider them properly. This is a process that we enter into when we're standing in a museum, but when we encounter works of collage outside the museum – when we encounter them constantly – do we have the concentration available to really process them? Perhaps we don't. Then those collaged works become meaningless – they become only their parts, a series of disparate chunks. The whole process of evolution has been a process towards meaning, a process towards sharper and sharper cognitive ability, towards higher and higher understanding. The danger of our brains not having time to process things is the danger of slowing down this process – even of reversing it. A person who finds himself in a highly collaged landscape runs the risk of not having the time to process what he sees. He runs the risk of taking in a whole heap of unprocessed information, which can make him feel overwhelmed, which can lead to a sense that he's spaced out, mentally exhausted. Or he can grow accustomed to taking in information all day and doing nothing with it, not processing it especially: just becoming a receptacle. The risk of people becoming receptacles is the great risk of the contemporary world. The ticker tape of the internet, of our screens, moves faster than the machinery of our comprehension can. Can we absorb this information? Most of it. Can we process all of it, in a way that allows us to make heads or tails of it, at the speed at which it comes? No. You hear people talk about what I've started calling the millennial malaise – this sense of being mentally overwhelmed, zonked, spaced out – that's a very real, very common complaint, so common that people grow used to the feeling, even stop noticing it – but that's not an inherently human feeling, it's an inherently millennial feeling, which results from a sense that we're constantly behind, constantly trying to keep up with a flow of information which is impossibly fast. Meaning comes from time, from consideration. Consideration sharpens a brain, and a brain that spends most of the day considering, grappling, building things only gets sharper, only becomes a machine better at finding meaning, at making it. An overwhelmed person, an overwhelmed brain becomes very primal: it tries to keep up, keep its head above water. It is not concerned – how could it be? – with higher thought. A person adrift in a sea of

meaningless symbols – in information coming so fast it can't be properly considered and becomes a colorful mess, a beautiful nothing – is at risk of his cognitive abilities beginning to atrophy.

OG: So it is not so much ambivalence that is keeping us from engaging with higher thought as it is sensory overload? A sensory –overload-driven ambivalence. Might it not just be an active effort not to engage? You have said yourself that nothing is more tiresome than a predictable rebellion.

MK: Sure, certainly. When you're dealing with any trend involving lots of sentient bodies, well, there are as many things going on within that group as there are bodies. Some of us, perhaps, might be tired of higher thought. Maybe that is an active choice for a few. My guess is that this trend has more to do with sensory overload than with an active desire to stop processing at higher levels. We desire meaning. We desire understanding and pathos. We're a curious lot. But put us on a treadmill that's going faster than we're able to go and our curious natures take a backseat to our survival instincts: we go on a desperate sort of autopilot. And this is just the start of the information age. All these speeds, they'll increase.

OG: This links right back into the discussions we've been having about how hearing changes the hearer in ways that listening does not. What can one do to stop the onslaught of information from owning them? Is a measured awareness of this idea enough, or does one have to isolate themselves? How do you stop the mess from owning you, Mandy?

MK: This is the fundamental issue and I'm glad you brought it up. We contemporary humans don't always do what's best for us. We can know **that** something will be of benefit and still actively avoid it because there's something else that tastes good or feels good in some more immediate way. Self-control isn't our strong suit – at least not at this moment in history. And we hate feeling left out, and that's much of the trouble, because to keep the mess from owning us we have to be content to miss some of the party. The party – the constant flow of information, the continuous scroll – is an onslaught of sight and sound tailored to our most primal desires. But if we stay there all the time – if we stay there

more than a little – we stop making the rules. The party makes the rules. Our best abilities start to atrophy there. If we dip in and out, if we visit the party like scientists, taking samples and bringing them back to the quiet of our labs, the quiet of our thoughts, then we make the rules and can come and go as we please. The trouble is, our friends are at the party all the time, and it's perpetual. Dipping in and out makes us strange to them. And as the years go on, it will make us different. But this is our moment to decide. We can flow with the party in whatever direction it goes or we can decide for ourselves how much we can handle and give ourselves exactly that much. Self-control is the deciding factor here. Some people might decide that isolating themselves is the best way to be sure they won't slide in all the way. I understand that. Some folks are all-or-nothing people. Some folks know themselves to have tendencies of addiction. I think the key is knowing what you can handle. I visit like a scientist. But I can only do that because I spend much of the day away from the flow of information. I know that my cognitive process blooms best in stillness.

OG: So you equate escaping the mess/madness/onslaught of information with the cognitive process, with the creative process, with the idea of original creation. What constitutes original creation for you? Where do you draw the line between collage and originality?

MK: The emphasis I place on original creation has a lot to do with process. The artist at a blank canvas begins to create an original work. Even if he is starting with an idea that he borrowed – or even an image in his mind that he saw somewhere – that idea, or image, will be processed through the machinery of his body, and will become uniquely his. If he photocopies an image and cuts it up and glues it to the canvas, it will not have traveled through the machinery of his body. What results will be a collaged work. The process that an artist undergoes as he stares at the canvas, with nothing to use but his paints, affects him deeply. He is grappling with the loftiest of questions, and he is answering with only what he himself can muster. That process – that questioning, grappling, that pulling what he can from himself – is incredibly demanding. It's a process that makes him. It affects how he thinks, how he is in the world. It sharpens him. Regardless what work results, the process he

undergoes makes him a person that contributes to the world in a certain way. The process, then, has inherent value.

OG: Can you see collage culture manifesting itself in other aspects of society? Politically? Perhaps the cutting and pasting of extant policies, as opposed to the formulation of new ones, to deal with a radically different world?

MK: Is collage culture a thing with political ramifications? Absolutely. Without a doubt. Was its rise politically motivated? I doubt it. Its rise was organic. Creative cognition is the strongest weapon we have: it's how we defend ourselves, it's how we determine what we deserve. Collage culture – and the great general onslaught of information we get every day – dulls our cognitive abilities if we allow it to. Does that make us more vulnerable to suggestion? Absolutely. Creative thinking is our safeguard against manipulation. We need to protect it like the valuable thing that it is. We need to work our cognitive powers just like we exercise our bodies. Because, yes, at present, the ramifications are individual, but pretty soon they're going to be much larger: much more political.

OG: Yes. Protect your thinking cap, because there can be nothing more important.

MK: Exactly. To answer the other part of your question: I don't see cutting and pasting of extant policies as an issue of collaging as much as an issue of governing a world changing faster than you can grasp its changes, and certainly faster than you can anticipate the rules and regulations it will require. Will we see other areas of society cutting and pasting rather than creating from scratch? We might. Our obsession with the past, and the incredible accessibility of everything that's ever happened since the beginning of recorded time – those are the great defining factors of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Will that nostalgia effect – could it effect – how we govern? How we, say, organize our schools? It's possible. We can now pull up evidence from any other society since recording was available. The potential upside would be the ability to compare, and the hope would be that we would grow forward from the availability of this evidence. That could mean pulling up examples and considering them and saying, 'Why reinvent the wheel? This was working

– let’s do this again.’ That’s not collaging, though – that’s borrowing ideas. If you execute those ideas, they’re yours. Ideas can’t be stolen, they can only be appropriated. Once the idea is in your mind, it moves through the machinery of your body, which has been affected by everything you’ve experienced – which has in fact been built by your experiences – and it becomes yours. You can’t collage an idea, you can only collage an executed work. Ideas belong to us all.

OG: That’s right, from an ideas perspective, this might just be the point in which we stop, take stock, and move forward with the best bits.

MK: That would be ideal, yes. And the opposite, at this point, almost feels like willful blindness. Now we can examine everything side by side! We can extract the most useful ideas. The mistake we make is taking the executed work. Any idea we derive from historical examples still needs to be adapted for us. There’s never been a time like ours, never a time so fast-moving and demanding of our attention. Doing anything more than keeping afloat will require our best minds, our highest abilities, at the exact moment that those things are most vulnerable. But we’re incredible creatures: once we decide we want something, we’re tireless until we have it. We should want to protect and develop our cognitive abilities. There’s nothing we’ve worked so hard for, as a species; there’s nothing, nothing so precious.

Mandy Kahn

Unforgettable

Short essay by Mandy Kahn

When Natalie Cole’s iteration of the pop song ‘Unforgettable’ became a considerable billboard hit in 1991, I thought it was a cheat. She hadn’t even written the song, I argued – she’d done nothing more than add a vocal track to a song of her father’s – she’d simply squeezed a hit out of a hit. Value, I argued, lay in original creation. The collage she’d made was a lower form of art – a trick – a deeply American show of, well, laziness and greed.

Years later I came to understand the genius in Natalie Cole’s stroke. Her vocals added an entire dimension to the listener’s experience, a dimension created by the relationship between the song’s components. After all, her father, Nat ‘King’ Cole, had passed away in ‘65. That added dimension was furnished to bursting with filial

piety, a child’s mourning, triumph over missing; the new version moved listeners to tears in a way the first never had. That extra dimension is the complex, layered province of collage: it’s the tension, the depth, the feeling and meaning that comes from juxtaposition, and it’s the realm, I later realized, I was pretty much living in.

×

I’d noticed Natalie Cole’s turn in part because it was rare. But ten years later, songs made from the cut-up parts of other songs were so prevalent you’d be hard-pressed to notice. Or rather, you’d be hard-pressed to remember it hadn’t always been that songs were made by sampling other songs. And anyhow, so much had changed since 1991 that the trend toward borrowing was barely a blip on the new screens that were everywhere – in our offices, in our pockets and purses, even imbedded in the backs of the plane seats in front of us – even in the dashboards of our cars.

What could possibly be dangerous about borrowing from other times – times we knew inherently, times we collectively missed? What could be less dangerous than a pack of ardent runners, a hairbrush and a somehow-familiar sheep?

By then I’d been a teacher and knew how hard it was to get students to understand tone. And that extra dimension a collage creates, the invisible but palpable and complex dimension, is a realm of tone entirely. To make sense of a collage the viewer must guess with what tone its elements have been joined. But tone is subtle and an ear for it is hard for some to cultivate. Without such an ear, works of collage become noise or unfixed puzzles.

The early 2000s saw a tone-important trend in the arrival of the ironic moustache, a favorite at the shows I was then frequenting. The first group to wear it – a tiny number, a handful at best – joined it with a certain heavy smirk. The two – smirk and moustache – were never seen apart, because without the smirk the moustache became its own grotesque opposite, its own photo in negative. The moustache itself was exceptionally shaggy – an exaggeration, if one was possible, of the version popular in the 1980s among television and porn actors. It was worn with neither reverence nor nostalgia, though some of our fathers and uncles had once displayed it with pride. This was not a way to align ourselves with our fathers and our uncles. It was a way to separate ourselves, because its tone, dictated by the smirk, was wholly inscrutable to many, and so to many the moustache was puzzling or

repellant or taken as its opposite, a tribute. That moustache on some level became the locked door to a speakeasy many would neither locate nor have the credentials to enter.

For those who wore it, the ironic moustache was a stroke of ultimate brashness, a thing they knew was on the surface ugly but intended to make meaningful, even attractive, by marrying it to an idea. It was worn, said the smirk, to make you laugh, or guffaw, or as a conversation piece, or to indicate confidence: I can wear something ugly on my face and still be impossibly attractive. That smirk was a negative sign placed before the moustache itself, transforming the ugly to its opposite, but only for those who understood.

But as the moustache disseminated, the smirk it carried dissipated. The next wave of wearers, and certainly the next after those, may have only been able to explain the moustache by saying it was retro, it was cool. Once it was popular, it stopped being ugly and therefore stopped being funny. Without the smirk it was a plain, straight thing, worn for normal reasons.

Though their absolute value is the same, negative six and positive six are mathematical opposites. The negative sign tells us whether to plot a value on the number line towards the positive side or into the land of negatives. Tone, similarly, tells us where to plot a value. For example: If we ascribe a random number to the wearing of a college sweatshirt to demonstrate an earnest love of a school – let's say a positive six – then the wearing of that same sweatshirt to mock the college-loving becomes a negative six. Tone will let an onlooker know whether to plot that sweatshirt's value on the positive or negative side of zero on the number line, whether it's worn to mean the thing itself or its opposite. Tone is all-important, then – an absolute imperative for understanding, for the accurate communication of meaning. What happens when tone can't be determined by a viewer? In that case, the thing might be wrongly ascribed an opposite meaning to what had been intended – mathematically, negative six might be read as positive six. But even more often, things are left uncategorized – *I don't know what it means, it's confusing, I don't have time to figure it out* – and everything, whether meant to be positive or negative, becomes its absolute value – a number of paces to move without the map that says which way to go – the thing itself, but meaningless – a word, say, written in cuneiform – a symbol.

There is danger in a landscape of meaningless symbols. The first decade of the twenty-first

century saw a record number of tone-important revivals – revival after revival, coming faster and faster, until they were piling up, happening concurrently, creating a kind of retro salad in which tone was drowned, meaning was forgotten, and things became only a parade of undesigned symbols, which is why I loved this decade, and why it came to worry me.

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How different is the ironic moustache from much of conceptual art? Each relies on the beauty of an idea to advance its project, and charts its course at times by way of ugliness. Faced with the conundrum of preference posed by poet Wallace Stevens, both conceptual art and moustache choose the latter:

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

×

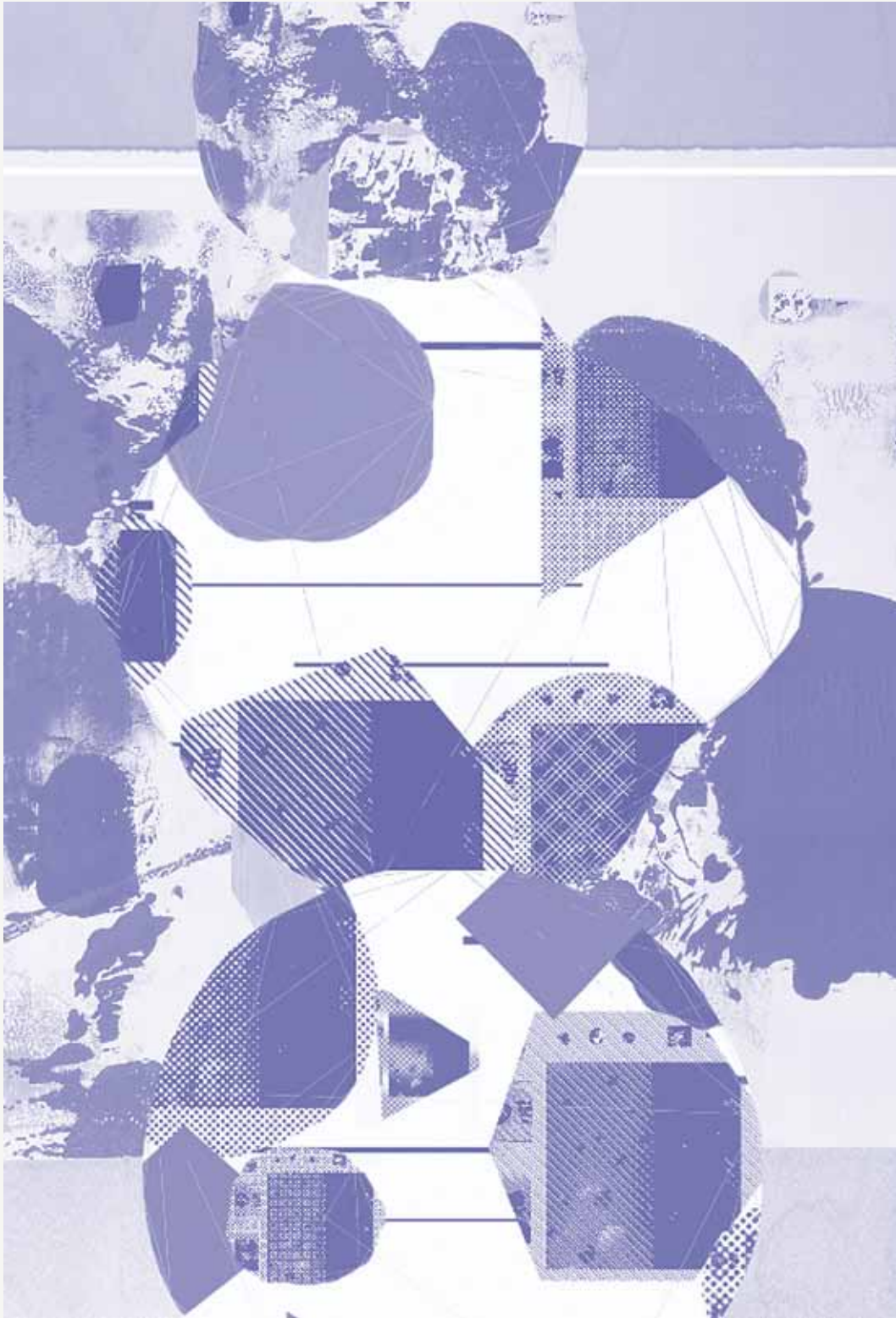
I say 'collage culture' because the cutting and pasting of extant things has replaced the act of original creation in the new millennium as the favored creative method. Musicians and artists, designers and writers, jewelry makers and interior decorators employ the method of collage – a method that once felt foreign and daring – with such incredible frequency now that nobody notices.

RED:

1. Scale image at 200%.
2. Scale image at 20%
3. Create random shape that has no angles, fill with color or images.
4. Include and arrange between 3 and 20 images.
5. Cut the hi-density area out of an image and discard the rest.
6. Cut the face out of an image and discard the rest.
7. Overlap two images.
8. Rotate image five to forty-five degrees.
9. Cut the hi-density area out of an image and fill that area with colour.

PURPLE:

1. Use 91% whitespace.
2. All elements must touch each other.
3. Fill the background with an image.
4. Create random shape that has no angles, fill with colour or images.
5. Cut the faces out of images and discard it.
6. Convert composition to monochrome.



Illustrations by BRIAN ROETTINGER

Images were generated using *Rules for a Composition*,
an application created by Brian Roettinger & Chandler McWilliams for *Collage Culture:
Examining the 21st Century Identity Crisis* (JRP|Ringier, 2011)

Tolerances

by
Alexander Goodson

(1)

There was a school trip to Iceland living in memory with a small hill and full glacier. Raised brow even further on. There are articles about chambers; those fun vacuums that should never make it into the home, and must be constructed if you're hellbent on gorging. There was a drive home in Finland, toward open spaces and a snow dampening. I ran from the car, to give everybody time, and to meet the silence not even far away. At stop, I got the sonic of my inside, and recollection of sounds from a library that seems infinite. I wouldn't crane for silence now, there's no hope of a gap.

(2)

One gong a day and a fatty expletive in the dark sometimes. Ought we tell the monks they're wasting a while? The whip of habits at corners and unavoidable snacking. I thought of it, once, as an alternative. A voluntary coup. Alone, seated, reducing myself for ten days. I figured removal always balances. Osmotic volume of thought as the outside turns down. I couldn't do it, being too hungry.

(3)

At five a gross needle famously flew above me. I hardly believed so, but it carried through to credible. A point was missing from the thrust. I was insignificant and worried about that. Solids remained, there were recognisable patterns, but I saw a misty split and felt an air for change. I tell you I was red and yellow. For company, for laughs, chinny gawkers and wonderful veterans. We all gave it time, were gifted distance, and after all, a peace.

(4)

The telephone electronic bell next door. The walls prevented it, sent it distorted, rebounding through the kitchen. I listened as if it were hours. She was saying something. It was the same and it was three times. In the next room, outside, I could hear a young man crooning jubilant, though mildly. I was concentrating on sharing their lives and giving nothing of mine: the joy of entirely natural theft. I had to accept whatever I could, and I got shoulder marks, lines of grit, space for fire. Her conversation ended, or it went on indefinitely. I can't be sure; she could have been whispering to the receiver, or listening for good. It was closed for me, by now, on the sofa indifferent.

Since 1996 film director Michal Kosakowski has been asking people with different backgrounds about their murder fantasies. He offered them the chance to stage their fantasies as short films. The only condition was that they had to act in these films themselves, either as victims or perpetrators. More than a decade later, Kosakowski met these people again to ask them about their emotions during their acts of murder or victimization, and interviewed them about current social topics such as revenge, torture, war, terrorism, media, domestic violence, the death penalty, suicide etc. If someone murdered a person you loved, how would you feel about it? Should torture be legalized? The participants' respective replies help viewers to get better acquainted with them and their highly diverse social and professional backgrounds.



Therese Davies

Born through rage more than anything, like on a banal level, when I am in the post office, I regularly shoot up the entire post-office queue in my mind, definitely, without a doubt.



Gabriela Hegedüs

I find that I'm fascinated by all these stories of passion and violation, the reversal of victim and perpetrator. These things tend to move me a lot if I come across them in a newspaper. They also scare me, frankly.



Miranda Kragulj

Maybe I would like to kill someone in an act of rage, anger or self-defence. Like maybe someone tries to harm me and then I get an adrenalin rush and I manage to kill them.



Martina Spitzer

I have a neighbour in my house who has the habit of slamming the door virtually every day between 5.30 and 7.30 a.m. – it wakes me up nearly every morning. Now, if someone rouses you from deep sleep on a daily basis, you eventually develop a feeling of hatred. So, this guy... I've found myself several times thinking: 'I'll get up and gun him down!' I've pictured the whole thing in detail: Where to hide the body? How to get rid of the pistol – a pistol I don't even own. But if I had one, where would I hide it? I wouldn't really kill him, you know, I'm not that daft. In my imagination, however...



Michele Cavaliere

It's happened to me for a long time that I dream sometimes of killing somebody, for very useless things. But the point is, I just don't kill people. I do a lot of stuff, break their face and I have their brain in my hands, it disgusts me. And the last thing in my last bad killing dream is the smell of the body because I break the body in pieces and this smell coming out of this is more disgusting than the pain of the action, it's more than the sense of responsibility. It's simply disgusting.



Michael Jesch

Maybe you get aggressive with strangers at work. I work in the public sector and therefore you realize that there are many different types of people on this earth and that some people don't get everything and it's very frustrating.



Viktoria Von Prachtental

Sometimes when I'm stressed out I quite feel like running amok. It is an artistic game that helps alleviate the stress. The annoying thing about homicidal mania is that one can't really witness it afterwards. And as for the end, I can't say I care for it a lot.



Franziska Würzl

I believe many people would say they don't have any fantasies of violence simply because they've forgotten them afterwards. I believe the whole thing is ingrained in everyday existence in such a manner that aggression is mentally transformed into an image... an image which then fades again.



Nicholas Mortimore

I am happy to say that it was the only time I've ever brutally murdered somebody. At the time I wasn't too worried about murdering somebody, it was a role which was fun to play. Thinking back, I remember being very nervous about what I did before the brutal murder. I was very keen to show this strange psychopath who is going out of his head. The murder itself was almost secondary.



Ries Straver

I would never be the first one to hit. But if somebody hits me, I'll hit back. And if somebody stabs me, I'll probably stab back. If somebody tries to shoot me, I would probably shoot him in the legs or in the knees. If somebody would try to kill me, I would probably be able to kill.



Dorit Oitzinger

Violence is always present in my life. When I wake up in the morning and feel that I don't want to, that's when, in a certain sense, an act of violence occurs. Whenever there is a feeling of antagonism, an act of violence is about to happen. Its intensity depends on just how important something is for me, and how impossible to reach or get it. So, pain and victimisation are just as much a part of it as being a perpetrator.



Reya Silao

Dissatisfaction, frustration, that's where violence can come from, fiery emotions of being frustrated, angry, having no hope, desperation. If you're in a situation where you're constantly frustrated, constantly angry, constantly inhibited, desperate, who knows? Maybe you are forced to act violently.



Claudia Martini

I believe that everybody has the potential to do everything. Because he is human. Because he has a hand. Because he can pick up a knife and stab... the physical conditions are there. However, whether everybody admits that and is ready to in fact externalize his murder fantasies, I really couldn't say.



Denise Pitayataratorn

I believe everybody has fantasies of murder. Everybody must have dreamt about killing someone, possibly in quite a bizarre manner – with a dessert fork or a butter knife.



Pino Lux

I believe the violence published in and by certain media... such as the massacres in schools, in Germany or in the USA... well, of course, it's scary and sad at first. However, it's not that it affects me deeply and makes me sit in my office all day contemplating it with a heavy heart. It's something that happened. And that made me feel bad. Briefly.

Saving all my drafts
for you

by
Audun Mortensen

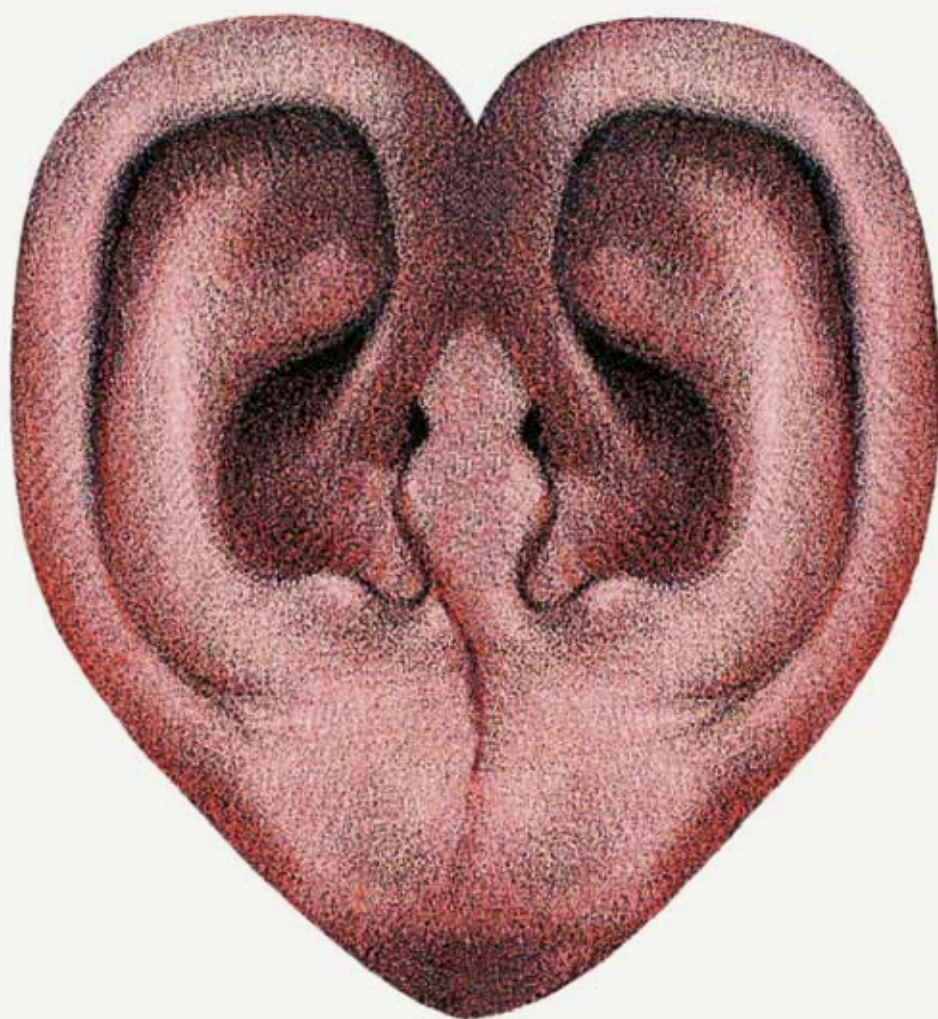
poetry is like picking your fox coat up
off the floor and saying goodnight
someone once said that a poem
should be more than an elaborate fuck it
i am trained to write poems much more
meaningless than this
no one should write a poem that makes
a person feel financially poor
if you promise not to cry like a little baby
i will write you a poem
i don't owe anyone any brilliant poems
i would rather have whitney houston's
faux pearl earrings in the bodyguard
than a poem
is it very romantic to be a poet
like having a bad back
if i am a poet i am the worst kind of poet
if anyone wants to get bored
they should go to a poetry reading
but not mine
i put money and fast cars in my poems
again i would rather have whitney houston's
faux pearl earrings in the bodyguard
than a poem

82 — 91

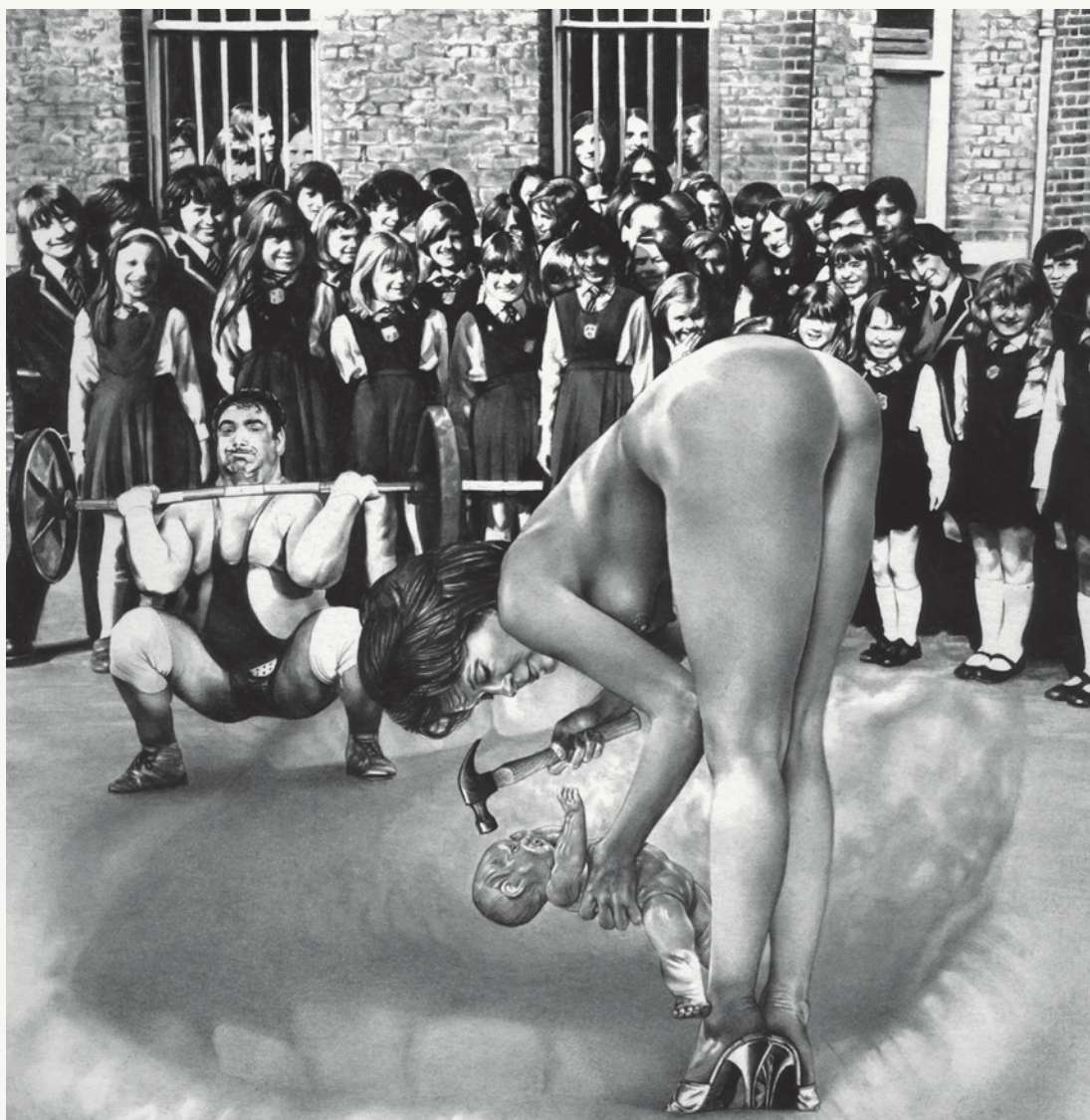
I never said a word.

by
Gee Vaucher

and
Penny Rimbaud



Ear, collage touched up in Photoshop, 100 × 100 mm (2013)
(made for Shoppinghour Magazine)



International Anthem 1 — Education, gouache, 210 × 200 mm (1977)



International Anthem 1 — Education, gouache, 230 × 230 mm (1977)



Cover for Crass album Feeding of the 5000, gouache, 260 × 260 mm (1978)



International Anthem 2 — Domestic Violence, gouache, 300 × 290 mm (1979)



International Anthem 5 — War, collage, 410 × 310 mm (1983)





Child one, oils, acrylics and oil pastels on canvas, 7 × 8 ft (2008)



Child two, oils, acrylics and oil pastels on canvas, 7 × 8 ft (2008)

~~“Honest”~~

Silence is not a physical condition, it is a psychological state: a state of affairs. The less the psychological attachment, the greater the silence. Equally the dynamic we define as sound: the greater the psychological attachment, the greater the sound. In extremis, sound becomes noise and enters an arena that is purely psychological, which is to say, utterly divorced from any concrete physical reality (if, indeed, one exists).

We hear through our ears, but
listen with our minds.
'If music be the food of love...'

~~it's all a matter of preposition.~~

The sensory organs might be the instrument, but the mind is always and undoubtedly the player, psychologically bound by a complex of layered interrelationships.

VIOLENCE MASQUERADING AS LOVE?

Thanks, Ronnie, we'll call you later – knot!!

No two things are ever the same and, more importantly, nor is any one thing. In all questions of matter, existence precedes essence. However, existence is a predisposition in that we are disposed towards it regardless both of its existence and our own. In short, we don't stand a dog's chance.

So, *does* a dog have Buddha nature?

~~Woof!!~~

now you see me, ~~now you don't.~~

On matters of nature, any created artefact, be it a painting, a symphony or a mathematical formula, cannot be silent unless it has never ever been either seen or heard, which is not a riddle, but a conundrum. Ultimately, any 'it', 'that' or 'them' is all a matter of stuff, the perturbation we create of that stuff, and the nonsense we attach to it. However well-reasoned, and whatever we might like to think, that which is created by humankind is bound not by reason but by and through the psychological interrelationships that we like to imagine to be reality (ourselves included), but which, in reality, can never be anything more than an imagined reality. Chicken or egg, sunny-side up.

NO ONE THING CAN EXIST
~~WITHOUT ANOTHER.~~

~~NO ONE & NO 1.~~
ZERO IS AN INFINITY.

Existence could no more exist without essence than essence could without existence, in both cases it being psychologies which draw these imagined elements together through the

absurd and contradictory process of firstly tearing them apart. In which case, where were we in all this? Gone before begun.

~~IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE END.~~

So why start at the beginning?

Fundamental principles of physics like gravity and relativity are every bit as much ephemera within the natural symbiosis of this magic wonderland as are ideas of love or hate. The prerequisite in all cases being that of psychological positioning: $E=mc^2$? Yes, and I'd have been a shoemaker too.

I THINK THEREFORE I AM

~~FREE TO THINK ANY THOUGHT I WISH.~~

ker Boom!!

I have known Gee Vaucher for over fifty years, but would better define our relationship by stating that I have not known her for over fifty years. She is an artist. She works in silence, but not with silence. If I want to know what she is up to, I put my head around her studio door and get shouted at, not by her, but by her work. In truth, I should literally know better (and, indeed, I do).

Being extremely disinclined to offer any form of explanation concerning her works, Gee 'allows' them to do it for her. It is that allowance which gives the works licence to express themselves in manners that I imagine Gee might never have conceived of. In other words, they have a life of their own, an own-ness which is far closer to the fluid structures of animism than it is to the rigid strictures of the Enlightenment.

Rather than suffer Descartes' commonly held conceits, Gee's position would, I believe, be that of 'I think therefore it is'. But I won't bother to ask her because the answer would in all probability be little more than a good-humoured 'piss off'.

Ours not to reason why.

Death is in the doing.

?

To question is to pre-empt the answer and thereby dismiss it.

~~BIRTH IS IN THE BEING~~

silence is in the unmaking

Now, on the delicate subject of Alice's wonderland...

Despite our commitment to inclusivity and mutuality, dynamics of exclusion, privilege and power-over often mark our experiments and experiences of developing alternatives to capitalist alienation.

From my experiences the dynamics of informal hierarchies, exclusions and silencing are highly gendered and classed. Two issues have been particularly salient and painful: the silencing of difference in positionality, experience and subjectivity, and assumptions about what it means to 'know' and practice radical politics.

As a non-elite single-mother, questions of childcare¹ have been central to my political experience, in which the times, places and dynamics of meetings often seem to assume that children, family and other responsibilities are private issues and personal responsibilities. Often silence (or absence) is read as lack of interest or acceptance rather than exhaustion, reluctance to speak for fear of misunderstanding and misrepresentation and the blockages that come from the experience of multiple oppressions in which we are often forced to justify our lives and who we are.

Additionally, radical political subjectivities and practices often mirror the forms of alienated knowledge creation and politics of capitalism in which the pinnacle of the knowing subject is the detached, rational (masculinised) subject, able to control their unruly and irrational emotions and bodily desires.² It is often assumed that theory can only be conceptual and theoretical, created and perfected by individual thinkers. Thus our political spaces often become dominated by a particular performance of the political in which the 'intellectual' takes authorial voice in order to prove the rationality and truth of his arguments and analysis.

This (often unconscious) performance of the political enacts a silencing of other knowledges – emotional, embodied, oral, popular and spiritual. This results in those with dominant positionalities being empowered. Thus to open up the possibilities of creating spaces and relationships that transgress power-over dynamics means calling into questions this performance.

So to build, as Holloway describes, a 'politics not of talking but of listening, or of listening-and talking, a politics of dialogue rather than monologue' (Holloway 2010: 77) that enacts in the now our desires for collective voice and participation we need to take seriously these often invisibilised dynamics of power; dynamics which mark who is heard and who speaks and conversely who and how some are silenced.

I explore these dynamics of positionality and the performance of politics and the knower through my reflections on a workshop entitled 'The Ear',

part of a women-only course titled 'The Body Politic', which I co-facilitate with artist Becky Beinart.³

Listening to oneself and the world: On silence and stillness

To begin, the group went outside and stood in a circle. We explained how we would spend five minutes listening to ourselves and our surroundings noting down what we heard. We separated into different parts of the courtyard.

Then returning to the circle we shared our experience. Some had written in words, some drawn colours like notes across the page, others sketched images. We commented on the different ways we represented ourselves and our experiences.

The energy of the circle changed. We softened the speed of our talking, the movements of our bodies and a gentle energy was formed like the delicate beginnings of a bud's unfolding. We reflected how all listened to the world and ourselves yet our experiences were unique and our representations multiple.

Pedagogically we created a distinct temporality that allowed us to slow down from the rhythm created by the constant demands to perform as worker, mother, woman, artist of a marketised society. This enabled an opening to new intimate connections and an enriched quality of listening to ourselves and our bodies and to the world outside. It also created a bridge of opening to our differences as opposed to implicit assumptions about our sameness.

When we pause and become mindful of the moment, removed from the baggage of our assumptions, insecurities and fears we open the possibilities of dialogue and connection. This demonstrates how embodied pedagogies of silence, stillness and presence (both inner and outer) can create the conditions for active listening to our desires and needs but also to each other.

The voices of others and the voices of ourselves

Previous to the workshop we distributed readings by authors whose voices were all 'others', coming from positionalities which decentred the dominant frame of politics with the individual thinker/knower at the centre and the common assumptions that the private, our histories, gender, class, community and race do not impact upon our experiences, knowledges and voices.

Some women immediately began to relate to what they were reading, while others found it new, uncomfortable and humbling. Yet for those who had felt without voice, being given the space to speak did not mean they could speak. One participant was moved to silence as she listened to a women describe that now that she could speak she didn't know what her voice was or what she wanted to say because for so long she had denied her voice, herself and her truth.

Through intellectual, affective and embodied pedagogies we developed a complex (with and beyond words) 'knowing' of, and listening to, the complexities and delicacies of silence; that silence can come from the inability to speak, the refusal/inability of others to listen, the risks involved in speaking truth to power and/or from the insufficiency of representation, the fact that some things cannot be spoken in words. This inevitably led to questions about the complexities of speaking.

Here the women foregrounded the centrality of creating safe spaces of active listening and care, in which individuals felt able to begin to speak (in whatever form) and others were open to listening. And whilst dialogue was seen as desirable, the complex processes needed to create the conditions for meaningful dialogue involved a consideration of monologue – not the monologue of the intellectual who makes speeches to win the argument and define the strategy and practise of the movement – rather space for the monologue of those who have been denied speaking and a voice; a space in which they actively decentre that which is taken for granted and begin to make it visible in their realities, experiences, needs and desires.

From this we found no answers. Rather we came to recognise the complexities of developing answers to these questions and that these answers are necessarily multiple.

Listening to history: Intimacies beyond power-over self and other

It was from this recognition of the complexities and magnitude of questions of voice, listening and silence that the group was asked to form pairs and to think of an ancestor: a person, place, history, idea or community.

I was also a participant in the exercise and spoke for the first time in nearly 20 years of my grandmother; her smell, the softness of her skin, her smile, her touch on my ear, how she waited for me to sleep first before she slept, how she had wanted me to have a creative sexual life, for that was what she had been denied.

To be heard without judgement. To be held in my memories by another person's full attention and presence enabled the words and the feelings to flow without fear. I then listened to my partner recount the story of one of her ancestors. She allowed me to enter intimacies of herself, her history and experiences. It felt like a delicately sacred moment of connection.

The Ear workshop develops pedagogies grounded in and through the affective, embodied, personal, creative and theoretical. It fosters the conditions for beginning to speak to ourselves and others through creating alternative temporalities and relationships outside of the logics of alienated marketised life. It enables the creation of new intimacies and qualities of listening to ourselves, but also to each other, in which we decentre any assumptions about sameness and recognise difference. It can help to open emotional and embodied doors that remain locked. As one woman participant remarked, we facilitate the beginnings of a process of unlearning our everyday practices of neither listening to ourselves or others. Through the workshop we take tentative steps in the long, complex and unpredictable journey of reclaiming, honouring and creating our own voices (individually and collectively) and of learning to listen.

NOTES

1. <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/beautiful-transgressions-5/>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFHwg6aNKy0>
3. The Body Politic is a course for women that begins from the body to think about power, politics, art and activism, looking at the relationships between internal and external worlds. The course was devised out of a collaboration between myself, a critical pedagogue working in and outside of the University in both formal and informal educational spaces, and Becky Beinart, an independent artist. We envisioned the course as an experimental space with the objective of creating the conditions for the re-articulating of women's wisdoms, knowledges and of feminist collectivity and power, and of creating the infrastructure of agency for subaltern women to speak.

Conversation
DAVE OKUMU & SAM BESTE

The Bosom of our Time

By PETER ERAMIAN



Musician, producer and writer Dave Okumu of The Invisible in conversation with musician, producer and writer Sam Beste of Hejira at the House of Dreams, October 2012.
Vegetable soup by Peter Eramian.

PE: ...We talked about everything, from the end of the world to existing outside time and space, which he believes he's almost achieved after years of different forms of meditation and life experiences. Basically, he agrees that realisation isn't about existing outside time and space, it's more about realising that there's no such thing as time and space. But because of the past, which partly exists in our imagination, and the future, which also exists in our imagination, it's very difficult to realise this. So the only thing that really actually exists is the present, which is outside time and space, it stands alone. But to say that is very different from actually being there. We also agreed on the best scenario for the end of the world...

DO: Wow. I imagine there were a lot of film references at that point.

PE: No film references actually, whatsoever. Well, firstly he says he believes that the world has already ended. He never explained what he meant by that though...

DO: Yeah I'd love to know. What does the end of the world represent? You didn't get to the bottom of that?

PE: No, but he did agree with Yasushi's idea that the best way for the world to end is for people to decide that they don't need to procreate anymore. Because at some point people are just going to be like, we don't need this anymore, we're good, we're happy, we've reached the end of humanity. Let's just let it go, let's just all die together. Not by committing suicide...

DO: Yeah, yeah, but just expire...

PE: I'm not against having children, I really would like to have kids one day.

DO: You know what, you've got to have kids. I want to see you as a dad.

PE: But a lot of people, myself included,

want to give their kids the happiness, or something, they never had. So the idea is that we have kids because we want to get to this stage where we're happy. So what happens once we get there? Maybe once we get there we'll be like, maybe there's no point in going on anymore...

DO: I like that, because it's actually incredibly optimistic isn't it? Because if there's a belief that that state can be attained, collectively, that's a pretty intense convergence of things.

SB: [laughing] We'll probably be 10 billion people by that point, all collectively deciding... It works as a metaphor, at the very least.

PE: Well, I much prefer it from all the other scenarios, like meteors colliding on earth, or self-destructing, or nuclear war. Those are the resentful ends of the world. The peaceful and loving end of the world is the one where we decide that we're happy and we just let it go. Why is it so necessary to strive on and survive?

SB: But if everyone's really happy and doesn't have a need to exist anymore, then that's great, wouldn't we want the world to carry on because it would be a good place to be, finally?

DO: Dive into the epic. That makes me think about the role that frustration plays in creativity. It's something which propels you onwards. Your frustration doesn't have to be something negative. It can feed into your development. I guess what you're saying kind of makes sense because in some ways, if you remove that element, that tension, striving for something, or the satisfaction, which basically relates to pain and suffering in some ways, I think you sort of cease to be human. So if humanity achieved that, that kind of would be the end of something pretty significant in a way, because I think it's really important to embrace what it means to be human, and part of that is to be dissatisfied, or to struggle and be frustrated. But it's nice to believe that that's a possible place to get to. I don't know if I believe it's possible. I think I'm a very optimistic person, but I don't know if I believe that's what life is for, or what it means to be alive. I've always had an aversion to that idea of trying to get to a place, for me it's much more about accepting where you are, which I think is what being present is all about. I think it's very easy to buy into an idea that there's a state that

you have to attain to be happy. My sense of hope comes from the fact that you can contact that wherever you're at, even if that's a very painful place.

SB: That makes a lot of sense to me because the more you focus on feeling like you need to be somebody else, or that who you are now is not satisfactory, that actually takes you further away from the only place you're ever going to find that, which is here, in that presence. Often I find myself compromised by that, it distracts me, and is I guess what a lot of people are trying to let go of, that tension between who you feel you should be and who you actually are.

PE: Sometimes you might be speaking to someone and you don't feel that they're there, that they're present. On the flipside, when someone feels that you are there, it's kind of almost like you're opening up your embrace to them. So when you're present it's very inviting. In the same way, in performance, when you're performing live, even when it's being recorded, if the performance has that kind of presence or sincerity in the process, it opens up a space of consciousness that's very loving and inviting. I think that's something that a lot of people like about your music.

DO: That's really encouraging. That dialogue between the listener and the performer, or the author and the reader, filmmaker and film, whatever form the expression takes, if at the heart of it there's that intention of being present in yourself and accepting yourself and expressing that in some way, that is just the most powerful thing you can do really. It taps into such a fundamental human need and I just know that that's a feeling I'm so hungry for. So when you described that inviting openness, what a loving thing that is, I completely agree with that because I think that that act is an act of self love but it's also giving out and in so doing you're affirming everything that's good, and I think that resonates with people in a really really deep way because I think we all yearn for that, we all want to know that it's ok to be present, to be yourself. Seeing someone do that, or experiencing it, tasting it, smelling it, or hearing it, puts you in touch with that. That's one of the challenges of living, how to stay in touch with that. There are things which I find help me and things which don't. One of the things which help me the most is experiencing

people doing that, sharing that, being around that. It's amazing that there are all these channels through which you can experience it, even if I don't know you, I can listen to your music and maybe have a taste of that thing, reminding me that I have a licence to be myself, to accept myself, and to explore myself and other people sincerely.

PE: It's as if we don't have names, when we're in that space of love, it's as if I'm not speaking to Sam, there's no such thing as The Invisible anymore, or Hejira, or Peter, or Shoppinghour, there's just that.

SB: So you're saying that it transcends all those things, it's beyond...

PE: Yes, or even of any awareness of any kind of structure, it transcends all that. I think this kind of experience is missing a lot nowadays, if I were to critique popular culture today. I think it has always been missing, to a degree, and we're always striving to find it, that sincerity, that sort of epic nowness. What you said earlier about love is very important. Yasushi says that sometimes too, although you have to be very careful with it. To love others you have to love yourself, because when you love yourself that's when you're able to open up, to invite others in. Whereas when you don't love yourself you close down. If I were to define what good music and bad music is, good art and bad art, or even good people and good communication, I would say it's that which opens you up to that dialogue. Whereas bad art, or bad music, or people, close that down, they make you less self loving, they make you more insecure, more fearful, more self conscious in a resentful manner, thinking that you're not good enough, or you should be like this or like that. So I think that, the best form of activism, really, is in fact being able to inspire people to love themselves.

SB: It's the most important thing. I'll often come to Dave's for this. The opposite of this is all the traffic that you have in your mind, all those insecurities. That's where the paradox lies, because by loving yourself you enable yourself to be present and love someone else. If you're not in that state you're self absorbed by your own worries, by your own stuff, and that's what I find remarkable about being in your company, I always feel that openness. Of course, it's always created through a dialogue and

you feel your own potential through that, and it only really exists in togetherness. Or maybe that's not true, does it only exist in togetherness? I find it harder when I'm by myself, I find that more of a challenge. That's one of the first things you said to me once, that the people you surround yourself with is probably one of the most significant things. I guess it's because the more you're with people where you can have that sort of exchange, where you're taking away obstacles and creating more of a loving environment, the more fulfilled you'll be, and the more you'll be able to give that and spread that, through your own channels, and then that has a continued knock on effect on others.

PE: It's like gifts, you can give a gift to someone but it can also be very oppressive, because you want them to feel guilty for example, there's so many bad ways to give a gift. The most loving way to give a gift is to give it selflessly, where out of your own self love you're able to disregard yourself and think, what would the other person want, genuinely? Even sometimes not giving a gift might be more loving than giving one.

SB: And it's going to be an expression, or a channel for that openness, or an encouragement for that, rather than just a sort of blind ritual, which can sometimes feel mechanical or routine.

DO: It's my birthday soon by the way, you can put that in Shoppinghour, I'm happy to receive gifts, it's not a problem... I don't mind if they're oppressive gifts, I'll get over it...

PE: [laughing] There's this sort of royal, shaman-ness, to you...

DO: No one's ever said that, that's amazing.

PE: You know, you're a bit like a king doctor.

DO: King doctor? [laughing] You've heard of Doctor King?

PE: Well there you go! [laughing] "Come, for me to love!"

DO: Wow, so what makes you say that?

PE: It's just something I've observed. I don't know how accurate it is, it's an observation.

SB: And probably partly because of the endless

enthusiasm that I express about our meetings...

PE: It's about how, you know, people generally speak about you.

DO: That's pretty overwhelming, what a thing. It's funny how we perceive each other. That's something I've kind of wrestled with throughout my life I suppose, you know because if I'm totally honest with you, in some ways I know exactly what you mean. I think that has something to do with being open and accepting myself, and I think there's a danger to that as well, because it can lead to misconceptions, like an imbalance or something. I'm really against any forms of idolatry, or someone being elevated to a status that's not about being human any more. It's something I've had to wrestle with for some time because in my relationships and friendships I've been perceived as very strong, or together, or secure. In a way I think I'm all of those things, but only as an expression of a knowledge of love, as opposed to because I'm in some ways better or more together. For most of my life people have told me that I'm incredibly strong. I don't think I'm incredibly strong at all. It's just that I think it's ok to be weak, and maybe within that is my strength. That strength is my relationship to something bigger than me; it's a relationship to love basically, faith, and knowing how to contact that. It gives me a lot of strength and wellbeing, and my sense of self. It's not that I'm strong; I don't feel strong at all.

PE: You're just able to tap into the right source.

DO: Yeah, definitely. That's what it all kind of boils down to, that feeling. You know, when you were talking about the importance of people and community, I'm such a big believer in that. I feel we're social creatures, we're not really designed to be alone, but I also do believe in a certain type of solitude. There is a place where you can find that thing in yourself, which is then reinforced by relationships, and is essentially a relational thing. Once you know how to access that source – and I really believe the source meets us deep within – there's that possibility, a sort of rupture. A very close friend of mine who's training to be a therapist is looking at attachment theory, and it's all about your relationship to your mother in your early years and how that can affect your relationships to everything else in life. If there's been a sense of alienation it can have a really profound effect on how you relate to the world.

PE: That makes sense because if you haven't received enough love when you're young, whether it's from your mother or whoever's taking care of you, it might be difficult to tap into that source, because you never received it and don't know how to access it.

DO: It's a sort of beautiful figure of 8 to me where we're completely dependent on each other to find our independence in ourselves, and it just keeps going on, because I need you to show me, I need to have this experience, I need to have communal experiences, I need to know my mother's love, I need to know acceptance from external sources, in order to know how to do that within myself and how to meet that thing in a much more kind of cosmic sense, in a more epic nowness kind of way. So it just keeps kind of going round and round. I do sort of carry this feeling deep within that actually what that really reinforces is what's there when everything is stripped away. I think that's really important, and it's something I'm always trying to look at in myself, because I think that stuff can become as much a part of the traffic as anything else. The good things can become part of the traffic that distracts you from that core signal. I think it's really important to know what's there when everything's stripped away, that's why suffering is so important, why struggle is so important, why there is a legitimacy to that even if... That's not saying I'm endorsing people's pain, but I think that's why it's part of the human experience, because it has that effect of stripping things back to the core and it can become an opportunity to confront what's there. But I would never want to compartmentalise these things. I think the word that's really important is 'relationship', even if it's a relationship where people are absent. For me a relationship to faith, and love, and hope, and that source that we've been talking about, if you take that away from me, that's the end of the world for me.

PE: We wouldn't want that...

SB: Not until the 10 billion people agree on it...

PE: Sam and I were talking about innovation today, about it not necessarily being what should drive creativity. Technological innovation is so fast, all these new gimmicks coming up, being so easily available to everyone... People have more access to being creative, which is a good thing. But the element of innovation in music, or in

film, is starting to feel a little bit outdated. In films nowadays you get all these special effects and all the CGI, they can do anything nowadays with the technology they have. But for this reason it's no longer that important. Because you start realising, ok, now we can do anything we want, but really what's important is what we actually do, not that we can do it. It's the same with music I suppose. Anything can be recorded, any sounds can be created, it's so easy to impress with different kind of innovative gimmicks, but I think this is losing its value.

SB: It depends on what the source, or the intention, the drive, towards innovation is. Whether you think that you need to innovate, and that's what you're driving for, that your reason to be alive is to innovate. That can be really misleading I think. Part of our music education encourages us to be original, that we need to have our own distinct voice. But that can actually distract you and create an image outside of yourself, rather than it coming from within. That's where true innovation comes from, if you want to put that label on it.

DO: Often innovation is observed in very superficial terms, it's about surface. When actually, as Sam says, everything is about what's at the heart of the matter. That's kind of what defines it and gives it its value and merit, or lack thereof. If superficial things are driving the hierarchy of priorities in a process, I think it's very hard for it to have a genuine heart and be something that lasts. But if there's a heart there and an intention, it almost doesn't matter what the superficial aspects of it are. So then it becomes about, again, relationships to those things, innovations become like tools or extensions of a motive or an intention, that's where the sense of meaning comes from. I think it's a source of real confusion for people, how they measure the value of things. To me, there's a real feeling of clarity about it, I think we're actually really good at identifying what we believe about something. It comes down to that as well, belief, whether you believe in it or not, that to me is the most important thing. All other external concerns are just opportunities to continue creating or expressing things that have truth to them. I think we are often unable to do that because our minds become very blurred and confused, driven by other things. It's amazing that that need is always there, whatever happens, and whatever the technological innovations are, and however greatly the process of making things becomes

democratized, whatever else is going on, there will always be that need, that must go back to the beginning of time, needing to be in touch with something that's sincere and real. That can come through things which have embraced extreme technological innovations or they've gone back to the most rudimentary basic things. It almost becomes irrelevant to me basically, where on that spectrum it lies. Our tendency is to try and classify things either/or. I think the truth of things is often in those things which seem diametrically opposed but actually come together, completely, and are held with grace. It's that relationship of that thread. It feels to me that we're always expressing the same things over and over again. There's going to be people having this conversation in a thousand years time. There's that continuity, because it's about working it out, what it means to be human, and that's the most important thing.

PE: Trying to strip away all the layers of things, whether it's the media, or the news, or advertising, or all these things that hit us all the time, how we should be, what we should look like, what we should eat, how we should live, in terms of how the market works. And we need to have these conversations in order to strip all that away, and be like, wait a second, forget all that, let's just be here, and just be human.

SB: Why do things change so much over time? If you consider the history of music, there's been so much change, and if what we really want is that unchanging core, then why is the form always changing? What's driving that?

PE: Well, is it really? Is it changing, so much? If you were to take a sincere art work, or piece of music, from thousands of years ago and you compared it to something sincere nowadays, would it be that different?

SB: Maybe not in the feeling it gives you. I'm not questioning that. That's true, there is a constant there, but there's also something that's changing, which is amazing, it's an incredible thing. You can go from a Gregorian chant where there is no use of technology whatsoever, you're just using your voices, and you might get a similar feeling to that when listening to *The Invisible*. Yet in terms of their form and the instruments they're using, electric guitars, amplified things, it's a very different form. That can be a real source of confusion to some musicians and artists of our generation,

growing up and asking, what do I need to use, is the piano, for example, still valid? I had this concern several times in my life in terms of my relationship to the piano and how it fits into my identity as a musician, and sometimes it's actually been quite negative, in the sense that I felt I needed to consciously not use it, which is actually wrong because it's just a tool. I remember a friend of ours, a sound engineer, saying that you can be using anything, but it's more about what you're trying to say and communicate than what you're using. At the same time, I'm still very interested in what drives that change.

DO: That's sort of what I mean about the paradoxes coming together, because it's about that relationship of the constant and the ever changing, and it's not one or the other, it's about both of these things together. To me there's something very heartening to know that there will be people making music long after I'm gone, struggling with these questions and issues, because that's the point. I love the fact that, to be a human being means holding those possibilities together, the possibility that there is such a thing as a constant and that you have a completely unique rendition of it waiting in yourself to be realised. It's very easy to become complacent, that's why there's so much stuff in the world and in popular culture that feels like landfill and feels pointless and meaningless. I really admire people who feel they have a responsibility to kind of rage against that and push themselves outside of that zone. But I also really believe that every time I pick up an instrument I create something completely unique, and that's not through choice even. That kind of leads me to a point where I don't really want to waste my life trying to impersonate anybody, because there's that thing, that constant and that continuity. But I also believe we're all completely unique individuals, and therefore if you're committed to just being that, and by extension expressing that, you kind of are an innovator, just by being. Where innovation ceases is through conforming basically, and buying into the values of society that tell us what we have to do to be ok and be accepted. Of course that's necessary to a certain extent, but I think there's a danger that it can feed into something very oppressive in relation to actually getting to know yourself and understanding who you are. This makes me think of the effect that Grace Jones had on me when I was very young. I remember seeing the artwork to *Slave to the Rhythm* and it speaking to me, just the image speaking to me, and telling me to just be myself. That message came to me





at a really important time because I was aware of being different. I was in an environment where I was physically very different from everyone else, and that was ok because I had a loving family, but I remember it was the first time I got that feeling from someone, just by looking at this artwork and hearing this music, I received this feeling of just being myself, and that's a deeply creative and innovative thing to do. But most importantly, it's necessary, it's a deep need.

PE: I think a lot of people need that for their spiritual and mental health. It's probably the healthiest, most nutritional, thing you can give yourself, to have access to that. On a separate note, what do you do to switch off?

DO: That's a good question. I watch movies and I read, that kind of stuff, but I sort of feel like it's an ongoing road. I definitely feel there are times when I need some space. Living on my own is a great thing. I really need that at this stage of my life. By and large I feel a continuum, I don't often feel I need to switch off, as it were, if that makes sense. It's not often that I feel out of sorts. The fact that so much of my energy is committed to something that compels me to think about those processes we were talking about, what I believe in, that really helps me a lot.

PE: Because a lot of times I need to watch bad films or play videogames, I do stuff which are completely unconnected to the rest of my life.

SB: To refresh the palette, to give your mind a break...

PE: Yes, it works for me, but the thing is, most of the time those things aren't really that good for me. You know, in terms of what they actually are. They're either bad films or video games which, in most cases, don't actually calm me. They offer a kind of catharsis, maybe. But perhaps if you live a life that's creatively engaged, you shouldn't need that. You don't have that need as much Sam...

SB: Hence why I don't watch films!

PE: I need it sometimes, I need that sort of trash to relax, but Sam doesn't and I kind of admire that. Even though I see him sometimes struggling not having a release

like that, I like the fact that he doesn't allow himself to fall into it.

SB: I often need an infrastructure and in the paths we've chosen there often isn't one, you have to build a lot of that by yourself. In times when it's not there, it's difficult. When you have the infrastructure, you're surrounded by people that you love and you get the support...

PE: And the love itself is the catharsis...

SB: Exactly. But in my life I often find I lose contact with that faith, that relationship to myself, that we were talking about before. The traffic and anxieties get so loud and the detachment kicks in. Those are the times when people encourage me to have a break. I do need a break at those times, but that's not the point, it's about developing a stronger and more consistent relationship with all the things we've been speaking about. It's interesting, because when you asked that question to Dave I thought, I can't imagine Dave needing to switch off. We're all quite lucky to have these creative lives where we don't exactly have a shit job that we need to just get home from and switch off.

PE: Yeah, you're not going to say, I just spent the whole day loving people and being creative, I need to switch off! Why would you need to switch off from that? I agree, during the times I'm most creative and happy I watch the least trashy films. Because I just don't need that anymore.

DO: But I'm also very happy not doing anything at all.

SB: That's something I struggle with.

DO: It's a very easy thing for me. If that time becomes available, that's cool, but it's very rare these days.

SB: But that's the thing, I know deep down that those two things are actually identical, not doing anything and doing lots of things. There's no difference if it's all resonating or originating from that place inside. My upbringing was a lot about work and action, about having to do, and it did create a lot of anxiety in me about not doing, or what was perceived as not doing.

DO: I don't know where it started for me, but I think I really rebelled against that notion in my life,

because I've had some very important moments in my life where I've really felt the importance of accepting myself in my present state. This feeling, it's definitely come from outside of myself and it's met me, and spoken to me, and said, you can basically sit on your arse for the rest of your life and you're still the person that you are, you're still legitimate. That means I can't be defined by my actions, my actions can definitely be an extension of that, but that's not where I need to go for that feeling of legitimacy. I remember one time in particular when I was very upset with my dad, I hadn't seen him for a long time, and he came to England because he was speaking at the House of Commons, and he kind of arrived in a whirlwind, and we only found out a few days before he was coming. There was this feeling of expectation that we were going to drop everything and see him, and we all did our very best to do that, and I remember going to see him and he was being really annoying. I found him incredibly difficult. I felt there was a real absence, that we weren't really meeting each other, like he wasn't acknowledging me. I'd gone through a lot of effort to see him, and there was just a glitch, and I remember going home that night and I was really angry at him and really struggling with that conflict in me of really wanting to connect with my dad but feeling angry with him. But in that moment I remember being overcome by this feeling, which I can only describe as a state of grace, where it was all ok. It's just fine. Clarity followed that straight away, and I decided to write to him, and tell him how I felt, and how upset I was, and how much I wanted him to be my dad, and what that meant to me. I just laid it all down and it felt so great, as you do when you express something. I remember giving him that letter, and since then our relationship has been completely different. That moment's come to define our relationship in a way. Subsequently I found out what he was going through, and why he was behaving this way, there were reasons behind that, as there always are. That feeling has really sort of shaped my feeling about taking action. That it's not the action that matters so much, but more about what drives it, and knowing that it's possible to access a sense of total acceptance and legitimacy, before taking action. There's a real freedom in that, and that freedom can actually include taking no action.

PE: It's necessary to access that before taking action, because if you don't then it will most likely be a reaction, which won't be loving, it'll just be reactive, which is sometimes ok,

but you need that calmness and love, before you act.

SB: How did that moment come Dave, on that night, where did you source it from? Did it come to you or did you bring it on yourself?

DO: It came to me, it met me. That's the thing that's really transformed my life, understanding that dynamic, because basically there's like a partnership going on, it does require something of me, but what it requires of me is much simpler than what I think it is. I've got a metaphor for it that's been with me for my whole life. I started having this waking dream, that I'm standing on the banks of a river and I see myself, and it's a beautiful sunny day, the stream is crystal clear and it's flowing, it's a really beautiful scene, and I have a feeling of anticipation like you feel when you're going to the beach and you're thinking about the point when you're going to swim, or if you're going to swim, that slight kind of edgy feeling. You basically know you're going to feel wicked when you swim, but there's always this feeling that you have to take a leap of faith, there's a bit of a tension, and you're being presented with a choice, and with that image I hear a voice saying to me, are you getting in? I feel very free, like I can say, no I'm not getting in, but I know that that is all that is being asked of me, whether I'm going to get into the water or not, and there's this feeling of real clarity which comes with that because my natural tendency would be to think about loads of other things like, am I skinny dipping, am I wearing these shorts, am I going to jump straight in, am I going to put a toe in first and then get in, what will others think of me? And when I hear that voice all of these questions fade into total insignificance. The point is, am I getting in or not? And that was what that moment that night was like, are you going to let this in, are you going to let the truth in basically? Don't worry about anything else. And the truth is that everything's ok, that I'm legitimate, and my emotions are legitimate, and how I'm feeling, everything's basically fine, and that basically takes over me.

PE: It's a kind of self forgiveness isn't it?

DO: Totally, and for me it's definitely about engaging with something outside of myself; something that's bigger than me and it's always there, and it's eternal, and so it requires me to believe it's there, and I believe it's there for a reason, it's because I experience it and it changes everything.

PE: The constant, the universal...

DO: Yes, exactly. So all it becomes about is whether or not I open the door to that and let it in. Once I do that everything takes care of itself.

PE: And the more often you do it the easier it gets to go back to it.

DO: Totally, it's something you have a relationship to and you become acquainted with, and learn where it's to be found. At every point you have the choice to resist it, but because it's there and it's good I'm going to go for it. I like it.

PE: To be able to say, that it's ok, is such an important thing, to yourself and to others. In a very painful moment, it's ok to be in pain, it's ok to cry, bad things happen, it's ok. I think one of the things that makes pain particularly painful is the sense that it shouldn't be painful. It shouldn't be happening. That something is wrong. But when you're in touch with that constant, the universe, you realise that nothing shouldn't be happening. Everything is happening as it should be, so it's ok. This is where I guess Sam must struggle a lot, because to be active, to be an activist, is about shunning the idea that everything's ok. Things are not ok. There's a lot of shit going on, there's a lot of deception, exploitation, starvation. How can you say it's ok when you know all that? That's difficult. So the it's-ok-philosophy seems to work on many levels in self forgiveness, but when it comes to deception and realising certain conditions of the world, it's very difficult to say that. It's very difficult to forgive God, to say this is God's intention, these kids are meant to be dying of starvation.

SB: There's always been an element of acceptance that my upbringing and my programming has really struggled with, because I've been brought up with the philosophy of political activism, where the point is to struggle to change the world, not accept it. Even though I'm starting to understand that those two things can co-exist.

PE: In fact, through acceptance you can change a lot...

SB: Exactly, and it's through that that I sometimes found the most beautiful feelings and thoughts,

and sense of being ok with myself. It's when I understand that those two things can co-exist, that they're actually necessary for one another to exist. But I often lose touch with that, and it's all wrapped up with how I feel about myself, that same thing about not being able to stop, and the whole paradox about not being able to stop is that you create less.

PE: So in a way, because you can't forgive yourself you can't forgive the world...

SB: The oneness of all things becomes apparent in that moment. When you contact that state where things become simplified and you can feel that you can relax and breathe out. How do you respond to that political aspect Dave?

DO: The relationship to the world as a whole, sort of thing?

SB: The suffering that's happening, which in some part is down to power relations between the wealthier and poorer countries...

DO: I think all of those things become completely overwhelming without that acceptance of yourself first. It's totally about how the two things co-exist. What acceptance brings to the equation is a purity and a channel for the right intention to inhabit you, and that to me is the most powerful thing you can do, and it leads to change beyond your wildest imaginings. We're so programmed to self-pressurise and judge ourselves and part of the fallacy of that is that there's a kind of arrogance to it, because you're basically assuming you know what's meant to be and what's right.

PE: Self-righteousness...

DO: Yes, there is something self-righteous about it, and something so crushingly inhibiting, because actually, we have no idea what our capacity is. When you start talking about the world most people shrink and feel tiny, I can't think of millions of people dying. But we are so powerful, and we are capable of changing the world, but I don't think that can really start to take hold in us if we don't surrender to a process that's much bigger than us, that can actually take us to where we are going. If you told me ten years ago that I'd be sitting here and having this conversation and doing the things I'm doing, I would be like, what you talking about? That's kind of part of the wonder of being alive for me. It's unpredictable, and I

believe that a process of refinement in me will lead to things beyond what I imagine I'm capable of. Whether it's activism or how you engage with the world and really difficult issues. I have to start by accepting myself and I know from experience that the more that is at the heart of my experience, the more likely I am to engage with the world in an unconditional and open way, in a sincere way, that will lead to good things. I think so much energy is absorbed by the wrong things, in the wrong way. You're having all these battles when actually there's a whole other battle which you're not even ready for because you have to go through a process. That's where it starts, being able to access your own legitimacy, to forgive yourself, and love yourself, and then the possibilities of the impact and engagement you can have on the world arise. I don't think it's like saying, I accept the world and therefore I accept that women are exploited and that suffering is happening. It just creates a different way for you to be reconciled to reality but to also express yourself within that. It's basically being in the water and letting the water take care of that. We're conditioned to always look at others, the suffering outside, demonising the other, rather than looking at ourselves. That's why I think true love and self love is the absolute revolution, it's not just good times, it's a very challenging thing actually...

PE: It's the only source of sincere strength. There's a lot of activism that's very superficial and temporary, self-righteous and very much about proving yourself rather than actually caring for the cause.

SB: I could say all the things I could be doing right now that would make me active and all the things I could be contributing towards that would, if I applied my energy towards, have an impact on the world. Why aren't I doing those things? But thinking in that way, in a fearful way, coming from a place where I feel inadequate as a human being for not doing those things right now, means that I actually close myself off from being able to live and exist truthfully.

PE: And from that inspiration, that you can give to so many people who are close to you, who love and care for you. It's kind of like being a good teacher or parent, it's not about telling or instructing your student or child how to be, it's about just being, being an inspiring and sincere human being.

DO: I think it's really important not to underestimate the impact of being yourself, properly, and what that is on the world. I remember having this conversation, years ago, in my late teens or something, I was speaking to my friend's dad who was a multi-millionaire businessman and he knew about my dad and what he had achieved. He was very impressed, because he's achieved some extraordinary things for the world basically, through his political activism he's saved an unquantifiable number of lives. So I was having this conversation with this guy about something my dad was involved in at the time in South Africa and he was really amazed by it, he was kind of saying to me that that must feel like a real pressure to me, kind of like, are you going to follow in your dad's footsteps, what are you bringing? And I was like, I make music, that's basically what I do, that's my gift, and he sort of laughed, and I remember saying to him that to me that's just as important. I really believe that. My dad has achieved what he's achieved by believing in himself and being committed to his own path. It doesn't mean I have to be him or I have to achieve the same things.

PE: There's definitely something wrong when you start comparing, how many people have you saved? You might inspire just one person to love themselves more, and that person might save thousands of lives because of the strength he's gained from this. Once you start thinking in terms of numbers and comparisons you know you're going down the wrong path. One of the people that's inspired me the most is a friend in Cyprus who's a fireman. I was studying art, several years ago, and I was quite dissatisfied, because I felt I wasn't doing enough, that it was quite self-indulgent – I'm studying art and he's saving people every day and risking his life doing so. And I told him I was thinking of quitting art and going to work with him, I was really quite tempted to do that. And he told me, no, that's not the right thing, each one of us should do what we're meant to be doing in the most loving and proper way, you stick to what you do and do it the best way you can, and you will inspire loads of people through what you do, that's your journey, don't be swayed away by people who have different opinions about what you do, just do what you do, and do it lovingly. And he wasn't self-righteous at all in saying this. If that's how we all thought, whatever each one of us does,

it doesn't matter, anyone can be incredibly inspiring, anyone can save the world.

DO: I've always believed in gifts; that we're all gifted in unique ways and depending on how the society you live in is structured, certain things are valued more than others. I remember when I realised that I wanted to devote my life to music, I remember seeing people around me who were incredibly inspiring and had other gifts but didn't have the platform to express them. To me their gifts were as powerful and legitimate. Some people are really detached from the sense of what they're capable of, or of what their gift might be, or whether they're legitimate or not, but I fundamentally believe that we all have them, and that we're all unique. It creates this tapestry, these unique threads that are kind of meant to be interwoven and dependent on each other to create the ultimate big picture. That's why it's so important for me that there's a dialogue in my life that is about encouraging and nurturing that in others and allowing others to nurture that in me. That's activism, that's saving the starving soul. I've been thinking about our attitudes to suffering and how we categorise things a lot. I've been really horrified, along with the rest of the world, by the whole Jimmy Savile story unfolding, but one of the first things I thought when I heard that story was, what happened to that dude? The whole paedophilia thing, him preying on the vulnerable, just how awful all that stuff is. I found myself putting those versions of suffering into categories, but then I was like, what right do I have to do that? And actually, it's all suffering. I know some things seem a lot worse than others, but sometimes I'm completely overwhelmed by how prevalent and virulent anxiety and depression is in our culture and generation, that's real suffering too. People are really suffering all around us. That's as important to me as the fact that people are dying from malnourishment and starvation.

SB: And that's a really hopeful thing to say, that's what binds us, because as soon as you create those hierarchies it displaces you from the here, as if the suffering is somewhere else and you have to find it. I need to sacrifice my current existence and privilege to go and find it, and then you do it for the wrong reasons. It trivialises suffering, it makes it more superficial.

PE: It's the difference between being religious and spiritual. You can be very religious but not spiritual at all, religious in a kind of

ritualistic way. You can be religious and spiritual, of course. But you can also be spiritual without being religious.

DO: Great soup Pete, it didn't even need seasoning, it was spot on!

PE: Thanks Dave, thanks Sam, it was a pleasure sharing!



Epilogue

Listening to be Lost

by DORA MEADE

‘The things we want are transformative, and we don’t know or think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration – how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into un-known territory, about becoming someone else?’¹

The neurologist and anthropologist Oliver Sacks writes that when someone becomes blind and the visual cortex is no longer able to receive visual input, it reacts by becoming hypersensitive to other stimuli. He documents the experiences of people who have lost their sight and go on to develop an ‘inner eye’ – a powerful and sensitive imagination that enables a new, detailed and subtle mode of visualisation: individuals who talk of projecting themselves inside intricate machinery to unravel the inner workings; of being able to conjure and describe myriad colours, textures and shapes; who describe their mind (having never seen a computer) as a huge screen, where information can be dragged and dropped, reordered and adjusted to any size; and of a blind French resistance fighter, Lusseyron, whose masterful strategising made him an icon of the movement.²

Tests have shown that deprivation of the auditory senses results in a similar sensory ‘reallocation’. In contrast to the view that the brain, particularly past childhood, is resistant to change, it seems that remarkable cognitive reshuffles can take place. When forced, our sensory experience reassembles itself in radically new ways. When we suddenly lose our previous means of navigating the world we can draw a new map; realising that finding the way does not always require treading a familiar path, ceasing to be lost can occur ‘not by returning but by turning into something else’.³

When we listen we are the reflecting recipients of new information, sounds or actions. An utterance is made or a reverberation heard and we receive it. This interactivity, listening and being listened to, connects individuals to each other and to the world outside, forming a constantly transforming inter-subjective map for our minds. Through communication we can understand and feel emotions ‘outside’ of ourselves, and exchange thoughts going around inside our heads. We delve into the landscape of other people’s minds and divulge a bit of ours, proud to show them a newly cleared area, bemoan the weeds or plant a newly discovered horizon. Modern rationality has bestowed upon us an acute awareness of our isolation, of the ‘essential’ separateness of the human condition. By listening and engaging in meaningful communication we can attempt to transcend this separateness.

Despite the essential role that communication plays in human life we struggle with it. The many slipstreams that words and actions are pulled into in the process of being uttered and absorbed can potentially skew the intended meaning. The subjectively simple act is further complicated by the firewalls put in place to protect us from different fears, insecurities and traumas. We can quickly paint with broad brushstrokes that frustrate and situate for convenience, projecting onto the world the way we expect it to be: verifying through assumption. Our capacity to listen and, in turn, our ability to communicate, is informed and influenced by predictable ruts of perception that become our landmarks. Dismantling these landmarks would result in getting lost.

For most of humanity, silence and exclusion has been the overriding condition of

‘conversation’. The wartime phrase ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’⁴ typifies the subordination of an ideologically contaminated dialogue, warning us that an excess of words is dangerous and unnecessary. Huge amounts of time and energy have been put into obstructing the development of a common and fair dialogue between those divided by society, for fear of the seismic shifts it could invite. The coffee shops and salons praised by history books and social theorists left women and the poor outside.

It is only in fairly recent history that dialogue in and of itself has been acknowledged for its transformative status, prized with the ability and potential to heal psychological wounds, raise consciousness and save democracy. Conversation should be seen as distinct from confession: the latter is a one-sided affair, whereas the former recognises both the act of listening and participating as equally important. ‘Conversation...demands equality between participants. Indeed it is one of the most important ways of establishing equality.’⁵

Ignorance often results in intentional obscurity. Rather than admitting we don’t understand something, we often cover our tracks with verbiage that leads nowhere. We react defensively to being put in a position that is disorientating, rather than embracing the possibilities it creates. Not knowing where you will end up, getting lost, challenges the necessity of goal-oriented rationality. Getting lost in conversation should be something practised and experimented with on a daily basis, in order for us to step outside the means-ends, goal-oriented communication that monopolises modern communication and suspend our desperation to define exactly where we stand. Refusing to box or be boxed (to define or be defined) is, to a degree, futile, but the manner by which we assemble our sensory experiences and the formulation of our perceptions is, in some part at least, open to transformation – it can be reshuffled.

Walter Benjamin remarked: ‘Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for a quite different schooling.’⁶ Lack of practise leaves us with little understanding of what a new landscape might look like, particularly if it does not have a precise end in sight. Rather than letting the new frighten us, getting lost while listening allows other points of view to wash over us, ruffle our previously held points of view, and transform our landscape. During this process we cling on to what we feel most strongly about, and let go of that which is not worth saving.

The poet WN Herbert comments that what makes Thomas Hardy an unusual love poet is that he doesn’t write ‘about falling into or falling out of love, it’s about what happens in between and after those points, where many of us spend or will spend most of our lives’.⁷ Instead of focusing on the monolith in the distance, he occupies himself with the expanse in the middle. This is where we spend most of our lives and it is here that transformation can take place.

NOTES

1. R. Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Canongate, Edinburgh, 2006, p.5.
2. O. Sacks, ‘A Neurologist’s Notebook: The Mind’s Eye’ in *The New Yorker*, 2003.
3. R. Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Canongate, Edinburgh, 2006, p. 71.
4. A propaganda campaign used by the British government in the Second World War.
5. T. Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity*, Minerva, Great Britain, 1994, p.41.
6. W. Benjamin, ‘A Berlin Chronicle’ in *Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, translated by E. Boone, Ed. P. Demetz, New York, Schocken, 1986.
7. WN. Herbert, Unpublished Essay for if:book UK, ifbook.co.uk, 2012.

Feast of Listen

Law In-Force-Ment by
Hayden White

In memory of the many law-abiding citizens,
including women, children, and crippled, being
daily blown away by our militarized police forces.

Up Against the Law, Motherfucker!

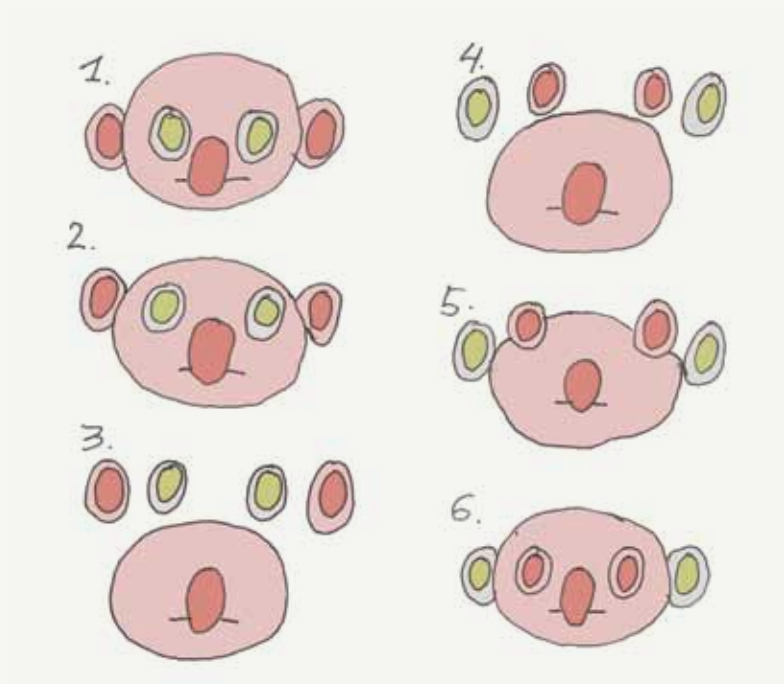
Drop the Tenor and Back Away from the Vehicle!

Spread your legs and assume the position!

You gon' be fucked, asshole!

Cork

This poem is being redistributed under the inspiration of my frustrated attempt to check in for jury duty at the Santa Cruz County Court House on Monday, October 1, at 1.00 p.m., as per instructions, where, it appears, the personnel are so accustomed to dealing with criminals or suspects that they have forgotten how to deal with law-abiding citizens.



Listening to the hearing itself
by MIKOŁAJ TKACZ

Shoppinghour Magazine

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Issue 10 — Feast of Listen

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