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the culture of noise: an invisible history

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible. Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise and that death alone is silent: work noise, noise of man, and noise of beast. Noise bought, sold, or prohibited. Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise. (Attali, 1985: 1)

This statement resonates. It boldly sheds light on an ocular-centric history, a history that has been excised from and integrated back into the cortex of visibility. Seeing is anything except knowing. It is, rather, an affirmation that the visible world mirrors the mind's eye. Our ocular-centric history is blind to the ontology it has so graphically borne. This eternal recurrence in modernity itself seems a kind of unbreakable cycle that I will attempt to unwind through research around the invisible, namely the noise of modernity. The term itself, noise, is questionable. What differentiates noise from sound and music? Why are distinctions made? Where can these triadic areas overlap? Nothing links these elements of audible perception. (Rien). Noise, music and sound are culturally-determined phenomena. Without anthropologizing these mutually exclusive bits of invisibility, I will attempt to delineate, throughout the exegesis of this paper, where distinctions can and cannot occur in this triadic relationship. However, these audible forms, as Plato could have called them, are nothing without perceiving them. Within a somewhat Hegelian model of sensual manifestation of thought, and importantly to me, art, we will explore the relations between knowledge and listening through artists, musicians and writers.

Noise is a kind of information-disturbance, or a thwarting of clear communication that is independent of the message being transmitted. Canadian composer and soundscape ecologist R. Murray Schafer writes:

Noise is an undesirable sound signal. Noise is the static on a telephone or the unwrapping of cellophane candies during Beethoven... Sometimes dissonance is called noise, and to timid ears this may be so. But consonance and dissonance are relative and subjective terms. A dissonance for one age, generation, individual, may be a consonance for another age, generation, individual. (Schafer, 1967: 5)

The didactic, and redundant, binary of consonance and dissonance are set up by Schafer as

components of noise. Inter-personal subjectivity is itself a kind of noise or information-disturbance, linked to individual perception; my sense of noise is different than yours as are my hearing capacities. Tolerance to noise, perception of noise, annoyance and possibly comfort through noise are relative areas of subjectivity in this vague field of “undesirable sound signals” shifting throughout cultures and epistemes. (Schafer, 1967: 5)

However, when Jacques Attali writes about noise within a musical context he calls it: “... a weapon, and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon as a simulacrum of ritual murder.” (Attali, 1985: 24) Within the context or grouping of communication-transmission, Attali’s description of noise has little to do with Schafer’s musical terms. Rather, it focuses on the process through which and by which noise occurs, with a sender, sending device and receiver.

A noise is a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission. A resonance is a set of simultaneous, pure sounds of determined frequency and differing intensity. Noise, then, does not exist in itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed: emitter, transmitter, receiver. (Attali, 1985: 26)

Attali links listening to music as an ordered noise: “Listening to music is listening to *all noise* (my italics), realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power that is essentially political.” (Attali, 1985: 6) This socio-political observation is central to his philosophy – where the enculturation and controlling of noise is contextualized within a framework of political economy. According to Attali recording, marketing, promoting and distributing music as a commodity have been major features of traditional western capitalism. His writings on all-noise (or all-sound) – infused with socio-economic language - differ significantly from John Cage’s formal concerns in music.

Twentieth century composer John Cage draws a distinction between noise and sound stating: “... a sound has four characteristics: frequency, amplitude, timbre and duration. Silence (ambient noise) has only duration.” (Cage, 1961: 80) With this concise statement from (the text) *Silence*, the composer links sound and silence (or ambient noise) together through the commonality of

duration. If this silence and all-sound (or all-noise within this model) can be homogenized through time and duration – how and when will we perceive them? Within this praxis, is our mortality bound to the limits of duration? Perhaps more than any artist of the twentieth century, John Cage can be acknowledged to have bridged the formal and conceptual gaps between performing, recording and integrating all of the above into notational/documentation-systems. Within Cage's organization of sound, we find a non-hierarchical system where noise and music are virtually synonymous. Cage profoundly explores all-sound and the potential forms it may take:

I believe that the use of noise to make music will continue and increase until we reach a music produced through the aid of electrical instruments which will make available for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard. Photoelectric, film, and mechanical mediums for the synthetic production of music will be explored. Whereas, in the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate future, between noise and so-called musical sounds... the principle of form will be our only constant connection with the past. Although the great form of the future will not be as it was in the past, at one time the fugue and at another the sonata, it will be related to these as they are to each other: through the principle of organization or man's common ability to think. (John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 1961)

Varese, Stockhausen, Messiaen, Ives, Zappa, Oliveros, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Alvin Lucier, LaMonte Young, Cardew, Devo, Kraftwerk, Laurie Anderson, Merzbau, Marclay have all fulfilled Cage's predictions – with or without futurist intentionality. Current practices in sampling, synthesizing sounds, disc-jockeying, and various means of live-mixing and processing sound attest to Cage's futurist notions of nearly 50 years ago. Attali writes on this futuristic musical phenomenon as predicting near-future commodities; within Attali's model, music is almost waiting to be enculturated economically:

Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future. (Attali, 1985: 11)

This heralding of the future sounds like socially-enculturated music, mass-distributed and proliferated on a system predicated on repetition as we will soon explore. However, within Cage's non-hierarchical system of noise, silence and music, there is only one constant, the observer's mortality. Within his open-ended model or organization of all-sound, the composer needs to "give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather

than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments.” (Cage, 1961:10) This philosophy of relinquishing control over sounds resonates (with futility) in a kind of void, allowing the universe to remain as it precisely is. Cage’s all-sound is definitely connected to his relation to Zen Buddhism as well as a keen understanding of the music and writings of Erik Satie - the latter’s concept of furniture music (*musique d’ameublement*) as a back-drop to the foreground of daily life. This furniture music proved as perhaps the first moozak – played during the entr’acte of a theatre production by Max Jacob. It’s preamble read as such: “We beg you to take no notice of it and to behave during the entr’actes as if the music did not exist. This music... claims to make its contribution to life in the same way as a private conversation, a picture, or the chair on which you may or may not be seated.” (Kahn, 1999: 180). I believe it was Oscar Wilde who proclaimed (on his deathbed) that either he or the wallpaper had to go. Similarly, Cage links mortality and Satie’s furniture music in an analog relationship. Unfortunately, all is lost.

Why is it necessary to give the sounds of knives and forks consideration? Satie says so. He is right. Otherwise the music will have to have walls to defend itself, walls which will not only constantly be in need of repair, but which, even to get a drink of water, one will have to pass beyond, inviting disaster. It is evidently a question of bringing one’s intended actions into relation with the ambient unintended ones. The common denominator is zero, where the heart beats (no means to circulate his blood). (Cage, 1961: 80)

The psychic architecture Cage constructs reveals a reflection of nothing (in and through its transparency). Nothing is the underlying unifier between mortality and matter. A philosophy that is all-encompassing considers nothing (and perhaps Sartre’s nothingness). The spiritual and the experiential are linked here by a tenuous but profound acceptance to chance. All-sound includes no-sound and the birth of mortality.

Within Attali’s model of all-sound, the hierarchy of power within western classical music is just that – class-based. He reminds us of a few of the social power-dynamics therein:

How many errors would have been avoided in social science over the past two centuries if it had known how to analyze the relations between spectators and musicians and the social composition of the concert halls. A precise reflection of the spectators’ relation to power would have been seen immediately. (Attali, 1985: 118)

Cage opens up the possibilities of things and nothings to be explored while Attali is interested in how the audience could afford the tickets for the show, and equally important, which class runs the show. On a micro-instrumental level, the process of tuning an orchestra involves a kind of power-dynamic

between members of the orchestra. The act of tuning also demands certain compromises between the conductor and player, setting up a sort of hierarchy. "Tuning to the oboe's "la" before beginning to play is a prior compromise made by the musicians in an orchestra, one that is shielded from subsequent challenges by the orchestra leader." (Attali, 1985: 64) Composer, conductor, players. These are the basic triadic divisions of labour for concert-hall production and performance (written in a decreasing level of importance within a western classical model of music). Conceiver, interpreter, skilled labourer might be another means of breaking down this hierarchy. The late Edward Said writes that performance and its rich history in western cultures is somewhat perverse. The need to have highly-skilled musicians performing tasks that are virtually impossible for dilettantes, amateurs or non-players sets up an alienating dynamic between the performer and audience. With classical music there is the need, however, for the player or interpreter to insert something of their own in to the mix, their own interpretative style to demonstrate nuances in musical literacy. Said writes on the dystopians choreographed as ideals within the concert hall as such:

But this unattainable actuality, so strikingly dramatic when we see it before us on a stage, depends on the existence of unseen faculties and powers that make it possible: the performers' training and gifts: cultural agencies like concert associations, managers, ticketsellers: the conjunction of various social and cultural processes (including the revolutions in capitalism and telecommunication, electronic media, jet travel) with an audience's wish or appetite for a particular musical event. The result is what can be called irreducibly and temporally not repeatable, something whose core is precisely what can be experienced only under relatively severe and unyielding conditions. (Edward Said: 17)

What are other social-political dynamics between orchestras and orchestrators? After 1850, the size of orchestras increased dramatically. In fact, the number of musicians climbed from sixty to over one hundred with numerous players doubling up or duplicating in instruments to help fill the contemporary concert halls at the time. (Attali, 1985: 66) In this enlarged orchestra, the visibility of the conductor is crucial to help direct and order such a large group. Their own mini-stage and podium is of great importance.

The obligation on the part of performers to look at the conductor implies an equal obligation on his part to make himself visible to all of them. Whatever the arrangement of the orchestra may be, whether on steps or a horizontal plane, the conductor must select his place so that he can see everybody. The greater the number of performers and the larger the space occupied by them, the higher must be his place. His desk should not be too high, lest the board carrying the score hide his face. For his facial expression has much to do with influence he exercises. (Attali, 1985: 66)

The power-dynamics between audience and performer is explored in the history of the concert hall, as

a kind of bourgeois invention, allowing the elite to exert influence and gain economic rewards from their programmed productions. The concert hall replaces royal courts where music productions were commissioned; the bourgeoisie replaces the cultural elite as the audience. The economic benefits are apparent. Utilitarianism; the greater good for the greater number.

duration

...“ (music) exhibits the three dimensions of all human works: joy for the creator, use-value for the listener, and exchange-value for the seller. In this see-saw between the various possible forms of human activity, music was, and still is, ubiquitous: ‘Art is everywhere, for artifice is at the heart of reality.’ (Attali, 1985: 9)

Attali argues that music’s function within a society is based on utilitarian and Marxist notions of economics. Again, the greater good for the greater number. The advent of reproducing and recording technology has in effect taken music back to its original form - as noise; repetition and proliferation of records have, as Benjamin wrote about in connection to photography, mediated and displaced the aura of the original - the artwork. However, recordings within this model of *joy-value* or pleasure for the creator, *use-value* for listener and *exchange-value* for the seller are not pure or perfect. In fact, recordings are full of faults, imperfections and various kinds of noise. They extend the range of our ears (analogous to Benjamin’s contention that photography extends the capacity of our eyes), and limit the spectrum of noticeable nuance and ambient noise. In fact, hi-fidelity recordings aim to be loyal (*fidele*) to their original sound source. R. Murray Shafer goes as far as to state that this makes rural landscapes “hi-fi” – while the cacophonous and polyphonous urban centres tend to be “lo-fi”. However, within the context of recording technologies, the mass-reproduction and distribution of records (cd’s, dvd’s, tapes, vinyl records...) mimetically degrades and mediates noise as an information disturbance. Ephemerality knows little about purism. It finds its way into the most obvious and obtuse of places. Ephemerality and nuance are values analogous to audio recording processes – tautologically echoing difference. Again, chance illustrates its function best within a utilitarian paradigm. Unfortunately for Cage, Satie and Wilde’s mortal spirits, some contend that art needs to serve particular uses. Art incites political turmoil - a redundant necessity. All art is political and shares value with societies as records of its manifestation.

Records are not performances. The enculturation process of packaging, storing and indeed recording has led to what Attali calls the “blind spectacle” (a reference to DeBord’s “Society of the spectacle”). Attali goes on to describe the proliferation and over-abundance of records as

components to cultural noise stating:

When music swings over to the network of repetition, when use-time joins exchange-time in the great stockpiling of human activity, excluding man and his body, music ceases to be a catharsis; it no longer constructs differences. It is trapped in identity and will dissolve into noise. (Attali, 1985: 44)

In this instance, use-value for the consumer is second to exchange-value for the seller. By this, I mean that through the repetition and (over-) playback of records, music itself is codified and fixed as a mediated entity - floating somewhere in between the consumable and the consumed. Of course, this is the goal of reproducing and playback technologies - to capture the future of the past with a cost. The marked separation between body and noise (performer and performed) echoes a binary of which Attali warns us. Constructing difference as a cathartic experience is flattened by the noise of economics. The spectacle of the concert and the court are replaced by playback. Listening to records of performances, live radio or internet feeds, or even making music at home through numerous audio software programs have largely replaced historical ways of listening to and making music. It was for this reason that John Cage adamantly opposed buying and owning records since it displaces performance and ritual in favour of ownership and commodification.

Attali derives his thoughts on reproduction from Walter Benjamin's artwork essay – albeit infused with the Baudrillardian language of simulacra and simulation:

Once music became an object of exchange and consumption, it hit against a limit to accumulation that only recording would make it possible to exceed. But at the same time, repetition reduces the commodity consumption of music to a simulacrum of its original, ritualistic function, even more so than representation. Thus the growth of exchange is ...accompanied by the almost total disappearance of the initial usage of the exchanged. (Attali, 1985: 89)

Recording and playback technologies have displaced the performance – or the original – through the advent of the record. Fortunately, as we will explore, artists have explored the grooves between recording production and content.

soft

The pianoforte, precursor to the piano, has been in existence for some three hundred years. The piano's invention and introduction to Europe proved an improvement on the harpsichord, and facilitated players in evoking dynamics of softness to loudness in music. The use of felted hammers and a pad release-system allowed musicians to control various aspects of their playing hitherto impossible. Sustaining tones for great lengths, muting them, as well as playing incredibly quickly became possible with this new technology. This was the advent of the pianoforte – later modified into the piano. However, the softness (piano meaning soft in Italian) of the instrument is of less consequence in this context than its loudness (a redundancy worthy of mention). In the newly enlarged concert halls of Europe of this time period, the pianoforte proved an important invention – filling these huge spaces with music. The ability to naturally amplify an instrument to such a great level comes with a very real cost. Ivory and ebony were shipped from the colonies of Africa to Europe to be played by the hands of elite musicians of various courts. These musicians were part of a labour-force encouraged to demonstrate the cultural orchestrations and sophistication of European nations and their royalty. Their technologies, crafted from woods, metals and precious materials (appropriated from far and wide - read imperialism), were part of this economic network.

A few hundred years later, my older sister introduced me to the piano (usually practising while I wanted to watch television). She practised and perfected various classical works as a sign of her desire to connect with Europe's cultural history. I sat by silently – having been ordered to keep quiet. I had no idea where the instrument came from (bits of elephant tusks and dense black hardwood?) and wondered why she was working so hard to learn such extremely difficult songs. Practising repetition; repeating practice. Skip ahead another ten years or so; my parents forced me into lessons for two years. Luckily, the piano teacher moved out of town; my piano playing days stopped. A few years ago, while working at a private daycare in Toronto, I decided to start experimenting with piano playing again. It was the perfect environment – a wild crowd who

wouldn't pay attention to my playing (I figured). The children sensed I didn't really know what I was doing on the piano. In fact, they often asked me to stop playing. Nonetheless, I decided to keep playing for the tough crowd of three year olds. Free play – spiel. Sharps, flats and whole tones explored daily. These music experiments led to hearing and in fact understanding chords a little – at least in terms of what visual patterns evoked certain tones and chords. I wasn't reading music, but instead finding it through playing, listening and memorizing.

ordinary accidents

Perhaps one of the best ways to be honest and true to the process of experimentation is to not be good at it. By this, I mean that the amateur has little to lose in experimenting in a field that he or she leaves to the experts. However, the amateur has much to gain here. We (amateurs and outsiders) have something sadly missing from the expert's agenda – a passion for play. Spiel, as Adorno and Benjamin called it, is the art of playing. Within the recent, and I want to really emphasize recent, development of modernity, play has been lost to newness. Shadows of utilitarianism lurk behind the lustre of newness. Artists make work similar to one another – often by accident. In a recent interview in Fortaleza, Brazil, I was asked why I was exhibiting work in a local contemporary museum. I remember stating that I was participating in an international dialogue concerning contemporary art. The interviewer recorded my response, translated it for the paper the next day and entitled it 'dialogo contemporeaneo'. I am not sure how she used my words to this day.

Ordinary accidents and chance-operations have their history through the works of Mallarme, Burroughs, Duchamp, Dadaists, John Cage, Fluxus artists, even Mozart is credited with having written an aleatoric composition – the list goes on. Cage's connection to the *I Ching*, or *The Book of Changes*, was instrumental in writing a number of hyper-text works – allowing performers to play his compositions differently through each reading. However, artists who have best understood chance know that it is not lucky. Chance is nothing - made apparent and more (or less) importantly - post-structural. Chance is to honesty as honesty is to thought. Sometimes they align – sometimes noticeably. Chance has served different purposes for different artists. It can displace the ego of artists as a subject of desire. And if the ego isn't busy concerning itself with self-actualization, it can be lost – suspending and pointing us to the other. Kantian aesthetics are made irrelevant within this paradigm. Chance knows little about dialectics and aesthetics predicated on truths. The artist as a kind of conduit through which art is made serves a fairly romantic purpose. In this model, art is ubiquitous. However, there is liminal space between

chance as fate and chance as disorder (a relative lack of order). Does it change form and flee interpretation in its analysis?

The word accident, derived from the Latin *accidens*, signals the unanticipated, that which unexpectedly befalls the mechanism, system, or product, its surprise failure or destruction. (Virilio, 1993: 211)

Accidents are made of chance just as ideas are comprised of concepts. In this “system” Virilio describes the accident as part of an overall design – where the invention of the train, for example, occasions the invention of the train wreck. The accident, or that which is waiting to happen, is a device of mine that shapes me as I try and give it form. The accident is shapeless and conforms to its formlessness just as I attempt to give it meaning. As soon as I attempt to fix it in meaning, it shifts forms, like an anxiously fleeting entity, avoiding representation. The accident cannot represent things – only a version of nothingness. It is a void, or as Trinh T. Minh-Ha might say, a void within a void. (Minh-ha, 1990: 36) The accident is friend and enemy to hindsight in that it reasons with nothing, just as hindsight is a sort of reverse foresight, reasoning only with time.

The mechanics of the accident derive from a ratio between design and work, where efficiency is the goal in the equation. Work done divided by the time in which it is done (work being the distance something is moved) – this is how accidents occur. Chaos theory versus fate. With the discovery of hindsight, chaos and fate are bound together in an uneasy marriage of convenience. They reproduce and create binary oppositions in the form of dialectical philosophy. In retrospect, Plato’s cave is largely about hindsight. We are not looking at truth (why Plato chose the sense of vision still escapes me); instead, we see its shadows on the wall of the cave. Truth and knowledge are aligned with light (in this well-lit universe). Merleau-Ponty, using a language based on experience and *a posterioris*, writes:

The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. ‘There is a world’, or rather: ‘There is the world’; I can never ...completely account for this ever-reiterated assertion of my life. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xviii)

We escape Plato’s cave with the help of Merleau-Ponty. I would be bold enough to suggest there is

no truth that we should be seeking outside the cave. There is no truth outside or in the cave just as there is truth in and out of the cave. Why not transform the cave into something else? How about we call it our bodies? If we make noise in this new cave, does it echo with uncertainty, pluralism or marginalism? I know what I know not because I am me, but rather, because I need to feel I know something. That need is a desire that extends from me to others. It makes me want to be with others, with friends and strangers to affirm my being.

It is easy to criticize chance and its unintentional baggage since it often lacks a voice. The politics of hindsight are apparent. The straightening of utilitarian lines, efficiently masked as progress, oppose the use-value of thought, or in this case chance. What good is philosophy? Where is its use? Professionals profess its use. The enculturation of the senses and specialization between disparate utilitarian fields leads us nowhere quickly. The commodification of the senses is a frightening reality. The visual is being commodified at light-speed – the audible slowly trailing behind. Epistemological shifts throughout modernity, and perhaps more importantly, throughout the economics of modernity, have led to the birth of the specialist. Today, the contemporary artist is perhaps one of the few citizens who incorporate daily work into daily life. If I am not a professional artist, I am an amateur – an outsider, and even a marginal member of that illustrious camp of the outsider. Is the amateur the new avant-garde?

disembodied: notational and recording technologies as functions of mortality

Leonardo compares painting and music as follows: 'Painting is superior to music because, unlike unfortunate music, it does not die as soon as it is born... Music which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting which the use of varnish has rendered eternal.' (Benjamin, 1969: 169)

Leonardo da Vinci affirms the superiority of painting over music – the time-space continuum frozen within the varnish of an eternal liquidity. Music suffers the plague of durational flow as a liquid state that dissipates in Leonardo's space before durational flow is capturable, recordable and dis-embodied from the soundscape of history, to never play back in the liquid future. In any analog system of recording and playback – the means of rendering or capturing information (audio, visual, tactile...) has to be congruent with the output apparatus. This model of re-representing reflects back on the systemic flow of an apparatus. The machine ontologizes itself as a projection of spirit, replacing the mechanics of perception.

R. Murray Schafer describes the divisive process of separating self and the external soundscape as such: "... the discovery of packaging and storing techniques (recording) for sound and the splitting of sounds from their original contexts, which I call schizophonia." Schafer goes on to describe the split between the source of sound from the actual sound being produced itself as a kind of fundamental split from Nature:

Originally all sounds were original. They occurred at one time in one place only. Sounds were then indissolubly tied to the mechanisms that produced them... We have split the sound from the maker of the sound. Sounds have been torn from their natural sockets and given an amplified and independent existence. (Schafer, 1986: 90)

Ontologizing a mechanism seems the corollary to splitting the self, the dominance of the other by the self as a protective measure in abating senses of dissociation. This observation by Schafer is an attempt to demonstrate daily and largely subconscious issues around soundscape perception within one's environmental and social situation. I hear cars pass, music playing, a few sea gulls that cry, myself trying to hear, the ventilations system humming, and various whirring sounds from my computer as I sit and write. I am participating in a soundscape that simultaneously dislocates my sense of hearing (on a subconscious level) and then re-attaches it when I am conscious of its presence around me – and even through me. This dislocation of aural space from my corporeal

presence, even in an experiential situation void of listening to audio records or documentation, is a perceptual one. However, what happens when recording information is presented into the equation? How is notational information, or even language, a technological device of its own?

Kandinsky explores this notion, reinforcing the possible fusions of painterly and musical sensibilities. Instead of representational painting, depicting a narrative event unfolding in a virtual time, a non-duration that is scanned through the glance of the viewer, abstraction was Kandinsky's recording or notational device. This "objective" formulation of notation-information was carefully calculated in a non-representational system of signs, non-signs and non-signifiers. The impossibility of mis-interpretation is invisible to Kandinsky, and echoes clearly in an anechoic chamber of his mind. Individualism through synaesthesia...

In the application of form, music can achieve results which are beyond the reach of painting... Music, for example, has as its disposal duration of time; while painting can present to the spectator the whole content of its message in one moment.
(Kandinsky, 1947:40)

If documentation and notational devices differ in durational and experiential frameworks – potentially beyond our mortality, what is the palpable aesthetic reference? Rainer Maria Rilke's writing, on a synaesthetic experience when transcribing fissure patterns from the human skull into phonograph-needle information, is an example of impossible transcription, that is an analog system of notation seeking the "primal" sound of the universe (through the mortal skull):

What would happen? A sound would necessarily result, a series of sounds, music... Feelings – which? Incredulity, timidity, fear, awe – which of all the feelings here possible prevents me from suggesting a name for the primal sound which would then make its appearance in the world?... What variety of lines then, occurring anywhere, could one put under the needle and try it out? Is there any contour that one could not, in a sense, complete in this way and then experience it, as it makes itself felt, thus transformed, in another field of sense? (Rilke, 1986: 94)

This incongruous relationship between analog recording, the tiny fissure cracks of the human skull that are traces of growth and physiological information, and analog playback passing the tone arm and needle on the disparate surface of the skull, is a synaesthetic, and as Susan Buck-Morss mentions, open-ended system of crossed wires. (Buck-Morss, 1993: 22) This phonographic process is a schizo-forming apparatus where the voice of primal sound renders itself as a function of the senses. Susan Buck-Morss elaborates on the significance of techno-

aesthetics in this system and language around synaesthesia:

Technology thus develops with a double function. On the one hand, it extends the human senses, increasing the acuity of perception, and forces the universe to open itself up to penetration by the human sensory apparatus. On the other hand, precisely because this technological extension leaves the senses open to exposure, technology doubles back on the senses as protection in the form of the machine as tool has its correlation in the development of the machine as armor. It follows that the synaesthetic system is not a constant in history. It extends its scope, and it is through technology that this extension occurs. (Buck-Morss, 1993: 22)

Synaesthesia rant

What is often forgotten about early experiments and excitements around synaesthesia is that the Dadaists were perhaps its most avid proponents – taking their cue from Kandinsky. Anti-fascist and anarchical, they reacted against the canon of art and bridged the great divide between work, society and individualism. For the Dadaists, synaesthesia offered a philosophical means of working that was socially, politically and wholly integrated with and against the state. Having admired Kandinsky's writings on an all-encompassing artwork and art form – and intentionally having taken it in a very different direction than Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk – the Dadaists (many of whom were avid Nietzsche readers) - synthesized the senses, confounded and intentionally shocked their audiences with the harsh realities of modernity. Call it avant-gardism.

long play

Edison's record proves that an audio-visual document is full of visually vibrational information. The mechanics of the record player are analogous to the recording process itself. Microphones are magnetically charged receptors for electrical impulses. These impulses seek release through their polar opponents. In this model, electricity not only powers the apparatus, but also provides the means by which content is made audible. AC current, the invention of Tesla, is important here. Giving electricity a voice and a means through which it could be experienced, Tesla helps power a matrix of information. Vinyl, however, knows little about what drives it at 33 1/3 rpm's in little spiral jetties - a precious stone follows nearly parallel grooves. Cutting into lacquer, its impressions are incised onto the surface with great precision. As with the French Impressionists and their new paints, new technology makes innovative art. The portable paint of 19th century France is now hard vinyl, rotating on a spinning palette; the sun is replaced and displaced with electricity. Now - the flow of rivers, reflected in the light of the sun - leads to hydro-dams - re-introducing the power of electricity to our ears.

Both R. Murray Schafer and Rodney Graham contend that the vinyl in its youth led to the standard three-minute pop song. The first mass-produced vinyl records were this length; ten inches by three minutes. Millions of recordings later, do pop songs seem to sound best around three minutes? Is this a causal connection between durational-popularity and records? In '78, I was '33 – having been born in '45. The mass-popularity of vinyl was due largely to its mass-reproduction; call it redundancy in distribution. Not long ago, musicians wrote, played and orchestrated their works into three minutes to accommodate their music to the limitations of vinyl. Unwinding the technology around vinyl itself is a huge task. The advent of AC current, advancements in electro-magnetic wiring, and developing a means of recording and playback (being analogous and analog) were highly significant feats. Douglas Kahn writes on the immortalizing phonograph, documenting the voice as a mortal time-machine, explaining:

Commonly referred to as the talking machine, the machine that talks, die Sprechmaschine,

and the phono-graph (voice writing), it was a good machine for the rumor-like circulation of voices...Cultural tropes of panaurality and all sound, all voices, began to proliferate the more it became a fixture within society. It was at this point that that Edison sought to make it a fixture within all the society that ever had been – by inventing a machine to communicate with the dead. The communication itself was ostensibly indiscriminate... (Kahn, 1999: 214)

The ghosts in Edison's machines were in fact notational memory. Their voices spoke the "future of the past", a Saussurian phrase synonymous with memory. In this model, ghosts exist as a kind of collective willing of consciousness by the living. Edison's interest in communicating with the dead, within this framework, as a means of hearing all voices, whose memories were impressed upon the surface of this phonograph (time-machine), testifies to the one certainty of mortality, death.

The act of speaking is itself a communication with the cogito. The sound, timbre and loudness of my voice is largely an extension of having heard myself speak through my bony armature; I think I hate hearing the sound of my voice recorded, therefore I don't record it (in the am). Kahn describes this schizoid process of utterance and documentation:

When one speaks, the act of hearing one's own voice is the most widespread private act performed in public and the most common public act experienced within the comfortable confines of one's own body. Hearing one's own voice almost always passes by unnoticed, but once acknowledged it presents itself as a closed system remaining within the experience of the individual. (Kahn, 1999: 7)

Roland Barthes explores this notion of listening profoundly with a kind of synaesthetic language:

...interpellation leads to an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: listening speaks, one might say... (Barthes, 1977: 252)

He points out in his writings from *The Responsibility of Forms* that: "Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act." (Barthes, 1985: 245) Listening is the aural equivalent of (the ocular) looking; seeing is not necessarily active. It can be passive as in Wagner's *Gemätskunstwerk*, where the audience is alienated from the seamless audio/visual spectacle of the phantasmagoria, yet bears witness to its epic unfolding through (unknowingly active) passivity. However, our ears are always open; our eyes can be selectively shut. Why do we learn to be selective about what we hear? This communication with the cogito is found in the writings of R. Murray Schafer on aurality and the soundscapes of pre-industrial to post-industrial

civilizations. He writes:

Language is communication through arrangements of phonemes called words.
Music is communication through arrangement of tones and sound objects.
Ergo: Language is sound as sense. Music is sound as sound... Printed language is silent information. (Schafer, 1985: 33)

Unlike Barthes's notion that listening speaks, Schafer's printed language is silent information (Braille included). However, central to my concerns here, language is a technology that bears witness to an ocular-centric history. Even finding the appropriate language to express metaphors and figures of speech outside visual frameworks is a great challenge. Marshall McLuhan describes the problem as such:

As our age translates itself back into the oral and auditory modes because of the electronic pressure of simultaneity, we become sharply aware of the uncritical acceptance of visual metaphors and models by many past centuries. (McLuhan, 1995: 30)

Onomatopoeia is an example of a break from the ocular-centric technology of language, where the written word is in fact a sound-effect, and sometimes the verbal feeling a word impresses upon the speaker, a self-reflexive system that echoes, without mirroring, its meaning as experiential, and thus a posteriori. It interrupts the rationality of language as a technological function, though possible to notate and document through technology. Douglas Kahn talks about this briefly as a kind of bodily experience:

Such acts of motivated speech may not be congruent with the things to which they refer, but at least a link has been made through which various associations and intensities can be played on. However, when the onomatopoeia refers to bodily sounds associated with speech itself, then another order of association occurs. (Kahn, 1999: 299)

The Futurists utilized onomatopoeia as a representation of technologies – delineating the body as a kind of mechanism that is inferior and subservient to industrial apparatuses. In his treatise, *The Art of Noise*, Luigi Russolo wrote:

Recently, the poet Marinetti, in a letter from the trenches of the Adrianopolis, described to me with marvellous free words the orchestra of a great battle: '...every 5 seconds siege cannon gutting space with a chord ZANG-TUMB-TUMB mutiny of 500 echoes smashing scattering it to infinity. In the center of this hateful ZANG-TUMB-TUUMB area 50 square kilometres leaping bursts lacerations fists rapid batteries...' (Russolo, 1913: booklet)

This is an associative language where text signifies sound effects and the cause and effects of the mechanical; it is a romanticization of the self as mechanical other. Importantly, this irrational lexicon is

the antithesis of rational Cartesian space – of self-doubt and unknowing. It is precisely the opposite. The body utters the feelings that represent external pressures forced onto itself. Technology zooms along oblivious to this language of muscle tissue or as Douglas Kahn would call it, meat.

unfinished endings

My sixth sense tells me that the other five will be routinely exploited before their
obsolescence .

Schubert's Unfinished Symphony No.8 is romantic, passionate and most importantly, unfinished. However, the reasons why Schubert did not finish this work are perhaps more interesting than the actual score. In one word – funding. He lost his financial support for the project. This was his pain – not the torment of a romantically artistic soul. I often receive criticism that my art is not resolved – and appears unfinished. To this, I say thanks. Thanks for coming to the show. In fact, you are the show. Without you it would be nothing (rien). You complete this show. I cannot and will never complete my shows. Such acts would be monotonous dialogues with my mind's eye and/or inner ear – proving sad and lonely. I don't want this paper to end. If it does, our relation may dissolve into nothing. Nonetheless, and nothingness included, thank you. De rien.

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