

DIRTY EAR REPORT #1 /
SOUND, MULTIPLICITY, AND RADICAL LISTENING

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DIRTY IDEAS / BRANDON LABELLE

The Dirty Ear Forum is an ongoing project – a type of meeting point, collaborative platform, a mobile zone for sharing, producing, and disseminating sound matter and ideas about sound – from which to generate a sonic imaginary, a sonic agency.

One of the things that I've been particularly interested in is to consider sound as the basis for what I would call "radical diversity". And certainly the idea of a dirty ear goes in this direction: to appreciate the movements of sound as a type of possibility, for participation, for collectivity, and more, for multiplicity and imagination.

I would say that sound is movement itself – already my voice is moving into this room as I speak (maybe you can imagine, this voice embedded within this writing?). Yet where this sound, or any sound, may end up can be appreciated as a sort of open horizon of possibility: maybe it will find its way into your listening, maybe it will leak out of the window, or maybe it will slip under the door to be overheard by someone hiding there ... Which is to say, that sound is fundamentally a poetic movement, a production of alterity, because it immediately invites, or I might say, requires the imagination: an imaginary construct, to confront and to think the other.

What I hear might be something, or it might be nothing; it moves into the open space, it tries to reach me. In other words, sound is an act of proliferation – it is always more than one might think, or able to comprehend. It rushes forward, touching walls and floors, brushing against this body; it is a special agitation, because as a consequence of its intense movements and circulations, its disruptions and its caresses, it is always somewhere between coherence and fragmentation: it may bring together in a profound way, or it may also interrupt with such force, and it may do both at the same time. We are already participating in this space that it creates, this unsteady ground – this territory of assembly and alterity. You can't escape, you can't hide; this sound has got you – it has all of us, it carries us along in its wave, pushing us together, allowing us to find each other, to dream and drift, or to actualize a material relation.

Such a perspective brings us to the topic of listening, and the notion of a dirty ear automatically brings us to the idea of a dirty listening, which I

would propose as an expanded platform or pathway: the multiplying, agitating or unifying movements of a sound necessarily widen our attention, pries it open, invites others in.

I'm interested to emphasize that listening is fundamentally a position of *not knowing*; to listen is to stand *in wait* for the event, for the voice that may come; it is a preparation for common recognition, for confronting what may be so familiar or what may stand in contrast to myself. Listening as a space of encounter made from primary agitations, those that move from under the skin, through this mouth, and into this public life, and back in again. In this regard, listening can be understood as the unsettling of boundaries – sound draws me forward, away from what I know; it interrupts me, it queers the borders of this body, even this thought. If we follow this further, I might say that listening – this act of *giving* one's ear – is a gesture that invests in the making of a future relation.

This relation might turn out to be a friend, or a stranger, or it may, in fact, turn away from us; listening is never stable or certain; sound is a type of pressure upon the skin, onto the bones, and sent directly to the heart, to tremble us: with agitations, imaginings, demands, promises, with a listening always in wait.

To return to my earlier thought, I'm interested to propose sound and listening as the basis for multiplicity, a ghosted and unsteady territory populated by radical diversity: even in that moment of hearing oneself, whether my own voice speaking to myself, or maybe when hearing the sounds of my steps across the pavement, here sound becomes like a second body echoing away from the first – these sounds fall away from my body and, in doing so, immediately unsettle forms of singularity: what I hear is not myself, but myself hearing myself, as another, and another: I am always already an echo. An echo within a commons of echoes.

I understand this precisely as a form of dirty listening. The assembly of a multiplicity that will forever unsettle any single view. What I'm after is a dirty theory to capture what I perceive as sound's forceful and provocative potential: to instigate the making of a new body, a body that is always more than

myself, a body constituted by an array: of imagination and movement, proliferation and agitation, echoes and vibrations. Subsequently, the Dirty Ear Forum is structured as a platform for confronting each other, for lending one's own personal practice to the group, and to figure a co-sounding activity.

To further explore these ideas, I want to conclude by dwelling on the question of "dirt" itself, and what we might extract from its presence, however miniscule or hidden. I would suggest that dirt be understood as that which crosses the line; we might think of mud tracked into the house, for instance, or a smudge of some unknown substance there on the wall or table, or maybe on our shirt. Dirt can be thought of as a type of transgression, if not the condition of transgression itself. As Mary Douglas details in her book *Purity and Danger*, dirt is that which should be kept out of view, held back or monitored, regulated. Dirt, in other words, is what should be kept at a safe distance.

It may contaminate, it may trespass, and it may also foul the body; my mother used to say, "You have such a dirty mouth!" which leads to the practice of washing a child's mouth out with soap – to literally cleanse one's speech from the dirtiness of certain languages. Yet, in a way, dirt always comes back; it is quite literally that which cannot be fully repressed – the body will always give way to its most hidden desires, its dirty little secrets. We remain fascinated by the shit of civilization.

Maybe what's interesting with dirt then is just how dramatic it is, while also appearing as a rather formless thing. Dirt is fundamentally dynamic because it evades formal arrangement: it is not so much an object, but a patina that may form along surfaces, an indescribable mark or scuff, or even a vapor that eases itself into the room. Dirt is deeply formless, objectless, ungraspable, which is precisely why we fear it: the one who is dirty may also infect and invade; dirt troubles any stable border.

Yet dirt also leads us to expressions of the erotic: we can immediately think of that phrase, "Talk dirty to me ..." a dirty speech that trespasses the line of social conversation, so as to stir the blood, to excite the heart; or, of course, dirty dancing, which puts on display the palpitating energies of bodies, a sexy repertoire of moves that definitely turns the dance floor into a feverish space.

What I like about dirt then is precisely its ability to not only undermine or sabotage the stability of forms, through its smudges and droppings, to transgress the certainty of particular social orders, but to do so by always introducing the excluded, the marginalized, and the unwanted (and the secretly desired), and by reminding of their continual presence – their nuisance, which accordingly must be embraced as delivering a confrontation with the possible. Dirt is possibly a type of smuggler dragging in what should essentially remain outside. We say: Look what the cat dragged in! A dirty topic or thing that once brought in cannot be ignored.

To conclude, I would propose a dirty theory of listening as the basis for an expanded ear: the dirty ear is not so much an ear full of too much, but an ear made sensitive to what it previously could not or would not allow itself to hear. A listening in wait: for others who may surprise us with their noises as well as their melodies.

FOR A GROUP:
A SCORE FOR A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS
MAKING A SOUND INSTALLATION TOGETHER * /

TAO G. VRHOVEC SAMBOLEC

Each individual has one media player and one loudspeaker through which s/he presents one or more sounds. All the sounds are to be made or chosen individually in advance or on the spot. The sounds can be (pre)composed, found, recorded, original or not. Each sound has to follow more than one of the instructions below.

Make or present:

A sound that directs attention towards the other sounds in the room (rather than to itself).

A sound that is precise and incomplete.

A sound that is not central.

A sound that is not disturbed by other sounds, neither does it disturb other sounds.

(A sound that listens.)

A sound that is active and present, but not in the foreground.

A sound that does not instrumentalize other sounds (in the room) that you might not know.

A sound that questions, comments or responds to other sounds in the room that you might not know.

A sound that makes space rather than fills space.

A sound that is not fixed in its representation.

A sound that does not demand attention, but that creates attention.

A sound that supports other sounds (in the room) that you might not know.

A sound that is unfinished.

A sound that is vulnerable.

A sound that doesn't require structured listening.

A sound that accepts and celebrates its constant immediacy and its continuous dissipation.

A sound that doesn't divide space and time into center and periphery.

A sound that can share territory.

A sound that needs other sounds.

* This score is written some years after participating in Dirty Ear Forum at Errant Bodies, Berlin in 2013. There, as a part of the Forum, we made a collective soundwork with the perspective of "putting into proximity the personal and the collective, the intimate and the global". Listening to the room recording of the resulting soundwork I propose a score for this situation as a continuation of the project, focusing solely on the possible attitudes of sounds in relation to themselves and to other sounds. Alternately – any number of instructions or all of them can be used for making any collective soundwork or other kind of collective work – the word "sound" in the score can be substituted with another word.

UNIVERSAL MANUAL FOR TRUTH-TELLERS:
STRATEGIES FOR
THE DIFFUSION OF FEARLESS SPEECH /

ANNA RAIMONDO
IN COLLABORATION WITH CHIARA COLOMBI

“To begin with, what is the general meaning of the word *parrhesia*. Etymologically, *parrhesiazesthai* means “to say everything” from *pan* (everything) and *rhema* (that which is said). The one who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse. In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks (...). And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find (...). The *parrhesiastes* is not only sincere and says what is his opinion, but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he knows to be true. The second characteristic of *parrhesia*, then, is that there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth (...). The *parrhesiastes* has to have courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes* (...). The last characteristic of *parrhesia* is this: in *parrhesia*, telling the truth is regarded as a duty. No one forces him to speak, but he feels that it is his duty to do so (...). To summarize the foregoing, *parrhesia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia* the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.”

Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* / edited by Joseph Pearson, *Semiotext(e)*, 11 – 20.

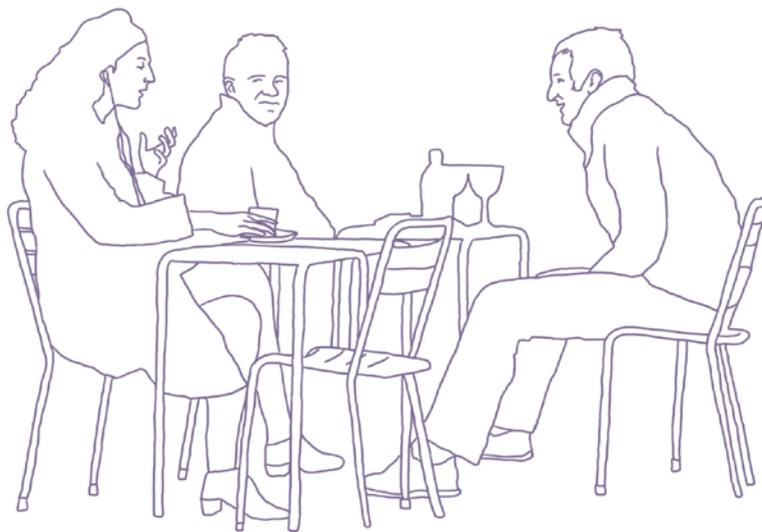
Keeping in mind Foucault's words, think about your life, and focus on your truth: Choose the one that makes you feel like a parrhesiastes (i.e. a user of parrhesia)

Take all the time you need.

Now, are you ready to spread that truth around you?



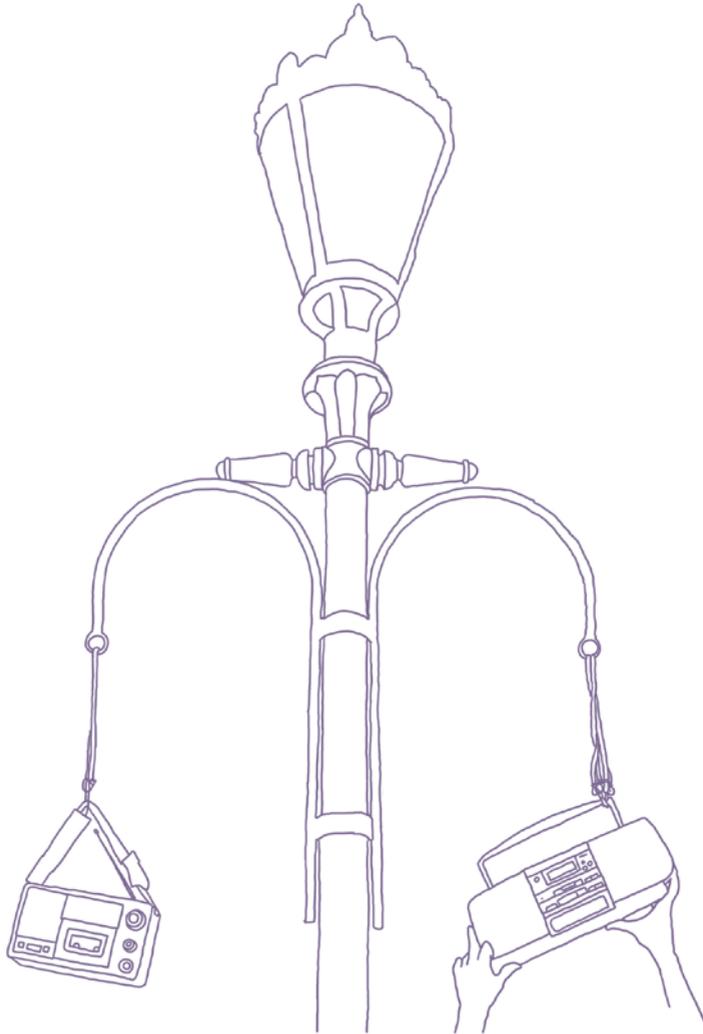
Tell your truth to a surveillance camera



Tell your truth as if you were speaking
on the telephone wearing earbuds



Write your truth on a sign, using big letters,
and hold it up to cars stopped at a red light



Record your voice telling the truth on a boom box,
then put it somewhere outside and press play



Speak your truth into a complete stranger's
door bell phone



Sing your truth softly at the bus stop



Suddenly, in a crowded area, tell your truth to the person next to you, looking her straight in the eyes



Stand on top of something, so you are above the crowd,
and declare your truth out loud to everyone

Here you may add your suggestions and personal thoughts
on how to become, or continue to be, a fearless speaker

CAGE AND CARE / ZEYNEP BULUT

Lovers

Cage and Care are lovers. Together they mean cases of connect and disconnect, of intimacy and distance. Cage contains. Care extends. This is suffering, as the subjects of intimacy and distance – of intensity and extension – are not different. They are very much alike. Like alike places. Like alike sounds. What was exclusively close in the past ought to be distant in the future. And in the midst of the two, “now” appears as a friction.

We have affection for “now.” But we can never fully make peace with it, as we cannot fully grasp or avoid “now.” We instead make up a sense of nowness and tell stories of it. Stories are not countable. They engage either with the past or with the future. We can re-tell and recall a story in various ways. Stories are most of the time unfinished, yet ironically, they come to life as stories with dead ends, with the urgency of closure and completion. The dead end, the vicious cycle of lovers requires the most basic and the cruelest: adaptation, “plasticity,” and endurance – moving on, if not always moving backward or forward. But what matters is not the story or narrative. What stays with us is the intensity, the feel of “the thing” between us. The feel cannot be perfectly detached from the events that surround and body it. The intensity of that thing does not stay the same as we move; yet it does not completely disappear either. It manifests itself in different forms, in different degrees.

What is that thing between us? Is it an assemblage of matters that we pass through? Is it a zone of vibrant forces, a state of affairs, which appears, disappears and then reappears? The thing between us does not show itself in such singular sequence. Informed and incited by simultaneous events, it rather emerges in parallel, cyclical and transitional movements. The thing between us unfolds itself and takes its form as we wander around, as we walk through what repeats and what remains, as we embrace the flows and stops, as we flow and stop. We carry on with that thing. We carry that thing in us. That thing captures us and makes a call. It speaks to us not in the form of narrative but as an instance of vibration, of affect. The thing between us gives a way to the unreckoned.

Boxes

I first saw Cage and Care in Berlin, in November 2012. It was sitting in the foyer of HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin. A light brown cardboard box with orange prints: Cage on the one side, Care on the other. I was there for John Cage's *Europera 3*, produced by Komische Oper Berlin, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, University of the Arts Berlin and Academy of Music "Hanns Eisler" Berlin. The organizers provided the box as a part of the show.¹

Cage's *Europeras* is a series of operas – or one can say, multi-media performances – which include fragments taken from the eighteenth and nineteenth century operas, re-groupings (reductions) of the orchestra and the orchestral parts as isolated parts, and re-enactments of everyday activities. *Europera 3* employs gramophone, recorded voices. Komische Oper Berlin's rendition of *Europera 3* in particular employs the idea of recording and recorded voices engaging with procedures similar to Fluxus events and Artaud's physical theatre. Sets of ordinary tasks are staged with fragments of singing. The everyday tasks are orchestrated as extended activities, yet they also remain singular acts in themselves. Instrumental sections operate as focused parts, as well as replacements of some other parts. The multi-media spectacle and simultaneity of these acts contest the narrative and constituents of a larger composition with a sense of redundancy on the one hand, and create – and yet still mock – the very expectation for a larger composition on the other. The experimentalism of *Europeras* questions the relation between singularities, between the boxes.

consider box an audio speaker:

I was invited to participate in the Dirty Ear Forum around the same time I saw *Europera 3* in Berlin. A group of artists, scholars and researchers, we discussed the sociality of listening, the ways in which we construct everyday auralities. We discussed the matters of sound. What constitutes forms

of listening? How do these forms draw and punctuate, interrupt and intensify, re-configure and mobilize a public space? How does a sonic experience – its multi-sensory modalities and physicality – contest the cultural order of sounds? How does a voice unfold and transport various ecologies of sound and space? In what forms, does a voice speak with its physical environment? At the heart of these questions, we reflected on the moments of resonance, of co-sounding. Eight participants, we composed eight individual audio tracks played back by eight individual speakers. We installed the speakers in the Errant Bodies Project Space. Eight speakers together generated a public space in which the audience was invited to explore the act and event of listening while walking in the room, standing or sitting around the speakers, and more importantly, while talking with – and perhaps through – the speakers or the sonorous boxes that speak.

Cuts

We said a lot about silence. Each track included silences so that it could coincide and mingle with the sounds of other tracks. Silences give a way to accidents and unexpected encounters. In the aural space of Dirty Ear Forum, field sounds, music boxes, radio voices, signal noises superimposed, syncopated, complemented, multiplied, interrupted and juxtaposed one another. Nevertheless the texture was light like air, as there were silences in between.

Silence does not allow a consistent sequence. Both rest and restlessness, silence can be a cut, one that amplifies noises. The cut stops something. It crystallizes a moment where one becomes more sensitive and attuned to the noise of silence itself, to the unfolding of what speaks both in and out of silence, as well as what is being silenced and excommunicated. Thus the cut does not stop talking. It rather creates a sense of urgency for talking. “What we need is silence ... what silence requires is that I go on talking,” writes John Cage in *Lecture on Nothing*.² The cut incites a surface

talk, one that includes many voices talking to/with/at one another without forming a necessary or cohesive dialogue. In the cut, one talks to the voices and things that speak in him.

I have kept talking with Cage and Care. I combined the sound recordings of heavy industry machines, a thumb piano and music boxes that I played in repetitive cycles, and my voice spelling c-a-g-e and c-a-r-e. The cut *in* Cage and Care is in language, in the sonic order of connect and dis/connect, in the economy of words, and in the rhythm and texture of sounds. The consonants of c-a-g-e and c-a-r-e functioned as percussive sounds, which amplified the irregularities of my utterance. The vowels were moments of breath, which operated both as passages to the other tracks in the room and as states of rest that stayed within Cage and Care. The cut *of* Cage and Care was in the Dirty Ear Forum, involved in the habits of hearing seemingly unrelated sounds together.

Habits

A cut does not erase habit, but draws attention to it, to the question of how one forms and embodies a habit in the first place. How does one habituate the act of hearing? More significantly, is there a habit of co-sounding? Looking at the conceptions of habit as discussed by Ravaisson, Bergson and Deleuze – and echoing Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, and Jane Bennett’s theories on affect, worlding, and ‘thing power’³ – Elizabeth Grosz invites reconsidering habit an “open-ended plasticity, a certain ontology of life between the living being’s activities and its milieu.”⁴ Grosz suggests habit as a potential action, almost a transitional state between “instinct” and “passion,” which pronounces “more attunement” to one’s surrounding and to the structural forming of his behavior. Thinking of habit, one also thinks of repetition, embodied memory, involuntary action, effortlessness and automatism. However, modes of effort, voluntary action and intention are already compressed in the formation of habit. “Habit is change contracted, compressed, contained,” writes Grosz.⁵

Emphasizing a sense of critical attunement to one's physical and social environment by means of repetitive and mundane activities, process music and sound events of the 60s' experimentalism engage both with the sensory and with the social formation of habits in everyday life. Examples vary. Take a few performance scores by La Monte Young: *Draw a straight line and follow it*, and *Poems for Chairs, Tables and Benches*.⁶ A landmark piece, *Draw a straight line and follow it* reads as it is written: draw a straight line and follow it. One can draw a straight line and follow it in various ways. Nam June Paik, for instance, attempted to draw a straight line by dragging his body on a long sheet of paper in his performance, *Zen for Head*.⁷ Paik dipped his head in a bowl of ink and treated his body as a paintbrush. As widely discussed, La Monte Young was interested in the physicality of duration in this piece. In *Poems for Chairs, Tables and Benches*, he instructs participants to move chairs in certain directions, with specified distances. In both pieces, precision and concentration, however, leads to an attunement to social forming, physical limitation, and spatial distribution of the activity itself. The more one attends to draw a straight line the more s/he is distracted from the "straightness" of that line. The commitment to the focused act ironically opens up the act itself to its surrounding. Such commitment creates an allowance for embracing the multiple planes, differentials, unnoticed resonances, and minor socialities of everyday activities. At the heart of this aesthetics and its effect, sound is emphasized as a zone of vibration, as affect which does not belong to any individual body, but which is "a consequence of action," as Jean-Paul Thibaud posits in his discussion on the role of sound in building and unfolding an ambiance.⁸

Going back to the questions of whether the act of hearing can be habituated and whether there is a habit of co-sounding, one can argue that these questions are intrinsically connected. Habits of hearing can be developed, managed, disciplined and perpetuated. But habit as "potential change," hearing both as an extensive and as an intensive mode of being, and sound as affect, an ecology of vibration and action, do not allow a perfectly fabricated mode of co-sounding.⁹

Voices

Co-sounding does not just happen. It is a constant negotiation. It requires electricity, a certain atmosphere, and a certain agency. It demands embracing the risk – the joy – of falling into another, of forgetting yourself. It implies resonance, an act of both tuning in and tuning with an environment. That joy or resonance is not always harmonious. There are also dissonances, clashes, and conflicts. When we “co-sound,” our bodies meet but do not perfectly merge or become one. Co-sounding intensifies the thing between us. It can be considered an act of re-assembling a world while being displaced, both in physical and political terms.

The shared space of voices in the Dirty Ear Forum created the conditions for a co-sounding of that kind. The vocal space of the audio tracks seemed to suggest a sense of anonymity. There were a variety of voices distributed to both human and nonhuman bodies in the tracks. One could still pick up and even prioritize a speaking or/and a singing voice in a few tracks, yet mingling such voices with field sounds, and relatively less identifiable noises and signals create a different zone of resonance, one that reminds Spinoza’s conception of affect, a force and energy between both human and nonhuman bodies. As one moved in the space, the electronic space of the recordings became physical, and each speaker became a voice. The spatial configuration of the speakers and the audio-tracks allowed the audience to hear each track individually, yet each track was heard aligned with and in the presence of the others.

Imagine that you were walking in the room, sitting next to one speaker, and listening to the track. Even if you engaged in the individual track, you would not be perfectly isolated from other tracks. Similarly, as you relocated, you would re-assemble the sounds. Just like there was no one single sound, there was no one single body of sound in this picture. Instead of a representational association between a sound and its body, the aural space created situations within which one could hear the multiple bodies and directions of these sounds. As partial, negotiable and mobile, sounds became anonymous, that

is they did not belong to one particular body. What's the significance of such anonymity, especially for a politics and ethics of voice?

The anonymity in the forum does not attempt to delete the individual voices or neutralize their situated presence. It does not wipe out a sense of agency either. Quite the contrary, the aural space of the forum invited the audience to question the conditions of hearing and to re-assemble and re-make the order of sounds. That way, I would argue, the anonymity underlines the immanence of a physical context. I use the word, immanence, in a Deleuzian sense, and wish to emphasize it as non-representational reality.¹⁰ Without an intentional object or a question of what's more, the aural space of the forum creates an urge to engage in what's already there. It gestures the real as imagined (and vice versa), as already involved within the space.

"/t, it turns out, is never simply it," writes Seth-Kim Cohen.¹¹ Seth Kim Cohen discusses the conceptual and discursive resonances of the "non-cochlear" sonic practices. This is telling for the ways in which we make sense and use of sound. To be and to be heard, a sound needs to be present with another. To become a particular sound, a sound needs to depart from and arrive in a particular body. But sounds also often appear as sounds of something, someone, some place. Sounds emerge and become present in between the bodies. The idea of differentials, the distributed multiplicity and anonymity is already embedded in the phenomenology of sound. The way we design and differentiate a sound as audible or inaudible is discursive and engineered, but the embodiment of sound – as well as its disembodiment – may still contest our discursive attributions for it. One needs to acknowledge and consider this matter of sound, precisely to imagine a possible politics and ethics through sound.

Let me propose a few questions about the "non-cochlear." When inaudible, are sounds still present or still potentially active? What happens, when one chooses not to make a sound, not to give a voice? Anonymity of voices seems to open up the space for the inaudible, for non-sounds in Cage's terms. This is not to champion non-sound for its own sake. This is not to look for non-sounds in the form of attentive structural listening, in which non-sounds

become an intentional object or a critical tool for transformation of any kind. This is not to suggest “non” as a condition of affirming the presence of sound either. This is a way to explore and discuss what’s at play and what’s on offer in a physical context, in the sociality, in the matters and atmosphere of sound.

Epilogue: What now?

Now does not stay where it is. “It is what it is” is not a static case. One is in transit. Movement is inevitable. Resistance to movement is a pretention. It is no different from prematurely or proverbially putting something into movement. Moving forward or backward, they are both myths. But what is now, if not an entanglement of already existing conceptions, beliefs, obsessions, fears, projections and not-yet revealed aspirations and hopes? Now does not fully contain or extend, unfold or manifest any of these states. Neither affirming nor negating, now is simply a space outside of itself. Like Dadaland, now is the very concrete sense, which leads to abstraction, not as normative sense but as non-sense. One may find occasional truth in now. The truth in now is context-sensitive, real to the extent that it is fictitious. Nonetheless, there is no truth of now. If one is looking for an ethics of now, if s/he wants to understand what’s worthy of happening now, now needs experiments, engagements and trials, perhaps a commitment to resonance. Now is demanding, but as it is, now is irresponsible.

So it is: Cage and Care are lovers. The two together is “now,” a sink in time, a flight in space, a lost bubble in the empire, Titanic.

- 1 / John Cage, *Européras III*, 1990. My thanks to my colleague Ivan Raykoff, who introduced me to the performance of *Européras III* in Berlin.
- 2 / John Cage, Lecture on Nothing, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 109–127.
- 3 / See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002; Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.
- 4 / Elizabeth Grosz, "Habit Today: Ravaisson, Bergson, Deleuze and Us," *Body and Society*, 2013, 19 (2&3), p. 217–218
- 5 / *Ibid.* 220–221
- 6 / La Monte Young, *Draw a straight line and follow it*, and *Poems for Chair, Tables and Benches*, 1960.
- 7 / Nam June Paik, *Zen for Head*, 1962.
- 8 / Jean Paul Thibaud, "A Sonic Paradigm of Urban Ambiances," *Journal of Sonic Studies*, Volume 1. Nr. 1, October 2011 (<http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol01/nr01/a02>)
- 9 / In his article, "Non-Cochlear Sound: On affect and exteriority," Will Schrimshaw attempts to suggest sound as affect as well. Will Schrimshaw, "Non-Cochlear Sound: On affect and exteriority," *Sound Music Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, Eds. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 27–45.
- 10 / The interpretation of the term, immanence, seems to be contested among Deleuze scholars. My reading of the term takes its cue and inspiration from Daniel Colucciello Barber's discussion of immanence in his writings. See Daniel Colucciello Barber, *Deleuze and the Naming of God: Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- 11 / Seth Kim Cohen, "Unhearing Cage," *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 151





SOUND, AFFECT, AND PUBLIC SPACE /

ÅSA STJERNA

IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTOPH COX

Christoph Cox: Your work tends to be site-specific and to be installed in public spaces rather than in galleries or museums. What interests you about public space?

Åsa Stjerna: Public space, in my opinion, has to be understood in two senses. On the one hand, it should be understood in terms of an ideological construct, connecting to the very issue of western democracy – the right to make one’s voice heard, historically pointing all the way back to the birth of democracy in ancient Greece. On the other hand, public space is the way that this ideological construct is materially and socially expressed as space – for instance, how democracy was materialized as an agora in ancient Greece and how that has transformed throughout history. Ideology and space always produce each other in a reciprocal relation.

Based on the assumption that ideology and the production of space always go hand in hand, the fundamental issue to be discussed is less the concern about what is public and not public in terms of definitions, but rather what is at stake, in terms of politics, behind the presence (or nowadays, with advanced capitalism, the absence) of those “squares,” “streets” and “libraries” we used to refer to as public spaces.

Coming back to the question of democracy and public space, a fundamental issue is what we actually mean by public space as an expression of democracy: should we consider public space to be the intersection where the political can be *represented* in a social sphere (Habermas), or, by contrast to this traditional consensus approach, should we see it as the intersection where the heterogenic, the disparate, and the non-representational elements of society are allowed to appear (Rancière¹)? This latter approach, which I support, declines the representational, where public space tends to end up as a projection surface for political ideals, and seeks instead to understand it as the junction from which a society’s existing but not always articulated forces can be grasped and expressed. To me, art in public space (or artistic practice in public space) deals with this. As a disparate set of practices that reformulates and brings to surface what public space (understood in its most open

form) is and what it can be. Such a notion considers public space to be a never finished process, as always becoming.

Working in public space is always a political manifestation. It is always about claiming space and the right to do so. From my perspective as an artist, it is about the right to offer other regions of sensorial experience. To affect is to open up new, hitherto unknown paths of experiencing and acting in life. With this perspective in mind, the political contains the right to experiences embedded in the sensorium we call life that today are suppressed and smoothed out by the striated spaces of capitalism. Art has the capacity to reformulate the sensibility of perception, the way in which we see and approach life. In that sense, politics and perception always go hand in hand.

From that assumption, my approach to how artistic practice in public space could be considered “political art” or “activist art” slightly differs from the approach of Chantal Mouffe,² who basically refers to conceptually-based art elaborated on a semiotic/linguistic level, the material/affective potential of which has a subordinated role. For instance, I would claim, to take a well known example, that Max Neuhaus’ *Times Square*, with its affective/sensorial/haptic register, is highly political insofar as it establishes a perceptual “Verfremdungseffekt” that contrasts with the sonic environment, producing other kinds of sensorial experience and requiring the flaneur to reformulate his/her own environment.

Christoph Cox: So you see your practice as contesting the advance of neoliberalism, which transforms the public spaces of democracy life into spaces that are private or owned and sponsored by corporations?

Åsa Stjerna: Well, I oppose all systems of power that undermine heterogeneity; and of course, capitalism is one such force. From a personal perspective as an artist, I also like the directness that working in and with the public forces on me as an artist. Working in public space, I have around five seconds or so to catch the audience; and I love those five seconds because that’s the moment where everything has to hold, has to work, because otherwise people just

walk away, right? In a gallery situation you can rely on at least ... one minute?!

Christoph Cox: In a gallery situation, people approach works knowing that they're works of art. So the element of surprise or puzzlement isn't there.

Åsa Stjerna: Yeah. The experience of being in a daily situation where art is not taken for granted ... I think this sort of experience has the specific capacity to *reformulate* you. The unexpected can be very powerful as an artistic tool or instrument. I'm interested in seeing how the artwork can reformulate the things that are most taken for granted, for example, the passages that you don't see any more but just walk through.

Christoph Cox: And you don't think this can happen in a gallery setting?

Åsa Stjerna: For me, gallery art is dedicated to a specific set of people. I am interested in making art that *everyone* can experience. Also, when you work in urban spaces you can catch people in a specific moment in their daily lives. So, in one sense, it's a democratic approach, because my point of departure is that every person is capable of experiencing complex art. But I also like the challenge of working in a situation where you as an artist really have to think about what's embedded in the space. In a gallery you can do things that are much more, shall we say ...

Christoph Cox: You can presume more about your audience.

Åsa Stjerna: Exactly.

Christoph Cox: In your theoretical writing, you're very attentive to the affective register of sound, which you connect to a spatial politics. Can you say more about your conception of sonic affect and why you think affect helps to clarify how sound operates in space?

Åsa Stjerna: I think of sound as having a specific *agency*; so to think about sound in terms of affect is to think about its *capacity to affect*. This is particularly relevant to sound because, though it's invisible, it's extremely perceptible and powerful. I find it important to think of a place or space as an *assemblage*, because you don't just insert sound into a space, you add sound as one agent or component among others. So thinking about affect is thinking about how sound can alter the whole configuration of a spatial assemblage.

Christoph Cox: In that sense to call something a *sound* installation or a *sonic* assemblage isn't quite right because all the elements – architectural, material, etc. – are just as much a part of the assemblage as is sound.

Åsa Stjerna: Absolutely. And I think this offers a powerful challenge to the conceptualizations of “form” and “content” that still hovers around site-specific practice today. It's not a question of how one should “install” a work but a question of how to articulate an assemblage. Deleuze's take on Spinoza allowed me to think of place as a body, a kind of assemblage consisting of a tremendous number of components with their specific relations, their specific capacities to affect and be affected. As a practitioner I think of myself as exploring what Deleuze and Spinoza call the longitude and the latitude of the place.³

Christoph Cox: I want to come back to what you said about installing a work. One model of making a sound work is that you produce it in the studio and then you go out and place it somewhere. This is probably the way that a lot of public sculpture is made: you make the sculpture and then put it in a space, and, perhaps, as the city changes, it gets moved a little bit or installed in a totally different space. But you want your work to be more truly site-specific than this in the sense that the piece would be fundamentally different if it were installed elsewhere.

Åsa Stjerna: People often ask what is site-specific and what is not, and whether anything can *not* be site-specific. This doesn't seem interesting to me. I

think of site-specificity as a kind of *practice* that requires a kind of *ability*, a sort of *sensitivity* to the ways that specific relations form or have formed a specific site or spatial context.

Christoph Cox: Do you think that sound has a unique relationship to this affective register of space – that, relative to other materials, sound has a more powerful material relationship to its surroundings, which alter it and are altered by it? I mean a bronze statue in Times Square could just as easily be put somewhere else. But Neuhaus' *Times Square* is different. It's uniquely tuned to its environment and is more profoundly altered by it.

Åsa Stjerna: Definitely. From the beginning of the process, I always avoid working in silent studio spaces. When I work, I always try to open the windows to get some sense of how the work will sound within a context. Of course, the last part of the composing always takes place on site. Over the past year, I've received some commissions to produce permanent works, which require an entirely different way of approaching a place than installing something for a week or so. They require a totally different kind of technological setup and change the way I'm able to appropriate the place.

Christoph Cox: I'd like to return to the idea of considering the site as a body composed of latitudes and longitudes. Can you say more about how you conceptualize those two vectors?

Åsa Stjerna: I think of longitude as concerning the specific material, historical, political, and social components of a place and the way they establish different relations. Latitude, then, is about my ability as an artist to understand and to modify those relations in the work, how I can reformulate those relations through sound, in terms of affective force.

Christoph Cox: When you arrive at a site, how long does it take you to get a sense of that latitude and longitude? I'm sure it differs from site to site, but ...

Åsa Stjerna: I think it's tremendously context specific and a question of what I as an artist can do in that context. For instance, my *Currents* (2011) project was set in the Oslo Opera House in a huge glass foyer visited by a few thousand people per day. Some critics asked me why I used such a very, very quiet voice; but it wouldn't have worked otherwise. Someone would have disconnected the loud speakers. So it's a question of finding the threshold between too much and too little. It's a question of really thinking about perceptual strategies, about how you can affect your audience within the parameters of what's possible.

I just made a permanent work for The Swedish Institute in Paris. They simply asked me to do something for their garden. It's a very small space, and so it was very important not to disturb the people working and living in the area. So it's a work that shouldn't be perceivable more than a couple of meters from the source. The piece is in an old well in the middle of the garden, and you have to walk up to it to hear it. So in this case it's more about what you *can't* do. You exclude everything you can't do and then in the end you have something left. I had to take away all those things that I might have preferred to do. But I like the challenge of producing work that's part of the context. So it's basically a question of what I can and cannot do, and how I can connect with this space sonically, and how I can create a work that somehow materially relates to this specific location. I started to look in the archives and made a collection of people that have been working or living in that specific location since, I think, 1550. I just tried to extract the names and the professions name by name, often working class people. In the official history of this former private palace, the names are mostly those of famous people; so my project was a way of letting the other voices speak, giving forgotten people and names a kind of presence.

I think the work itself established an assemblage that is far more than the sonic material.

Christoph Cox: An "assemblage" not only in the conceptual sense but in the more concrete sense of a machine, right?

Åsa Stjerna: Yeah. Connect a speaker to archival material. Connect that to a patch in SuperCollider. Connect that to cables. Connect that to the garden. I found all of that quite interesting. The piece is situated in a well; so I also want to play with that. The 300 names slowly drift between a very clear semantic texture and a sort of watery texture.

[Stjerna plays an excerpt from the sound file.]

Christoph Cox: Even the abstract portions reveal some of the articulations of speech.

Åsa Stjerna: Of course. It's basically a live, generative archive that extracts new names and new combinations all the time. When I listen to the piece, my blood pressure still goes up because the project was so, so stressful – I still have a bodily memory of it!

Christoph Cox: What made it so stressful?

Åsa Stjerna: The circumstances were very complex. Even though it's only a mono installation (the only one I've ever done), I had to find the right frequency range, because the well has its own frequency and kept producing very strange audio artifacts that you could hear throughout the garden. I had to work for a week to get rid of them. So it's extremely context-specific. The electronics are installed in a tunnel below the garden where the humidity is about 90 percent. So each step presented both possibilities and limitations. There are so many issues related to site-specific work – cable issues and all these things – that are not really discussed by artists and critics. But all of that is part of the assemblage.

Christoph Cox: Could you say more about why you find the Deleuzian language of “assemblage” and “affect” more fruitful and productive than, say, the phenomenological language adopted by most sound practitioners and critics?

Åsa Stjerna: All these particular processes taking place in a site are part of the practitioner's reality and very small additions or subtractions can have really huge implications on the whole. I think that the notion of assemblage allows for thinking in terms of heterogenic processes, in terms of how disparate elements actually relate and establish relations with one another. It's fruitful to talk about that from the perspective of the practice, though we tend not to do that. When I work as a practitioner, I'm confronted by all these possibilities and components that force me to rethink and reformulate the established ideas about a specific place, for example the way that Max Neuhaus takes a ventilation space in Times Square and reformulates it into something else.

Christoph Cox: As we've discussed on other occasions, one of the problems with the phenomenological approach is that it only thinks in terms of human beings and human agency ...

Åsa Stjerna: Absolutely.

Christoph Cox: ... whereas you are inclined to think about all materials as having a kind of agency, as being active agents rather than inert raw materials for you to impose your artistic will upon.

Åsa Stjerna: Yeah, absolutely.

Christoph Cox: To return to an earlier question, do you think sound is particularly suited to this way of thinking in terms of assemblages and affects?

Åsa Stjerna: I think this is true of all materials, don't you think?

Christoph Cox: I agree. But I think that, in its fluidity and evanescence, sound helps us to conceive all materiality in terms of flows and fluxes and makes those flows and fluxes audible.

Åsa Stjerna: Yeah. To think and understand sound is to think and understand life as process. We eliminate this kind of awareness from our daily lives but sonic experience and sonic perception reminds us of this.

Christoph Cox: And it reminds us not to think of artworks as objects but to think of them as processes and sets of relationships or, as you say, affects.

- 1 / Jaques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
- 2 / Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art&Research A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Vol. 1., No. 2 (2007).
- 3 / Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza and Us," in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988).

DIRTY RADIO / OLE FRAHM (LIGNA)

Dirty ear? Listening with a dirty ear?

Two quotes about radio came to my mind, two quotes that haunted me once and again – never fully understanding what they meant – actually it is only one quote that is quoted again – and again:

„Die elektronischen Medien räumen mit jeder Reinheit auf, sie sind prinzipiell schmutzig. Das gehört zu ihrer Produktivkraft“.

“The electronic media do away with cleanliness; they are by their nature ‘dirty’. That is part of their productive power.”

A quote by Hans Magnus Enzensberger from his influential essay, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media” (1970). He is surely arguing against left-wing sects, their small or even clandestine circles and their „reine Lehre“, pure doctrine. Instead, Enzensberger is in favour of mass media that exceeds these circles and their purity. Manipulation, a common topic until today if we talk about mass media, is not Enzensberger’s concern, the observed dirtiness of electronic media do also away with this topic. The productive power, a Marxist term, allows no pure manipulation.

And of course “dirty by nature” means also shit – in the sentence before the quoted one Enzensberger writes quite explicitly:

„Aber die Berührungsangst vor der Scheiße ist ein Luxus, den sich beispielsweise ein Kanalarbeiter nicht ohne weiteres leisten kann.“

“But fear of handling shit is a luxury a sewer-man cannot necessarily afford.”

In German “Kanal” could also be understood as the channel of information that cybernetics still try to clean from all noise (or dirt) – by the way with growing success as the development of big data demonstrates. But the channels of radio could never be clean; they are dirty, and if you are dealing with them, you are literally handling shit.

Why?

I do not know what Enzensberger had in mind, but perhaps it is about a material rest, good for nothing, something that you cannot use, no end, something that is severed from you – and this reminds of the multiplied voices that radio produces always already; something that, like a ghost living and dead at the same time, but we hear no chains, we only smell the decay that is somehow uncanny.

If there are riots you could, for example, say colloquially: „Die Kacke ist am Dampfen“. Of course, German is well known for its anal metaphors. The shit is warm, connected like the voice, to the living body, lively somehow, even if it is excrement, dead matter.

“The electronic media do away with cleanliness; they are by their nature ‘dirty’.”

This could provide a further reason why a Left, insofar as it is not prepared to re-examine its traditions, has little idea what to do with these traditions. For surely the history of the Left and its traditions are dirty not, at least, since so many searched for a cleanly defined line. This was a major point of critique that Radio Alice brought into the debate in 1976:

“The desire for a cleanly defined ‘line’ and for the suppression of ‘deviations’ is anachronistic and now serves only one’s own need for security.”

Then they quote Enzensberger (1976):

“Let us destroy every right to cleanliness, those delay of the writing in relation to the real process, since the (clean) text only speaks to us about the movement to fasten it, to crystallize it, to present it as immobile within categories, that, produced by the past, try to force the present to reenact the past. Thus, to write a dirty text, a dirty book about Radio Alice, as Radio Alice broadcasts dirty texts.”

The emphasis here is that the movement is dirty, spoken language (the voice) is dirty – a precondition for a dirty ear. But again: why? And why in the electronic media?

Interestingly enough Enzensberger and Radio Alice like to see themselves as dealing with dirt, with dirty situations. But both – in trying to criticize the clean line of the traditional Left (especially the communist party) – they both ignore or even repress *what* is dirty about radio, that which is always delayed, and which never broadcasts the real process.

Enzensberger explains by quoting Brecht:

“‘Radio must be changed from a means of distribution to a means of communication.’ Electronic techniques recognize no contradiction in principle between transmitter and receiver. Every transistor radio is, by the nature of its construction, at the same time a potential transmitter; it can interact with other receivers by circuit reversal. The development from a mere distribution medium to a communications medium is technically not a problem. It is consciously prevented for understandable political reasons.”

Brecht in his famous radio theory, written in the late 1920s and early 30s, is thinking of radio as a means to organize listeners, to play with the apparatus, looking not for a technical but for a social solution. Enzensberger narrows this perspective to a purely technical one. The notion of communication that Enzensberger uses is, despite his plea against cleanliness, quite cybernetical.

Brecht developed, in my opinion, a different notion: Communication in radio means distribution and distribution is dirty, in principle.

Why?

The materiality of the acousmatic voice, the fact that it is severed from its origins, makes it dirty in principle. It is uncontrollable. The duplicated voice with its uncontrollable impact is uncanny. Radio Alice thinks a text could be clean, but it never is: as a materiality, in its materiality it is always dirty; there is a material rest, living and not living at the same time – and one could state

that in this sense the voice in radio becomes text. While they stress the real process, fearing that the text crystallizes a present, they forget the situation of reception, which is never clean. Interestingly, they were in their radio practice quite clear about this issue, enjoying the dirty situation of reception by inviting listeners to talk in other tongues.

The dirt of radio is the dirty situation of the distributed voice – that is never pure. And – to quote John Mowitt from his study on radio – even the voice is not only haunted by a multiplication, not only haunted by its acoustic character, but especially haunted by a nearly unhearable sound, a certain humming; Adorno calls it “hear-stripe”, something that is there, that whistles in a kind of uncanny way, since it has no human origin at all. This dirty sound is radio. Dirty by nature.

How to draw the consequences for the still often quite clean walls of the white cube? And we have to take into account that the cybernetic means are already trying to clean the everyday from all dirtiness.

OF WHAT IS HEARD AND NOT HEARD / ANJA KANNGIESER

I

it was a room that dwarfed its inhabitants
its walls a smear on the horizon, its ceiling extending to the stratosphere
feet on a floor stretching beyond the edges of where the eye could see
clouds piling up in a corner, damp and mute

thirteen people sat in a circle
bent heads some small smiles some nervous hands some
discussion to be had
activity to be planned and plotted and engaged
imagined equilibriums
more or less

voices thrown into the cavernous space
conquering with assertive vowels and forceful consonants
electrified waves of opinions
waves so well formed and interlocking

each voice shrinking the room bringing the concrete into relief
bringing worn carpet into relief bringing dusty windows into relief
bringing the rain outside into relief and the sharp smells of age and mould
each voice illuminating a bright face
buffered by the vibration of the self making plans, being useful, participating
until you

silence
gaps
pauses
endings

until you

you said nothing
you said nothing
not a thing not even a stutter
you said nothing

and the room it exploded
into vertiginous space
the cold of stratospheric ice
freezing the clouds in the corner
the floor a sinkhole
you made the unknowable

again

II

in the very same land, a land watered by the blood of genocides, people began
to write to trees
they wrote of their love for the trees, their adoration for their branches, their
roots
the shadows they cast and the vast stillnesses they held

they wrote stories for the eucalypts and elms
of running fingers over their flesh, their rough edges, peeling back the outside
those bodies quietly holding onto histories
histories invisible until heard

they wrote to the trees of human politics
of uncertainty and parallel struggles separated by oceans and ideas
events of war
they wrote of economic collapse

they wrote of their own daily heartbreaks and angers
as though the trees could heal their human sorrows
the trees but resonance chambers for their own echoes
the trees emanating some sense of weight to ground their distress

some counselled the trees
commiserated with changing drought patterns and heat
commiserating against displacement and planning
reassurances over pages and words and screens

in some cases the trees wrote back
trees designated by strings of numbers and human voices
bearing messages in human tongues
bearing thanks for their attention

but the trees did not tell of the red that soaked their soils
the trees did not tell of their musky sap
the trees did not tell of the cyclical strippings of beetles of bark of moths
the trees did not tell of territories carved violently into existence

she said to me if you were a tree i would write you love letters
that was how i found out

III

that humanity is implicated in the sixth mass extinction
the dawning comprehension
of how many species disappeared, evaporated into the air
shadows painted onto shrubs and concrete as though they were remainders
of what?

groups of scientists

for decades at this point, listening to the gradual silencing that cannot be seen
mapping evaporations onto neon templates
like some kind of dialogue with dispossession
but in actuality one sided

the groups of scientists
standing in clusters with microphones and measurements
for decades at this point, recording and recording
almost imperceptible renderings of death
told in the slightest movements of a limb

over decades these recordings played together
a litany between timestamps transcribed onto graphs
a public space between species
each sound witnessing
a fleeing, a curling inwards into burrows

silence being only strong when chosen
when imposed, as an exile
from patterns of habitation
refusals transmitted in marks on sand
or in abandoned dams and shells and seed pods

what is made of the public silence
when it is in languages unregistered?
when it is found in traces and spurs
but not in collective knowledge
where the silence goes unheard

the groups of scientists
transducing silence into evidence
of anthropogenic damage

relaying catastrophe on earthly timescales
waiting until it nudges at the limits of concern

the fallacies of conversation
trapped in feedback loops

IV

held by masses of human bodies talking, sweating and shifting and generating
heat onto one another
breathing the same air
bodies linked in exhalations, in accidental contact

bodies gathered to proclaim, disclaim, reclaim
to tell their stories and to make common
across the boundaries of fabric, skin, stances, teeth
across the ways in which they arrived there
across the ways in which they will leave
and the stakes they hold

the police took away loud-speakers
from masses of bodies uncomfortable in the heat uncomfortable in proximity
but anchored in assembly
linked in inhalations, linked in exhalations

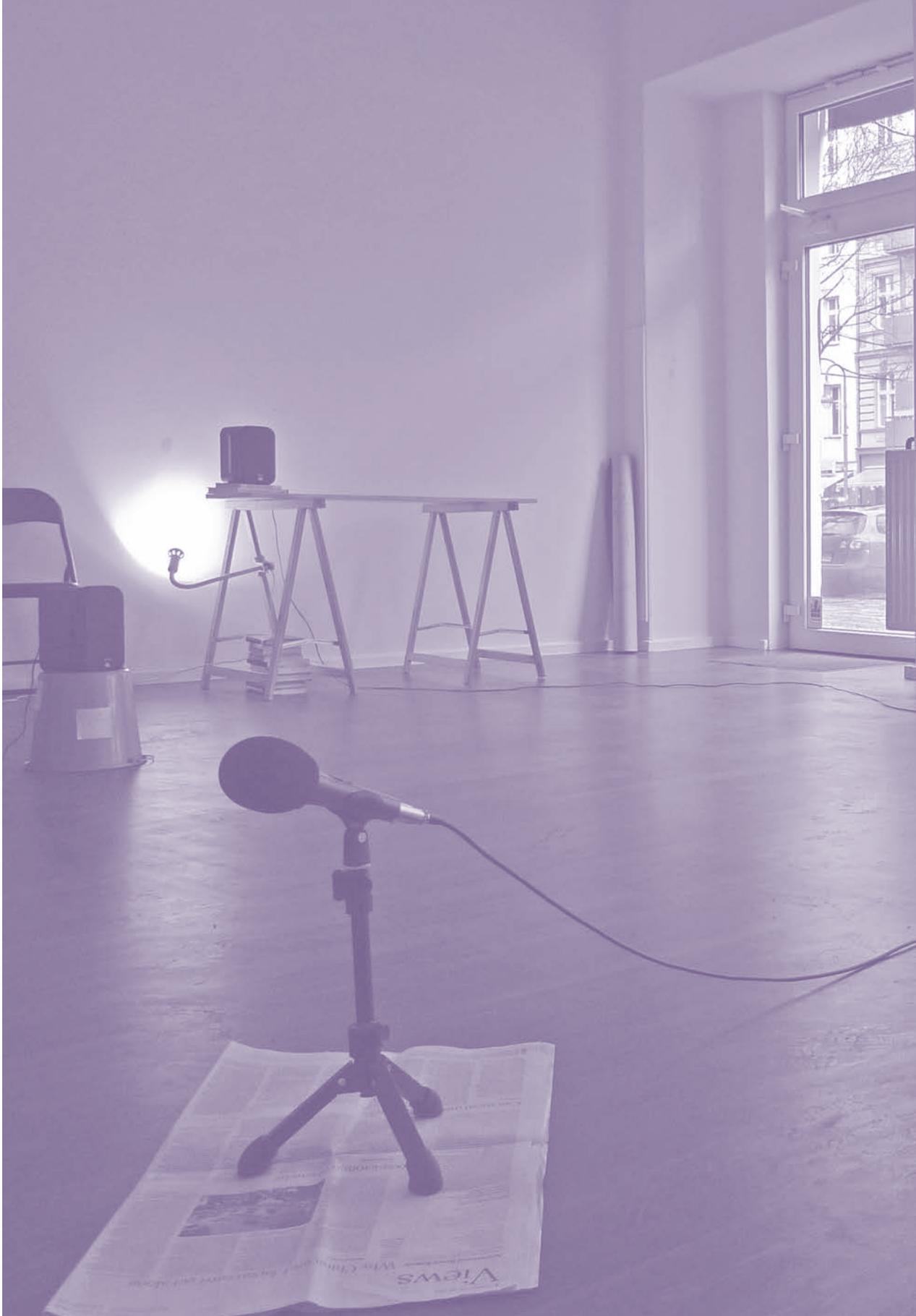
the chains of bodies
creating chains of sound
each voice heard a thousand times a thousand times one thousand times
a connection and disconnection
repeating a mess of passions
tone become mass

hitting up against brick and glass sliding over pylons and benches filling crevices and passageways
strident manifestations
made collaborative, collaborative in speech

a voice not compelling enough

a voice fallen out
(in this the fantasy of what is seen)
a body pushed into a gap
(melting difference into overheated bodies)
the space closed again, behind and lost
to no attention

to no notice





SAIT THE SAYS TRUCK NUMBER
SUNNY | BASS | 2010
SBA | SEAN | JAC | 2011
SBOAT | ME | JAC | 2012
SAC | WISSELM | 2013
SAC | 122 | 2014
SAC | 2015
SAC | 2016
SAC | 2017
SAC | 2018
SAC | 2019
SAC | 2020
SAC | 2021
SAC | 2022
SAC | 2023
SAC | 2024
SAC | 2025
SAC | 2026
SAC | 2027
SAC | 2028
SAC | 2029
SAC | 2030

ENDNOTES ON THE MARGIN
OF LISTENING /

BUDHADITYA CHATTOPADHYAY

1.

On this busy street during a hectic morning, the people are walking without looking at each other. They can listen to each other's footsteps, but the listening implies recognizing the existence of the other and coming face to face with the situation of the social interaction. The implication will work against the rhythm that the city demands. Some of the people in the crowd prefer to be on the margin of listening. It is their choice to be on the territory of that acute circle that social life offers. Not due to timidity, but fascination with loneliness triggers such a choice. What does it mean to be on the margin of listening? It is a situation of listening to the everyday sounds but not giving focus to their object-hood.¹ There are breathing, a cough, a prominent footstep, a car horn, a shout that stands out – but these sounds will eventually dissolve into the tone of the moment enveloped by a busy traffic without leaving any residue. Any resonance whatsoever of their happening won't linger in the mind. It is a situation of not attending to everyday sounds with the excuse of being alienated and self-absorbed in a crowd of many others – similar outsiders to the city. Margin of listening allows one to be immersed in the inner world – there is another sea, another river of flow; a certain environment of soliloquy that outlines the subjective self elevated and emancipated from the everyday.

2.

How do we recognize the barrier between what we do listen to, and what we do not? There is actually no objective barrier. It is a blurry margin of audibility that is set by momentary subjective moods with the affective dimension of an auditory situation.² An auditory situation is a fluid frame of spatio-temporal juxtapositions and occurrences that are more speculative than they actually appear. They are comprised of happenings and chance emergences of transient interactions with the sound world around us. Anything and everything can happen in this world. A meteorite can hit the earth; a car can suddenly make a loud screech on the street, a child can stop crying, a woman can scream looking at a cockroach on the kitchen floor, and dynamite can make a sudden blast in the heart of a metropolis. These situations are not characterized by what

they seem to present at the instance of their emergence, but how they appear, develop, indescribably negotiate with their aimless becoming and disappear into oblivion starting from the nothing, and how they are perceived as contours of certain fragile, uncertain, intersecting narratives in the mind of the listener. What we listen to and what we do not therefore are impressions of our mind. I do not hear the sounds that you hear.

3.

Look at that man who is standing at the crossroad, reluctant to take a step to traverse the eventful street. His steps are suspended as if there is a lot of uncertainty in today's air. His remorseful eyes do not know where to put the perfect glance. All the lonely people, cars and objects are passing by, or he doesn't care to move forward from his own incurable stasis. Is it possible that he is listening to his inner flow of sound and silence, and the frantic world around doesn't seem to prompt him to take mindful decisions. His thoughts are somewhere else other than this very street at the heart of the city. His steps remain suspended on the outermost margin of everyday sounds.³ Standing at the boundaries of the circle outlining today's tone of the city, his inwardness reflects the contours of the margin of listening a nomadic listener experiences now and then, and follows its ramifications against taking navigational decisions.

4.

It often happens that I become absentminded or fall into a reverie when listening to certain sounds. These sounds can be as mundane as everyday sonic occurrences – we usually do not attend to them in our daily activities. Some of these sounds might be the blaring of car horns out the window, the click-clacking sound of the mechanical curtain at the glass pane in my office, a flush in the toilet or the not-so-distant hissing of the electrical boiling mug for making coffee. These sonic phenomena are nothing special; they erupt and evaporate in my immediate environment during a working day without leaving any trace. However, some of these sounds do stand out here and there quite randomly, and induce me to elevate myself to some other perceptual plane perhaps not

directly related to the source or place of occurrence of the sonic phenomena.⁴ These sounds open doors into another world beyond their intended immediate meaning or object-hood. I try to understand why they manage to unsettle me in such a way that I enter into this elevated state of contemplation. It seems that these sounds are not the specific causes for my becoming absentminded and reaching a contemplative state. Rather, somehow, a fertile auditory situation unfolds around me as these sonic phenomena occur. These auditory situations are what I am currently interested in, and my curiosity lies in the exploration of the thoughts or the mode of contemplation being in such situations trigger. They appear as poetic and expressive, touching upon certain reflective, abstract and introspective state of the mind.

5.

At this moment I can listen to the strong electrical hum of the close confines of the room. No other sound makes an impression on my mind. But the hum, when being concentrated on, starts to produce stronger resonances in my ears. As time passes by, the power of concentration brings the hum to cross the margin of listening. I do not recognize it as the specific sound of a hum in order to navigate along the lines of this moment. But it appears as capable of overwhelming my senses with its sheer and relentless power. The balance of interaction between the mindful perception of the reverberant sound of the hum⁵ and its characteristic texture, tone and volume is disrupted. Through the occasion of this disruption a stream of chaotic thoughts ruptures signification. On the verge of various intermingling moods largely dominated by fear, I try to cut myself off from the sound, and then another sound intends to cross the margin of listening – a footstep in the corridor. I concentrate on the footstep and its sound continues to reverberate in my mind long after the actual footstep disappears into the hallway.

6.

One image instantaneously removes another less comforting. The face of a man looking at me across the street seems to be hostile and unfriendly – I

would like to replace the image of his face, so I look away, and then a young girl passes by on the bicycle. Image of her going away erases the uneasiness of looking at the eyes of intolerance. A bus arrives at the nearby stop covering a large part of the view. I continue thinking about the girl and that image hovers over the view of the large windowpane of the bus; I forget to be mindful of the widely spread-out advertisements on its bare body. I wonder if in that way a particular sound can replace another less engaging. It is assumed that compared to images sound events are more fluid in nature and less anchored to the source.⁶ What is more important is their ability to spatially juxtapose over each other without the necessity to replace or remove one from the other. When I look away, the image disappears. But my ears are always open to acknowledge the fragile wall of sounds enveloping an uncertain auditory situation at any moment. It is only a matter of intentionality to create the balance between the sound events emerging here and now. All the sounds are present; I take them for granted; but on the verge of listening I emphasize two or three specific sounds to take precedence over the others. The sound from the bell of the bicycle the young girl was riding is emphasized in my mind over the footsteps of the man. I allow the bell to ring longer after it disappears.

7.

The apparently silent room has layers of sonic actuality that stays beyond the margin of listening. The traffic and the clamor of the neighborhood outside, the church bell from afar, the faint tone of the room – these are the various layers that occupy the nonetheless sonically emptier interior. There is no voice that stands out by crossing the margin. Everything is as it should be – the way it has been for quite long. No meteorite has fallen on the ground; no bomb has made a blast in the area; no collective demonstration has hit the street so far. Every day is ritual-like, and every night is peaceful. The apparent lack of sonic obtrusion makes me thinking on sound rather than navigating along the inert sonic environment. Many other cities, areas and urban zones would otherwise demand the cognitive and navigational mode of listening to survive the everyday. The process of thinking on sound makes me aware of the effortless

meanderings one can make when sounds are all predictable, and the auditory situation is rather static. The relative distance of the inactive layers of sonic actualities from this room creates the space for self-motivated musing over sounds rather than passively analyzing and theorizing them⁷ using reductive logic. It is a contemplative state of mind that allows transcending sound's material grasp of immediate meaning-making linked with the epistemological knowledge structures.

8.

Am I not speaking to you? If I am, then why do you look away from me? It is possible that you do not listen to me, but there are reflections of what I am speaking in the shadows of my lips reflected on the wall of sound enveloping us at this moment. If you ignore my voice, the wall will speak for me. Standing at the privileged center of listening you wonder how not to attend to what I am saying. It is also possible that you will push the margin up to my inner silence if you cannot silence me. The multiple meanings of sound⁸ emanating from my voice evaporate into the room, which contains a claustrophobic quality, shaping the push and pull between sound and its intention. Your ears are only attentive to the primal voice that you want and desire. From the other side of the margin I continue to move my lips, and sounds coming from my inner silences refract into a resonance that challenges the oppressive mode of non-listening.

9.

I can hear two bodies are making love on the other side of the wall. The inaudible sound of their address to the act overwhelms the tone of the room. The wall represses the meaning of what they are saying in the moment of ecstasy. The undecipherable moans reach the margin of my listening, and return back to the walls again. Their multiple reflections meet each other halfway; together they cast longer shadows of melancholia in the situation of my loneliness. If I could reach the signification of their utterances, the intensity of transduction and transmission of longing would be lessened in tone and texture. The wall keeps the margins intact however eager my ears are. The fragmented array of

sounds are unable to convey exactitude of happening on the other side of the wall making my senses aroused to the point where I start obsessing over the imagined bodies. The limbs, throats, the elongated spine and neckline become mine. The margin of listening allows me to create a situation⁹ out of my outraged fantasy.

10.

To the ever-evolving ears of a nomadic listener, sounds essentially juxtapose over multiple memories from places experienced, previously traversed, psychogeographically navigated, or convolutedly imagined. This myriad of places, and their multitude of sound environments, can be intermingling in nature but different in tone and textures, which envelope different sets of auditory situations emerging here at the moment. Every engine of a truck or every horn of a car here reminds one of another engine and horn from there, as they mingle and juxtapose over each other somewhere. This is the situation of a nomadic listener for whom sounds engender psychosis, destabilization and unsettlement. Any effort to objectify sounds in theorization and normative structures of epistemologically approved scientific reduction would not therefore succeed in thoroughly understanding the sonic phenomena. There will always be a flux of fluid connotations outside the margin of knowledge scientifically available from a specific sound.¹⁰

11.

In the meantime of interruption I concentrate on the clock, and sound of other people's behavior annoys me. It's not that I am insecure of the noise, but the intrusion of the other in the development of thought is interference to the extent of disruption and rupture of a moment. How can I define an outsider? An outsider is he who lives in the margin of thoughts, and intends to come to the center of thinking-process. Thus he becomes noise.¹¹ Bits and piece of noise is included in today's impermanence in the sounds of footsteps down the hallway and through the corridor. An unwanted face in the visibility of the outward silence is what I am bothered about. It's not that silence should remain incon-

sequential, but interruption can also be discursive to the extent of reconstruction. Why am I bothered about the other? Is it not a private territory that I want to feel secure of? As the daylight falls out of the glass opening at the end of the room, I understand that keeping the experience personal is not the central question. Rather the interaction with the outside world and a change in the flux of thinking could be a valuable process.

12.

All margins are centers for some other territories. Standing in the middle of this alternative terrain of an abstracted and nebulous sonic landscape, whose contours are transposed with transient imaginings, I try to understand the positioning of my selfhood.¹² The constant bordering of what to listen to and what not to listen to stands apart from the problems of listening to sound's entirety beyond the imposed margins. The manicured listener and its elongated plastic ears are not what I am interested in. My inquiry lies in the blur between sounds outside and sounds inside, between the margins of private and the public, between you and me, between all and nothing.

13.

Listening has its limitations; can I listen to what I am listening to? To understand this, I put a microphone under a headphone at my ears. And then I lose hearing. When I lose hearing, I cannot listen to what I am supposed to listen to. So what follows after this? As if in a running train I only feel the buzz of activities happening around this lone moment where I am standing. All sounds have melted; textures of the sonic universe have blended into the liquid surface of a wall, and I am standing outside. Where am I after all? Is it not a sordid state of alienation? As if the world has become a perpetual flow of neutrality and indifference, as if the objects with their respective shapes and identity slowly transform into a monolithic curtain of vibration. Now I close my eyes, and I cannot hear anything.¹³

- 1 / The immediate sounds of the street may appear relatively abstract in the sense that they are generating memories and imagination of other realities that deviate and refract in response to the process of navigating the immediate materiality of the sonic events. These sounds, as impermanent as they might seem to the ears of a wandering listener, may open hidden doors and obscure entrances that invite further perceptual meanderings in the realm of contemplation and a myriad of thoughts transcending the merely epistemic knowledge-based material identity that the sounds would otherwise embody. The epistemological problems and ontological questions posed by such object-disoriented behaviors of sound, and the ensuing conditions of placeless-ness, alienation, nomadism and deterritorialization are the primary areas of exploration in this piece.

- 2 / I have extensively written on the notion of 'auditory situation' (Chattopadhyay, 2013, 2014, 2015) examining the contingent nature of sounds of a particular moment. I find resonances of such enquiries in the writings of sound artist and thinker Achim Wollscheid, particularly in 'The Terrorized Term' (1996): "Situation means first of all everything that is given at a given moment in time and space. Now everybody experiences situations quite differently. Something that is a situation to me does not necessarily have to be a situation to you. Nevertheless, we all have a certain idea of what a situation is. How would each of us describe a situation? Maybe it is something that, for some reason, persists longer in our memory than other impressions. A special stimulus is needed which unifies differing events. How does this happen?" (Wollscheid 1996: 7).

- 3 / If we explore an everyday sonic phenomenon, we may find that a specific sound leads to a specific listening state inside the listener, who may, in a nomadic condition, indulge in taking the phenomenon as a premise or entryway into an inner world that he or she did not previously acknowledge. The listener may address the sound relating it to the imagining and remembrance of a number of amorphous moods triggered by the temporality of listening, instead of deciphering its objective meaning, location-specific identity, or other spatial information embedded within the material attributes of the sound in terms of volume, texture and tonality.

- 4 / In his seminal writings, for instance in the article 'Aural Object' (1980) film-sound scholar and early phenomenologist Christian Metz expresses serious doubts about the object specificity of sonic phenomena in scholarly thinking following Pierre Schaeffer. Metz instead focuses on the "characteristics" of sound and emphasizes the problematic aspects of locating sound's object-oriented or location-specific source. He states that "Spatial anchoring of aural events is much more vague and uncertain than that of visual events" (1980: 29). In classical sound studies, scholars (Rick Altman et al.) have already under-

pinned the issue of sound's problematic relation to its object or source, and emphasized its interpretative nature and multiplicity of heterogeneous meanings.

- 5 / What I emphasize here is a shift in attention away from everyday numbed inattention to a careful and concentrated attention to sounds and their resonating, affecting qualities—in short, a listening to the process of “how” rather than the immediate “what-is” of sounds. This special attention can be achieved by being mindful of sound's fluid movements from one state to the other, which produce an elevated experience involving the listener's contemplative state rather than deciphering an immediate meaning.
- 6 / The problem perhaps lies in sound's resonant nature, as articulated by Jean Luc Nancy in 'Listening' (2007): “Why, in the case of the ear, is there withdrawal and turning inward, a making resonant?” (Nancy 2007: 3). By “resonant,” Nancy means the evocative capacity of sound to transcend its mere locative source or objective meaning towards memory, remembrance and similar perceptual meanderings around and beyond the epistemological groundings of the sound. Sound indeed can instigate a series of interconnected meditative states that hinder the concrete theorization required for scientific writing, primarily because of the nonsensical attributes of sonic phenomenon and its suggestive resonances left in human mind.
- 7 / When it comes to theorizing sounds, being ephemeral and ineffable, situational sonic phenomena tend to transcend the stricter margin of epistemic knowledge-structures by triggering a freer stream of thoughts. If we explore a sonic phenomenon, we may find that a specific sound induces a flux of listening states inside listeners who may indulge in taking the phenomenon as a premise or entryway into a fluid world unknown to them—it is this unknowing that works against the deductive logic of theorization of the sounds. In every occasion of so-called “scientific” writing on sound, I come across the problem of the slippage of meaning while trying to theorize sonic phenomenon in a controlled and analytical language.
- 8 / The multiplicity of meaning of sound at the interpretive listening ends are not rooted in the immediate sonic reality provided by the sound phenomena, rather, they transcend the mere recognition and knowing of the source or object of sound. They move towards a realm of fluid thinking processes that unsettle the epistemic and ontological structures of sound. This problem of ambivalence instigates Christoph Cox in his article 'Sonic Philosophy' (2013) to investigate sound's unsettling behavior outside of the object through the works of thinkers who had lent their thoughts on sound: “For Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, music and sound are philosophically important because they present us with

an ontology that unsettles our ordinary conception of things” (Cox 2013). Nancy has aptly called such transcendental behaviors of sounds as “listening strains toward a present sense beyond sound,” (Nancy, 2007) perhaps resonating with Cox, who maintains his perspective on the mobile and virtual world of sound: “[A] strange world in which bodies are dissolved into flows, objects are the residues of events, and effects are unmoored from their causes to float independently as virtual powers and capacities.” (2013).

- 8 / I would argue that such situations unfold around a sonic phenomenon (or a number of sounds occurring together in a certain place), but, for the listener, the sound may seem to cease signaling its origins as it moves further away from its locative source into the yet-formless “auditory situation” brought on by an imaginative and interpretive state of the mind. In my recent writings, I have discussed the ways in which such situations might unfold spatiotemporally, resonating to generate a stream of thoughts and creating ripples in the consciousness when a nomadic listener mindfully navigates from one place to another in a psychogeographic, rather than in a corporeal fashion.
- 10 / Following this problem, I intend to find an alternative methodology for writing on sound, which “strands the text in a private, timeless, hermetic isolation” as Adalaide Morris explains in ‘Sound States’ (1998: 5). The writing can be as free flowing as the poetic notes and scribbles made following a contemplative state of mind prompted by listening, with the listener being at the center of an uncertain but evolving auditory situation. An emphasis on an organic or essentially anthropocentric, participatory and interventionist methodology that I deliberately take up in this piece conceptually relates to the personal or private, or more specifically, the first-person experience having a base in the phenomenology of sound and listening (Don Ihde et al.). This contribution of the human to the sonic world can be understood in the ways in which listening can be a fluid, contingent and interactive process by involving the listener’s mind at the heart of the situation. This fluid process is reflected in the articulation of listening in words, not by the mere recognition of a sound (through apparently locating its source or object), but by apprehending the resonances and ripples they trigger in the evanescent musings of the listener. The listener I am considering here can be understood as a “nomadic listener,” who is not bound to a certain place or locale in a given time. The constant mobility produced through this deterritorialized mode of listening results in the intermingling of mental topographies; sound’s multiplicity of meanings and renderings become possible through spatiotemporal juxtapositions.
- 11 / Pure noise lurks at the margin of listening. It is unwanted and without having an identity of its own. The auditor appears to make a salient point: ‘you don’t exist in my perception’.

But noise is everywhere. We cannot stay away from noise of any kind. Noise is powerful because it is omnipresent. Noise can infiltrate from any side of a tightly closed room. Noise can buzz around the ear until one tends to recognize it, and interpret ascribing it to a multitude of meanings. Therefore, individuals whose voices are marginal and are considered 'noise' by not listened to may determine using the very form of noise as a counter-tactic to enter the privileged territory of the discourse.

- 12 / Gernot Böhme in his article "The Space of Bodily Presence and Space of Medium of Representation" (2003) speaks of selfhood in terms of involvement, "What is crucial is my involvement in this space, its existential character. Bodily space is the manner in which I myself am here and am aware of what is other than me – that is, it is the space of actions, moods and perceptions." (Böhme, 2003)

- 13 / The confluence of literary concepts and sonic practices may occur when writing on sound allows room for navigating in and around the conventions of scholarly discourse. Particularly when it comes to theorizing and/or practicing sound—being ephemeral and ineffable—the situational sonic phenomenon, as I have mentioned earlier, tends to transcend the epistemic knowledge-structure and ontological question of sound's immediate meaning and locative identity, and therein lies the potential poetic take on sound and listening. In my own sound works, I attempt to shed light on sound's relationship to different moods, particularly the poetic, arguing that sonic phenomena often activate thought processes that, when rendered into text as random open-ended scribbles, can transcend epistemic constraints of sound and involve the auditory situation and the context of the listener. For the piece 'Listening and its discontents' (Chattopadhyay, 2013) developed and exhibited during Dirty Ear Forum (http://www.dirtyearforum.net/dirtyearforum_one.html), I register and frame the spatio-temporal thoughts that emerge from certain immersive but evanescent auditory situations at the site of Errant Bodies, Berlin. Essentially contemplative and personal in nature, the piece and the corresponding text reporting on my contribution to the forum explore the pervasive interaction between constantly migrating humans and their contextual sonic environments involving the cognitive processes of the listening subject and the ensuing margins of auditory perception. Both the pieces question the materiality, site-specificity and object-hood of sound, and addresses aspects of contingency, contemplation and the boundaries of mindfulness inherent in listening.

BIOGRAPHIES

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is a Lecturer in Music at King's College London. Situated in the fields of voice, experimental music and sound studies, her work examines the emergence, embodiment and mediation of voice as skin. Her most recent publication, "Silence and Speech in Lecture on Nothing and Phonophonie" appeared in the special issue of *Postmodern Culture, Voice Matters*, edited by Nina Sun Eidsheim and Annette Schlichter (May 2014).

Budhaditya Chattopadhyay

is a sound/media artist and researcher born in India. His sound works are published by Touch (UK) and Gruenrekorder (Germany). Chattopadhyay has received several international awards, notably an Honorary Mention at PRIX Ars Electronica 2011, Linz. Chattopadhyay's works have been exhibited, performed or presented in Transmediale, Berlin; Today'sArt Festival, The Hague; Donau Festival, Krems; Sonorities Festival, Belfast; Hochschule Darmstadt; Sound-Fjord, London; Deutschlandradio, Berlin; Institut für Neue Medien, Frankfurt; and Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen.

Chiara Colombi

studied art in urban space at the school of visual art ENSAV La Cambre, Brussels (2015) and sculpture at the Academy of the Fine Art of Brera, Milan (2011). Her artistic practice crosses different disciplines, from drawing to sculpture to performance, often in situ. Her works focus on the interaction between relational spaces, desire and the idyllic.

Christoph Cox

is Professor of Philosophy at Hampshire College and a faculty member at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. Cox is the author of *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (1999) and co-editor of *Realism Materialism Art*

(2015) and *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (2004). He is currently completing a conceptual and historical book about sound art, experimental music, and metaphysics.

Ole Frahm

is a member of the artist collective LIGNA based in Hamburg, Berlin and Frankfurt. Since 2002 LIGNA's work devotes itself to creating temporary situations that employ their audience as a collective of producers – an association that can produce unforeseeable, uncontrollable effects which challenge the regulation of a space. Frahm published several articles and books on comics and Radio. *LIGNA: An Alle! Radio, Theater, Stadt* (Leipzig 2011). Co-editing the issue about radio of *Kultur und Gespenster*, Nr. 14 (Autumn 2013); and with Patrick Primavesi, *Movement Choirs and Body Politics* (forthcoming).

anja kanngieser

is a political geographer and radio maker, interested in the crossovers between ecology, self-determination and sound. she is particularly orientated on the ways in which people work together to create the living and working conditions they desire. she is the author of 'experimental politics and the making of worlds' (ashgate 2013).

Brandon LaBelle

is an artist and writer working with sound culture, voice, and questions of agency. He develops and presents artistic projects and performances within a range of international contexts, often working collaboratively and in public. Recent projects include "Civic Center", La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2014), "The Stranger Seminar", Melbourne (2015), and "The Living School", South London Gallery, London (2016). He is the author of *Lexicon of the Mouth* (2014), *Diary*

of an Imaginary Egyptian (2012), *Acoustic Territories* (2010), and *Background Noise* (2015; 2006).

Anna Raimondo

completed the MA Sound Arts at the LCC (UAL). Her research explores listening as both a political and an aesthetic experience, using sound as a device to build relational environments. She has participated in several exhibitions, her radiophonic works have been broadcast internationally and her curatorial projects are mainly focused on sound and radio art. She is the co-artistic director of the sonic arts' platform Saout Radio.

Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec

is an artist and musician working with invisible ephemeral phenomena and the notion of space. His artistic practice is a poetic exploration of relationships between transitory and temporal flows like sound, weather phenomena and human activities and built environment and social spaces they inhabit. Tao is currently research fellow at the Bergen Academy of Arts and Design (KHiB), within the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme.

Åsa Stjerna

is a Swedish sound artist who uses sound and listening as artistic media in the exploration of public space. Through her site-specific sound installations, she explores the often hidden underlying historic, social, and political structures connected to a place, making these perceivable. Her recent works and exhibitions include a permanent sound installation at the Swedish Institute in Paris commissioned by the Swedish Art Agency (2014); the Transmediale Festival, Berlin (2013); Nordic Music Days, Stockholm (2012); the Ultima Contemporary Music festival, Oslo (2011); and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2009).

The Dirty Ear Forum is an experimental forum for sonic research. Occurring in different locations and settings, it is based on the coming together of a selected group of practitioners to share and exchange research on sound and listening, and to collectively work through a range of sonic concepts. Each Forum is developed through collective decision making in terms of how to focus the process, and how to publicly manifest the work, as a type of concluding action. At the center of the Forum is a desire to bring together individual viewpoints and practices into a shared activity, embracing sound as a conceptual and material platform that may provide creative opportunities for collaborative and pluralistic expressions.

In particular, the project aims to pose sound as a material that allows us to rethink modes of collective work. It considers how sound evades our ability to physically hold onto it, how it moves through an environment and often passes over boundaries, and how the invisibility of sound often eludes description or capture. These dynamic and rather dirty qualities of sound are central to the Forum, and to enabling a sound art attuned to a diversity of situations, and that seeks out the multiplicity of being together.

