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The Notion and Politics of Listening
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The Notion and Politics of Listening

Edited by Berit Fischer

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On the Notion and Politics of Listening

Every contact leaves a trace.
– Edmond Locard

When reflecting on the notion and politics of listening, it is crucial to consider spatial and sociopolitical relations, in particular, the relation of the self to the shared space and the surroundings. In Helmuth Plessner’s bio-philosophical understanding, “a living being […] is placed in the border between its body and a corresponding environment. Only first when a living organism takes up a relation to its border, does it become open (in its own characteristic way) to what lies outside and to what lies inside. Only then does it allow its environment to appear in it and it to appear in its environment.”

Foucault describes the relation of the self to itself in terms of its moral agency as ethics and practice, a self-forming activity that allows the self to subject itself to a set of moral recommendations. Part of this practice, the care of the self, involves, for example, the

1. This statement, known as Locard’s exchange principle, is one of the basic tenets of forensic science; it was formulated by Edmond Locard (1877–1966), one of the founders of the field.

ancient form of speech called *parrhesia*, in which one expresses one’s subjectivity – the duty of speaking the truth as an act of freedom, even if it means criticising oneself or another, even if it means putting oneself in danger.³

When the border of the self is transgressed or extended into the outside environment through sense-based information – including aural information – a relationship and resonance between the self and its surroundings can be established. As Hans-Peter Krüger notes: “Singularity does not make any sense without its semiotic contrast of plurality. And, instead of merely thinking about plurality with the best of intentions, the consequences of living plurality prevent us from using force against one another. Thus, in order to coordinate contingencies, we need as a common minimum a procedure for publicly finding out the best currently available way towards a common future.”⁴

Despite the dominant visual and linguistic understanding of today’s culture, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that “the sonorous […] outweighs form”: “It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives it an amplitude, a density, and a vibration or an undulation whose outline never does anything but approach. The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.”⁵

Focusing on the sonorous obliges us to reconsider the aesthetic object in relation to the multisensory realm and to question representations of what sonic stimulation might communicate as information. It also creates a relation and a correspondence to the self, to the other, and to

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the outside world. Seth Kim-Cohen makes the point: “Lytard's equation of the sublime with postmodern aesthetics signals a different approach to the question of representation. The sublime object is no longer conceived strictly as the product of nature, as in mountains, oceans, and earthquakes, nor strictly as a product of the boundlessness of time and space. The sublime object, as it is now understood, is just as likely to be the product of human intervention.”

I would assume that social space is more sonic than visual. Communication is more precise acoustically than just visually.
– Haroon Mirza

In the Old English word *hlysnan*, “to listen,” the focus is on the notions of *attention* and *intent*; it refers to an active act not merely of hearing, but of hearing with intent. In Modern English, too, while the verb *to hear* usually refers to automatic or passive sound perception, the verb *to listen* connotes intentional or purposeful use of the sense of hearing. It implies intensified concentration and awareness of what one is listening to. The French word *entendre* carries both meanings: to hear but also to understand what is heard.

Kim-Cohen stresses the “inter-textual nature” of sound, an “aboutness” that “allows for sound's interactions with linguistic, ontological, epistemological, social, and political signification.” He also points out that listening is not about the “sound-in-itself” or “the solipsism of the internal voice”, but means multiplying the singularity of perception into the plurality of experience, which extends into “a conversation with

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the cross talk of the world.” Most crucially, he introduces the notion of a “non-cochlear sonic art” that moves away from the materiality of sound, away from the solidity of the objet sonore, of sound-in-itself – “a movement tended to be inward, a conservative retrenchment focused on materials and concerns considered essential to music and/or sound” – and towards a discursive conceptual sonic practice. Active listening can be an aesthetic/semiotic process that in fact goes beyond the realm of music, which is often understood as the language of the emotions. As Rosalind Krauss emphasises: “It is obvious that the logic of the space of postmodernist practice is no longer organised around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material, or, for that matter, the perception of material. It is organised instead through the universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition within a cultural situation.” Conceptual sonic art can itself be a spatial, cultural, social, political, and ideological practice in which the acoustic space conveys the social relations within a socially and politically produced space. From the auditory perspective, the space might be perceived primarily as a mere physical space with multiple layers of operational sounds from our everyday life, which we most often attempt to tune out. We seek to disconnect ourselves from the world outside and collective experience – this is a global phenomenon. With our personal devices demanding more and more of our attention, we are steadily growing deaf to our immediate environment and losing that sense of being part of a whole. The sonic art group Ultra-Red stresses that active listening helps us to define our own position in the public space: “How we hear what we hear [in] the spaces we come to occupy, constitutes us within this public

10. Ibid., p. 261.
While it is true that the public space is a design for control, which includes “a listener’s relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what”, it is not only a physical space, something engineered, but also a social space, formed by people and their social relations, and this is what produces its meaning. In contrast to shielding ourselves from the ubiquity of surrounding sounds, listening involves assigning meaning to our own social relations and amplifying and transforming the way space is produced and accounted for.

Everything is in conversation; everything is interconnected. As Eyal Weizman stresses: “The surface of the earth – now increasingly called upon to perform as evidence/witness in political negotiations, international tribunals and fact-finding missions – is not an isolated, distinct, stand-alone object, and nor did it ever ‘replace’ the subject; rather, it is a thick fabric of complex relations, associations and chains of actions between people, environments, and artifices. It always overflows any map that tries to frame it, because there are always more connections to be made.”

Recording techniques have become tools for documentation – not only in the realm of political and legal negotiations – but also in the writing and (re)creation of history, culture and reality. Who decides what is recorded, how it is recorded, and what should be remembered? Audio recordings can be tools for reconciliation, for resistance to power; they can be used as testimony and evidence in legal and forensic arguments. But like most things, they can also be abused: consider sonic anti-loitering devices and sonic warfare, or the military strategy of targeted assassinations using

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drones. Generally, the use of drones is an attempt to reduce civilian casualties, but their omnipresent sonic by-product, a high-frequency emission that hovers in the air like an indiscriminate lethal weapon, in fact causes severe long-term psychological distress with a variety of consequences for the social dynamics of whole communities. There can be no question that the deployment of such weapons, including, among other things, sonic booms used for the purpose of intimidation, violates human rights laws against harming civilians and exacting collective punishments. In sound recording practices, what is recorded is not only the sonic scope produced in the space (and which defines the space), but also the sound of the space itself. Sound is produced by space, but it also is space. Recording sounds may serve multiple purposes, but at the same time it brings up questions about ownership (e.g. commercial sound trademarks), the distribution of media in relation to the social space, consumerism, and spectacle. Field recordings (usually an unmodified recording of the soundscape of a specific environment; but often also understood as sonic journalism) play a crucial role in the practice of documentation and in the discourse around its various methods. In many cases, there may be a critical dichotomy between the aesthetic aspects and the factual circumstances of the recordings, involving such issues as social injustice, military and geopolitical affairs, and the interdependent relations between culture, the human species, nature, and the environment, as well as related questions of adaptation and reappropriation. As we have learned, when we lose an indigenous culture or species, we also lose a sound.

The surface of the earth is surrounded by an atmosphere consisting of vibrations of light and electromagnetic radiation – a geographical soundscape and the medium for the sound waves of wireless communications and radio emissions. Although stemming from a concrete physical reality, radio waves extend into other realms of the consciousness and sense experience, connecting and coinciding with faraway places. Radio can be a useful tool for information – and can also be abused (e.g. for propaganda) – and it can provide entertainment for popular culture and serve any variety of subcultures, even dissident
cultures (e.g. BBC and Voice of America broadcasts in the Soviet Union during the Cold War). Radio communications, and sound works in general, certainly have the capacity to create a sonic fiction – not only in the sense of a literary fiction, but as an alternative reality “which makes audible the possibilities of the actual world”, as Salomé Voegelin puts it. “It is sound itself, as pathetic trigger, that entices us to inhabit this world in listening, and grants us access to what the world might be and how we might live in it as in an affective geography.”

Auditory landscapes can also be interpolations between space and time, space and reality, the psycho-social and the geographic, and temporality and memory. The act of listening involves a transitional state between attention and imagination, between sensual experience and understanding or seeking a possible meaning.

[M]eaning and sound share the space of a referral, in which at the same time they refer to each other, and […], in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a self, a subject. A self is nothing other than a form or function of referral: a self is made of a relationship to self, or of presence to self […]. To be listening will always, then, be to be straining toward or in an approach to the self […].

When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something […] that identifies itself by resonating from self to self […].

– Jean-Luc Nancy

Listening is situated between expectation and prediction; it is based in the present moment, but this is a moment that looks towards something yet to occur. It is a desire for and an anticipation of understanding.


The lack of space between sign and signifier in the visual logic frames a location of desire.
– Salomé Voegelin

Listening is an interchronic moment, a void caused by the time of information moving between resistor, capacitor, and our biological auditory system as receiver. To listen is to enter a spatiality in which time becomes space, located between past, present, and future and encompassing notions of the remainder – the trace that, in Derrida’s description, “offers itself for thought before or beyond being”: 

It is inaccessible to a straightforward intuitive perception (since it refers to something wholly other, it inscribes in itself something of the infinitely other), and it escapes all forms of prehension, all forms of monumentalisation, and all forms of archivation. […] What we are saying at the moment is not reducible to the notes you are taking, the recording we are making, or the words I am uttering – to what will remain of it in the world. […] These remainder effects will thereby have presence effects – differently in one place or another, and in an extremely uneven way according to the contexts and the subjects that will get attached to it.  

As early as the fifth century BCE, the Pythagoreans explored ways to amplify the ungraspable effects of presence and developed the notion of acousmatics – a method of knowledge production that involves hearing something without seeing the originating cause.


When a sound wave is transmitted through space, either acoustically or electronically, there is a reaction in both the biological and auditory systems of the body. The body becomes resonant and vibrates in resonance with other bodies and surfaces. A clear example is the human microphone, which functions by listening to another person’s voice and then embodying that voice in one’s own, like a collective vocal transfer. In this method – also called the people’s microphone and used, for example, in the Occupy movement and in circumstances where electronic amplification is impossible – voice means not only sound produced and uttered through the mouth; it becomes, literally, the vox populi (Latin: “the voice of the people”) and serves as an agency by which a particular point of view is expressed or represented.

Involved in a constant reciprocity with its sonic environment, the human body perpetuates the fundamental principle of acoustic resonance: holding a multitude of similar frequencies neither as precisely same nor as perfectly different. Acoustic resonance draws a particular proximity between one’s physical location and phenomenal extension to another. Imagine this resonance as a landscape of acoustic tension, a horizontal spectrum of multiple modalities of sounds, which do coincide with one another but which do not necessarily become one. The very act of hearing holds the acoustic tension. When we hear a sound, we are simultaneously moved to and positioned in a place.

Sound is not linear; it is immersive, omnidimensionally complex, penetrating, and omnipresent, and it offers constantly changing possibilities and perspectives. The notion of listening is connected with tension, intention and attention. As Nancy explains, it “forms the

perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion.”

Situated within the tension of the acoustic scope are the material and performative aspects of the human voice, of language and speech. Vocal gestures can only be interpreted within a social fabric, where they can have far-ranging and life-changing effects: for example, in contractual issues (in the German tradition, a contract only becomes legally valid when a solicitor reads it out loud), in judicial decisions and witness testimony, and in geopolitics and the technologies and sciences that are developing around it. In this connection, we might consider speech-analysis technologies that measure and analyse bodily responses to stress rather than the subject’s speech itself; such devices are used worldwide in immigration and deportation proceedings to determine the veracity of asylum seekers’ statements about their origins. Their use raises fundamental questions about how we speak, how we listen, how truth is produced, and how such technologies of truth turn subjects into objects. In this context, the notion of silence comes into play – not only in a Cagean or a Situationist sense, where silence amplifies the situation and the omnipresence and spatiality of sound, but also as a form of agency, as refusal and resistance. Gilles Deleuze makes this point when discussing the archaeology of the present: “It is as if, speech having withdrawn from image to become founding act, the image, for its part, raised the foundations of space, the ‘strata’, those silent powers of before or after speech, before or after man.”

Hlysnan, listening with intent, helps us to reconsider deeply held notions about the auditory ontologies and epistemologies through which we understand the world. The act of listening is not about representation or the phenomenological; it is about resonance. What is it that resonates when we listen? And ultimately, how does the self resonate and with whom?

Berit Fischer is an independent curator and writer who has worked internationally since 1999. Previously based in New York and London (1997–2009), she currently lives in Berlin. Her research interests focus primarily on socially produced spaces, the specification of art as a producer of knowledge and a means to permeate the status quo, the creation of fields of action, and the development of spaces for critical engagement. She has published articles in Afterall (London) and be Magazin (Berlin), among other publications, and both edited and contributed to the books New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) Histories in Africa (co-edited with Kerstin Pinther and Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, 2014), HLYSNAN: The Notion and Politics of Listening (2014), and Other Possible Worlds – Proposals on this Side of Utopia (2011).

She has presented tutorials, lectures, and workshops around the world, including at Freie Universität Berlin, Nottingham Trent University (United Kingdom), and the Soma organisation (Mexico City). She is a member of the advisory board for the B32 exhibition space (Maastricht) and was a co-founding curator of The Brewster Project (New York, 2001). Her curatorial projects include Part of the Game, (nGbK, Berlin), Other Possible Worlds – Proposals on this Side of Utopia (nGbK, Berlin), Brooklyn Waterfront Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition (New York), Dumbo Arts Festival (New York), Intrude 366 (Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai), and City Beats (BankART, Yokohama).
I want to begin by telling you, or by confessing, that *I am nervous*. And *I am nervous* precisely because you are listening. So immediately I inhabit a space tensed by audition; in other words, I am already standing within the territory of my theme, which is the relation between listening and public life, and the acoustical tensions that locate us as bodies.

I’m interested in sound as shaped air; as that energy which flexes this arena between you and I. And importantly, sound as the production of a social body, one defined by what I might call, *radical sharing*.

As I said, I am already caught in the middle of such tensed relations, pressed between two forces: between the force of being present, in front of you, which might be called ‘the voice’ and which tries to reach you, and the force of your attention, which might be called ‘listening’ – two forces held together, as an intersection textured by the desiring productions of this and that, you and I. Surely, we are in this territory together, this acoustical tension; I am both invited and arrested by your listening. I am squirming with each utterance, each line a discourse of what Christof Migone identifies as “the running mouth”.

Brandon LaBelle

Lecture on an Acoustics of Sharing
I am running: into language, into your listening, to become a body which is mine and never only mine.

What can be discovered within this territory of the between?
What can be made from such relational tensions?
What does listening teach us, and by extension, what does sound – or what I may refer to as, the promise of sound – suggest to us in terms of being a body, and further, being a body within the dynamics of the powerful, within the thick of the empire’s economies, and within the languages that locate us in their forceful grip?

Might sound’s itinerant behaviour, its restless propagations, its tensed exchanges afford opportunities for bending the disciplinary boundaries of the proper and the powerful?
For the construction of a micro-politics precisely never singular, and always already between this and that, you and I?
A flexed geography of emotion that may spirit a sense for being public?

In short, the listening that I’m after is one of deep affordance, enabling through both its dedications and its distractions, a potentiality for what may come, and for what we may do or say.
I’d suggest that listening is a position of not knowing; it is to stand in wait for the event, for the voice that may come; it is a preparation for common recognition.
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 is an unsettling of boundaries – what draws me forward, away from what I know.
To give one’s ear is to invest in the making of a future public; it is to give the body over, for a distribution of agency.
Brandon LaBelle

_This is why I’m so nervous – I am filled with your attention; it is my responsibility._

As you can see, I am fidgeting;
the restlessness of this moment is already in my mouth –
I swallow it, precisely because I’m interested to take seriously the arena
of the between, as that tension of the voice, which tries to show itself,
even while hiding; and which also longs to be captured by the other.

_Am I getting carried away? I hope so._

This is precisely the point; the point of the between, which is also never a
point, but rather, an arena of flexed air, the acoustics of a future public.

I want to make an analogy then between the body that shakes under the
pressure of being heard, and sound itself, and which may perform as a poetic
engine for imagining the sociality of this body – for projecting it forward.

Is not sound already a type of restlessness?
Can we not understand sound as the shaking of an object, the squirming
of a body,
as a point of friction between this and that, you and I, and which stirs this
between with its sudden, generative energy?
Something that tries to escape, as a continual departure, to loosen the
seams, but also, which seeks to find connection, to be heard. Sound as an
unsteady economy of the between.

In this way, sound teaches me how _not_ to be myself;
how to trespass the lines that keep me in place, to supplement the
languages of the nation, to become another body. In short, it teaches me
how to run, to depart, but also,
how to arrive, elsewhere. It literally _enfolds_ and _unfolds_ me, as a you.
This might be what some call ‘radical empathy’, or what others refer
to as ‘deep listening’ – a listening that gains in momentum precisely by
integrating the tensions inherent to sound, expressed in the migration of form, the shifting of the body-identity, the bending of knowledge.
I want to underscore this as a fundamental perspective: sound as a body of nervousness, agitation, restlessness, and one that is always already public, that is, in between and in search; in short, an *emerging* body, which is equally an emergent sociality.

Association.

A crowd.

[audio]

**Echo / Vibration / Rhythm**

I want to unfold the notion of a restless acoustics as a question of listening generally, and more specifically, as one of public life defined by this agitation, as the result of a tension of relations that dislocates the singularity of the body. I’ll do so by focusing on three terms, or three auditory figures, which for me are suggestive of types of sociality, as resonant tension and possible publics.

**Echo:**
I approach the echo as a means for orientation: the auditory reflections that surround us capture a given sound and return it; the echo brings *this* sound back into the environment, to teach us the dimensions of our surroundings – we gauge the material envelope of place through these reflections of sound.

Echo, in other words, locates us through a repetition, or a repeat, and what I’d like to further suggest, a recital: is not the echo a ‘citation’ of a sound, re-figured or re-staged? A quote that re-speaks the original? In this regard, we come to orient ourselves by way of reflection (in the
double sense of the word), highlighting the echo as a type of mimicry: a sound that comes back to us, yet as if from another body.

I can develop this further by making reference to the work of artist Sharon Hayes. Hayes’s projects are often based on a performative recital of an existing text or speech, mostly referencing political histories. For example, her project *My Fellow Americans 1981–1988* is a ten-hour performance in which the artist reads aloud all of Ronald Reagan’s official ‘address to the nation’ speeches made while he was president. Performed in 2004, Hayes *re-presents* to us this particular ‘voice’, re-citing it not only in order to review history. Rather, such critical re-*speak* returns us to what is missing, and yet so present.

The work is an act of reversed ventriloquism – the mouth that moves with these words conjures the figure of Reagan, as that which is behind the scenes. Hayes opens her mouth and in doing so calls forth what is *prior* to her body, as subject, and as citizen. In re-speaking, the work operates as an echo aimed at calling forth what continues to ghost the present, and the nation, as well as her sense of being a political subject.

The echo then is a form of doubling, or dubbing, a voice made strange precisely by its re-play, by returning what we have heard before, yet from another. I would say, the echo is the beginning of a difference. As Judith Butler suggests, identity is a type of citation; it requires us to iterate a given gender, a given name, and yet such citation is always prone to slippage, to alteration, or migration; this, for Butler, is exactly the moment of agency, of difference, or differentiation: an appropriation of that voice which is always already directing our own, so as to carve out a space within the powers of lineage.
Vibration:
In contrast to the echo, and the production of a difference, vibration brings together.
As energy, it moves across and through the materiality of things and bodies, to force them into contact. As Shelley Trower states, “Vibration, not itself a thing or matter, can move simultaneously through subjects as well as objects, bridging internal and external worlds.”

I find this extremely suggestive in terms of understanding sound as a relational intensity. Vibration undercuts the visual geometry of architecture, instead forming space through invisible linkages and connections that pass through walls and floors, that also move through my body.
Vibration dislocates singularity; it diffuses the boundaries of this body, this space, into an associative and energetic construct.

These energetic constructs can be traced through a history of the nervous system, electricity and radio, and the esoteric sciences of the occult, seance, and mesmerism – all of which harnessed the energies of vibrant oscillations coursing through, or invading the body, linking it to spirit realms, hypnotic trance, schizophrenic ghostings, and other phantasmic forces.

Yet such dramas of vibration find pragmatic application in the work of Kisho Kurokawa, and Metabolist architecture. Originally appearing in the 1960s, Metabolist architecture focuses on the exchange between energy

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and material, supporting a dynamic interweave of the natural and the built, the ambient and the concrete.

In contrast to the separation of inside and outside promoted by Western architecture, for instance, Kurokawa’s work inserts what he calls “intermediary” spaces “unobstructed by any dualistic division between inside and outside,” and found also in traditions of Japanese architecture, in particular, with the veranda – the veranda as a spatial element so important for linking what is inside with what is outside, with bridging differences.

In Metabolist architecture, buildings participate in an ecology of interconnectivity, integrating our bodies within the greater flows of energy, what Kurokawa called vibrations, which pass through and connect all materiality.

I understand vibration then as the making of a common space, or a common skin, where the logic of the boundary or the border is overturned in favor of palpable integration.

Vibration might be what collapses the differences between bodies, to bring us suddenly so close, and in touch.

I take this as a platform for the production of collective agency: vibration, in other words, as a social body that can also move architecture, for instance, in the notorious Yippie demonstration from 1967, in which demonstrators attempted to levitate the Pentagon building through the power of collective meditation.

Rhythm:
Finally, I want to introduce the figure of rhythm. Echo and vibration form two renderings of space, that also afford particular relational exchanges; each locates the body within a scene of sensing and relating, one in support of difference and the other of commonality; one of echoing separation, and the other, of vibratory interconnection. With rhythm, we enter a space of movement and modulation, and of negotiation.

Rhythm gives order to things;
it sets the pace, defines the movement, patterns the flow.
Rhythm, in other words, is a process of synchronisation, and its modulation. *I step in, follow in line, veer off the path, to return at a later point*; one subscribes to a given pattern, while breaking with others. Rhythm is a means for negotiating the structural, for carving out more personal itineraries within a larger system.

This can be glimpsed in ‘voice and body synchronisation’ found in early speech formation; this instant of a child responding to the movements around, in the flows of speech patterns and the continuities and breaks of events. To synchronise with these movements through gesture and voice assists in finding place, in aligning with what is around, in figuring oneself – what Nicolas Abraham would also term “rhythms”, as the ability to “identify the object of our expectations”. Rhythm allows us to anticipate what will come; we follow and anticipate a certain structure, a “rhythm consciousness” for negotiating past and future; and where alignment can also be tuned, or de-tuned toward instances of revolt, drift, or empathy as well as performance.

Might we find such performance in the phenomenon of car alarm dancing, where guerilla dancers trigger car alarms? Here, the dancer wages a type of rhythmical modulation by appropriating the alarm as an
ordering device, bending it into a cause for pleasure and for the making of alternative moves.

[video]

Emergent
In mapping out these auditory figures, I’m interested to explore them as a ‘poetics of relation’, or what Michael Warner terms “poetic world making” articulated by publics. With the echo as the production of a critical difference, a re-play by which expressions of agency emerge; vibration as the making of a common skin, the formation of radical togetherness, or solidarity; and finally, rhythm as negotiation, appropriation and modulation, by which to create itineraries across an existing order.

These poetics are captured here so as to extend the reach of a sonic imaginary.

As David Michael Levin proposes, the attention one may bring forward in that instant of listening, in lending an ear, is defined as a “listening-to-the-other” – the making of a mutual space. Yet, this listening, as I’ve tried to show, is also fully tensed by not only empathy and care, but also with nervousness and hesitation, with longing and capture, by the invitations and the demands of the other – and by troubled echoes, intense vibrations and ever-shifting rhythms, all of which contour a listening identity.

In this regard, I’m interested in this notion of restless acoustics as a type of strategy for public life – an itinerant listening in search of a public.


I might provisionally characterise this as an *emergent public*, and one whose sonic energies may nurture the *in-between*.

Association.

A crowd.

To specifically create links between the auditory focus of what is in front, with the noisy circulation of what is around, between what I know, and what I do not know. In other words, to support the figure of a sonic body, one which, in tending toward *publicness*, toward ‘shared property’, might provide an active counterpoint to the privatisation of our civic life.
A Sonopoetic Exploration of Space, Sound and Radio

Udo Noll

Surfing the Gray Line

The fiery aether, which has no weight, formed the vault of heaven, flashing upwards to take its place in the highest sphere. The air, next to it in lightness, occupied the neighbouring regions. Earth, heavier than these, attracted to itself the grosser elements, and sank down under its own weight ...

This aether, the upper atmosphere, begins some eighty to a hundred kilometres above the surface of the earth, where the homosphere ends. Here, above the protective ozone layer, the air separates into its individual components; the physical and chemical conditions are dramatically altered by radiation and the reduction in gravitational force. In the cosmogonies of antiquity order springs from chaos, the weightless is separated from the weighty, upper from lower, light from dark. The separation and differentiation of matter gives rise to the spheres: direction and space. The aether is breathed by the gods; to humans are apportioned the denser layers of air underneath. In the resonance chamber between the earth and the spheres of the fixed stars, the movement of the celestial spheres produces a harmonious sound, symphônía, whose echo through the ages is still discernible in the string and quantum loop theories of today.

1. Ovid, Metamorphoses.
Such potent images of the origins of the universe, of creation, metamorphosis and the order of things, have not lost their narrative force. One of the most fascinating substances here is the aether. Its history spans thousands of years and it can still be found today in the realms of science and philosophy, appearing in different guises with its multitude of imputed properties and effects: divine breath, animating element, quintessence, the substance filling the universe, light-bearing medium and vehicle for all manner of forces. But the essence of this strange substance is evidently to connect and to transform the threatening void into something close and familiar.

*The world thought to pieces. And space and time
and what humanity wove and weighed,
nothing but a function of infinities –
the myth lied.*

On 11 November 1886 the physicist Heinrich Hertz conducted an experiment that was to have a profound impact on the real and imaginary space of the future. His proof of the existence of electromagnetic waves was the birth of radio and wireless communication, but something also began to be lost. The eloquent experiment did not go as far as to explain the newly discovered phenomena. Theories abounded. More and more complex aether models were devised to describe the movement of the waves through empty space. At the beginning of the 20th century, Einstein declared the electromagnetic field to be a property of space itself, thus rendering aether obsolete. Intuition could go no further; reality sequestered itself in mathematical equations. There were major advances in the precision of scientific predictions from this time on, and the formulas’ claim to reality also

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increased dramatically as they were translated into functioning technical devices. The history of the aether, from the perspective of science, had come to a provisional end.

Give me a here that is massively, positively here, a compact topographic relief of here, where you walk and pause to stand, where mountain, valley and plain are reliably named, everything clearly signposted, the directions are known or discernible: the cardinal directions.³

Berlin, January 2014, a clear and mild winter’s day, the setting sun low in the west. The sound from the kitchen radio has begun to change, the composition of sounds more layered, more elastic; a gradual heightening of spectral activity. The shortwave receiver is tuned to a frequency of 7550 kHz. Here, late in the evening, All India Radio broadcasts its international programme. But what can be heard now is an intricate pattern of shifting sounds: a rapid, rhythmic clicking reminiscent of raindrops, echoes of mechanical operations, periodically changing pitches veiling music, distant voices, unintelligible language, disconnected words, often drowned out by an electrical sound of wind, weather associations, thermal activity and redundant signals, fragments of the sound of the world, superimposed on an indeterminate background noise with neither position nor direction. The frequency to which the radio is tuned is a number and remains abstract. When placed in relation to the speed of the radio waves, however, it gives rise to a more tangible dimension. The signal’s wavelength is forty metres. The crests and troughs of the sine wave extend invisibly but at calculable distances through the familiar room: the garden right in front of the kitchen window, across the street to the shop on the other side, along the long shadows and the last rays of the late afternoon sun.

³ Ernst Meister, “Here” (Hier), German original in Prosa (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1989), p. 107.
These wavelengths can still be found on the dials of old radio receivers, arranged like the distance scales on maps, next to rows and columns of place names and the green light of the magic eye, which focuses the listener on his journey through the electromagnetic spectrum and the sounds made audible along the way. The sound cartographies on the dials of these devices from the heyday of radio attest to the relationship between radio and space.

As the evening grows darker, the sound changes once again. Tuning through the 40-metre band, individual stations become clearer, language and music can be distinguished from the static; the acoustic space seems to expand and deepen. This audible change is caused by processes taking place at the outer edge of the atmosphere, above the air layers. Here, in the electrically charged ionosphere, the space waves emitted by the radio transmitters are repeatedly reflected between the sky and the surface of the earth. During the day, under the influence of the sun, stronger charges are generated at certain altitudes. These form a protective shield against the vast amount of energy of the solar radiation and cosmic particle streams. At night, in the earth’s shadow, these layers completely disappear. But on
the threshold of day and night, energetic conditions are created which are conducive to the propagation of the radio waves. There are overshoots. The wave propagates along the twilight line, following the path of least electrical resistance and covering large distances in space.

The gray line, this zone between day and night, shifts with the rotation of the planet. Depending on the time of year and the tilt of the earth's axis relative to the sun, it connects the locations along this ephemeral line in the form of a specific radio sound.

In a narrow time window of less than an hour, a combination of space and medium becomes audible. The attentive listener enters into the geography of a radio space whose dimension and geometry are rooted in the physical, concrete reality, but which, at the moment of perception, also penetrates other regions of the consciousness.

In the ancient notion of aether as a substance filling the universe, it transforms the stifling void of universal space into a continuum of closeness and proximity. In the electromagnetic short circuit along the gray line, these qualities become perceptible as the presence and coincidence of distant places, woven into the hissing of the radio.

In the dim light of the familiar living room, the sound of the radio mingles with the muted sounds of the street, producing an acoustic atmosphere that is porous and redolent. The stream of sound on this late afternoon evokes regions beyond direct experience, realms closer to dream than to perception with its need to impose structure and form. Geographical visions, something like the experience of a long and solitary train journey. The landscapes framed by the window continually forming themselves anew, the gaze never coming to rest, roaming over the expanses in the rhythm of the tactile soundtrack of the rails.

And yet the traveller’s aimless drifting through the soundscapes between the frequencies is neither a withdrawal from the here and now nor a longed-for subsumption in weightless indeterminacy. The echo of one’s own existence, rooted in the present, determines one’s position – with the exactitude of poetry, which transcends measurement.
There is nothing presumptuous about wanting to plumb the 'mystery of a landscape'. It is a natural process in search of a land which would then be forever open to you and me.⁴

There is an experience of resonance in this immersed listening to the expanded acoustic space, which is suspended between medium, imaginary landscapes and specific locations.

In the practice of field recording – specifically, the largely unmodified audio recording of sound atmospheres in a particular environment – this experience corresponds to the technology of the open microphone. It is the attempt to direct one's listening into the air, in no particular direction and uninterested in the specific acoustic effect but open to the totality of an acoustic space that is modulated by the topographic, natural or architectural conditions specific to each location. The sense of hearing apprehends the direction and depth of the acoustic signals – and the time that passes within these dimensions. It does not have access to the bigger picture in the way that this is revealed in the gaze or the photographic reproduction. The perspective of an image corresponds to the path traversed by sound. Each change perceived by the ear is a progression in time – which is also always one's own subjective time – in that it synchronises itself with the acoustic event; the time of the body in the experienced space. Perhaps this spatiotemporal aspect contains a key to the immediacy and the intense experience of immersion that can arise when listening to recordings or reproductions: an inevitable process of simultaneous interpretation of what is heard into a spatial and temporal context, with oneself at its centre.

And yet the perception of the ego is altered, and the space is no longer purely geographical.

[...] a landscape of consciousness, which contains all experience of real landscapes, with their places and regions, resurfacing on the fields of a poetic map, in the adumbrations of a possible topography.\(^5\)

The soundscape is not the sum of the physical signals reaching the ear. As a ‘landscape of consciousness’ it does not disclose itself immediately, but develops on attentive listening as a dialogue from the totality of the perceptible sounds of a particular environment and a receptive ear. It is a process of stimulus and attunement, an assimilation and transformation of external reality into a deeper understanding of the reality of the moment at hand.

By listening closely to space we may uncover the potential for a poetic dead reckoning. Here resonance is the opposite of alienation and a loss of the sense of place; it is an active interrelationship with the surrounding world and the happy circumstance of ‘being in touch’ with the same.

The gray line has shifted further west with the onset of night; the room has grown dark. The window of time has closed and the spectral disturbances in the atmosphere have settled. From the street, the sound of footsteps, voices echoing between the house walls, and the evening hum of the nearby main road, vaguely reminiscent of ocean and wind. On the radio there is nothing now but the indeterminate atmospheric noise of the aether.

\[On \text{ the radio – the sea.}\]\(^6\)

(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)

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wait
listen
Wait/Listen (Mapping One Year of Waiting Moments Through Listening), is a collection of sound captures which, through listening, use my moments of waiting throughout the year of 2014. This particular experience of time through listening becomes an archive of subjective instants which project the imagination into a new relation to reality.

Alongside public and private waiting areas, there are also other contexts where one waits – for someone or for something to happen – in a less formal and more spontaneous way. It is above all these moments which interest me, these instants where waiting is transformed into a poetic, sometimes political gesture and listening becomes the experience of this gesture. An attitude, an energy – to be in the waiting, in the desire (in the temporal sense) – that attempts to introduce moments of vulnerability or doubt which do not partake in any profitable business in our unrestrained world, where only speed, yield and productivity count. When you really pay attention, these precarious and fleeting moments, which at first glance seem unimportant, become real immersive acoustic landscapes, each of them revealing a very singular experience. In them, silence is as important as the sounds which reveal the activity carried on during these space-time interstices.

Waiting is also a moment of transition and passage, an in-between state which looks towards something that will come to pass. Lending an ear,
being attentive, heading towards, making efforts to capture what seems inaudible, to be in the anticipation of understanding the different social contexts which surround us.

Each sound sampling is accompanied by a written caption which indicates the place, length and precise context of the sound pick-up. The accumulation of different fragments draws a map of these waiting periods and my various movements during 2014. This work process thus opens up a broader questioning about the idea of memory, our day-to-day sound environment and the traces we keep of these seemingly volatile moments.

The sounds of Wait/Listen are stored on a platform, a sort of map of the world of sounds, created by the artist Udo Noll (http://aporee.org/maps).

(Translated from the French by Simon Pleasance)
What we might have heard in the future.

Script for a Radio Drama

Scene One: Interior. Parrhesia in front of Computer

SOUND: THEREMIN BEGINS WITH SUBTLE INTRODUCTION THAT BUILDS UP AND THEN SLOWLY FADES TO A SOFT TONE.

SOUND: HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD.

PARRHESIA\(^1\):
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”\(^2\)

COMPUTER:
Vowel sound is distorted. Lower body of tongue.

SOUND: HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD; PARRHESIA INHALES.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Pace of breath is not recognized. Slow your inhalation.
SOUND: PARRHESIA TAKES TWO DEEP BREATHS.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Make space for pause.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Pitch pattern inoperable. Increase larynx modulation.

SOUND: THEREMIN; HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD

NARRATOR:
The future’s past has caught up with itself. In the Citadel residents are equipped with special auditory mechanisms for acute hearing. Communication has been stripped down to its most basic level; the voice and its aural residuals. Here, voice recognition technology controls the flow of social exchange. The interlocutors of the Citadel control the social order as well as the very limited resources of life. The voice is the key to pass. The Interlocutors guard vocal codes with full authority. Those in the half-light exist on the periphery without access.
Scene Two: In the Corporation

SOUND: ETHERAL DRONE SYNTHESIZER CONTINUES WHILE GAVEL HITS PODIUM FOUR TIMES CREATING THUNDEROUS SOUND IN AUDITORIUM.

SPEAKER:
We are on a brink of pioneering further exploration into the realm of voice verification and pattern mining. Our template matching and «feature analyses” are inimitable in precision and response. This advanced system is based on the unique geometry of the speaker’s vocal tract. It can mark linguistic difference to the nth decibel.

SOUND: AUDIENCE APPLAUDS.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:
This is the future, it is no longer about the forensic study of dialect and accent, but a mechanized system that will trace and eliminate suspected breaches.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2:
Right now, it seems a bit of science fiction, but it has a lot of promise.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:
And yet only a computer is required to run the verification software.
Scene Three: Parrhesia meets friend near The Citadel

SOUND: DARK DRONE INTRODUCES EXTERIOR URBAN SOUNDS; URBAN SOUNDS CONTINUE WHILE CHARACTERS PARTAKE IN URGENT DIALOGUE.

AMIGA:
Parrhesia! Parrhesia!

PARRHESIA:
“Electric fences line our new freeway here, in the half-light. ... Control has enabled the abandoned wires again.”

AMIGA:
Yes, Its “strange, how the scale forms on my antenna... in tiny patterns...”

PARRHESIA:
Security has increased since two were captured trying to pass. Were you able to carry it out?

AMIGA:
Yes, I was able to.

PARRHESIA:
Thank you.

AMIGA:
Don’t say a word as to where this came from. You know where I work. What are you using it for anyway?
PARRHESIA:
“Please don’t ask questions... I need a place to wait for morning...”

Scene Four: Interior Parrhesia in front of Computer

SOUND: THEREMIN BEGINS WITH SUBTLE INTRODUCTION THAT BUILDS UP AND THEN SLOWLY FADES TO A SOFT TONE.

SOUND: HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Differ movement of lips and tongue upon enunciation.

SOUND: HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Filter sinus cadence. Extract sinus obstruction.

SOUND: PARRHESIA BLOWS HER NOSE.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”
**COMPUTER:**
Simulate brain stem control.

**SOUND:** EERY SYNTHESIZER SOUND WITH THERMIN THAT BUILDS UP AND SLOWLY FADES OUT.

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**Scene Five: Café conversation Parrhesia & Amigo**

**SOUND:** INTERIOR SOUNDS OF A CAFÉ – BACKGROUND CONVERSATIONS AND DISH CLANGING CONTINUE WHILE CHARACTERS DIALOGUE.

**AMIGO:**
“Our Historical situation is not an easy one because it is dialectical: we are criticizing the language of [the status-quo under its very reign]. Therefore we must be both analytical and utopian, calculating the world’s difficulties as well as its wild desires.”[^4]

**PARRHESIA:**
“It is important that through all of this we strive to be historical contemporaries of the present. What would become of a society that ceased to reflect upon itself?”[^4] Yet it is not only critique that will break the code. I need more information. We must be strategic and pragmatic, I must make access, before…

**SOUND:** POLICE SIRENS INTERRUPT DIALOGUE; THERMIN FOLLOWS THEN FADES OUT UNDER MONOLOGUE OF NARRATOR.
NARRATOR:
Security forces arrest picketers just outside of The Citadel. Parrhesia disappears into the dampness of the night.

Scene Six: Interior Parrhesia in front of Computer

SOUND: LOW END SYNTHESIZER HUM BENEATH SOUND OF HANDS TYPING ON COMPUTER KEYBOARD.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Increase tonal receptors.

SOUND: TUNING OF RADIO TO LOCAL NEWS REPORT.

RADIO JOURNALIST #1:
In breaking news: there has been a recall of all dB 1204 model type audition implants. Those utilizing the dB 1204 model type must seek implant extraction specialists immediately.

In other news...
Decibel Levels of Noise pollution have shifted dramatically.

RADIO JOURNALIST #2:
During the early part of the 21st century, the source of most noise pollutants worldwide came
mainly from construction and transportation systems. Urban planning gave rise to noise pollution placing industrial sectors in residential areas. In today’s environment increasing levels of voice recognition data competing for radio frequency allocation have outweighed earlier pollutants.

These level shifts have interrupted the eco-system – fish are mutating from over-stimulation. Whale echo-location systems have been diverted and cold water whales have been found in warm water locales. Contemporary residuals of our marine life are only found in the stone effigies that float on the surface of polluted waters.

Fish in the rivers of Southern Europe have been found to contain molecular mutations which have shifted their swimming patterns.

SOUND: LOW END SYNTHESIZER HUM BENEATH SOUND OF HANDS TYPING ON A COMPUTER KEYBOARD. SYNTHESIZER CONTINUES UNDER DIALOGUE.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Clear esophageal cavity.

SOUND: PARRHESIA COUGHS AND CLEARS THROAT.
Valerie Tevere & Angel Nevarez

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Reduce speed of articulation.

PARRHESIA:
“We exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force.”

COMPUTER:
Access Granted. You may enter.

SOUND: SYNTHESIZER AND THERMIN PERFORM.

THE END
References:

1. Foucault, Michel, Fearless Speech, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001). The name Parrhesia was borrowed from Foucault’s characterization of the term parrhesia as “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)”, (19).


written to be read/ out
where I am/ here/ now/ always is the work/
being/ here/ now/
it always is/ always was/

rhythms/
to start/ studio
the drip drip drip of black liquid
the antidote to sleep/ the light switch/ clarity
not the ‘syrup of poppies’/ ahhhh/ no not that/
rather/
the light that shines bright on thoughts/
ancient/ obsidian black/ echo/
staring back/ at the top of the mug/ coffee/
addiction/

off stage/
you cough/ and wheeze/ you cough/ shuffle/ creak above always/
an hour glass/ shifting/ sand/ grain/ by grain/
I am not alone here/ I am alone here/ we have never talked beyond the mumbled greeting/ I can hear you dying for decades/

to work/
the equation of links on links/ part on part/ creating the whole/
the stage set elements inviting/
a situation/
one on one/ one to one/
monologue/ internal dialogue/
a morsel on a plate/
acting/
testing/
voice/

attention directed/ moving ever over to a model/ to
drifting back/ and forth/ and back/ to snippets of the day and worries and things

and being grabbed from a place of ambush/ not by some Almighty hand but a thing/ a pitch/ a mispronunciation/ something/ that makes you start/ again/ back/

to the cadence of the words/ the beating heart/
the rhythm of hearing/ snippets/ heard before/
you know so well/ you think/
you hear/ as if for the first time/ but far away/
a foreign language/ subtitled/layering/
familiar

and/

infernal internal dialogue/ clattering/
the din/
the father/ the mother/ the state/ the wider framework of/ maybe/
dark shadowy forms/ un-uniformed/ unseen/ regulated
tight/ reigns
freedom to think/ to draw/ to be/ to say/ to want/ to take this line right past the borders of the page …

and back/ and / yet back
snapped right back/ to the frontiers/ fitting in/
right/
right/ back here/ now/
the crack of the whip/
the line/ branding iron/marking

gather yourselves together with a jumbling of belongings/
set forth in the storm through the woods/
head for the dawn/on the edge of town/

who are you playing chess with?/
suddenly connected to the constellations/
expressions of death/a lifting/
a seduction for the living/
steer the caravan of hope/ and life/ to a tomorrow
defiant/
jumping over bonfires/
making a wish/
for health/happiness

blow torch/ flame

The Mask of Anarchy/
dancing in the embers/ sparks flying/
rippling out/
and keeps receding/
back/and back/ and back/

resistance/learning

pure matt darkness aids the voice/ /listen/

the underscoring/
the underlining of the text/
nascent/ sounds/

hear what you hear/ programmed/
the dove or snake in your ear/ the worm/
the describing/
the believing/
the doing/ the doing/ the doing/ is all there is
nervous fibrillation/ of
twisting/ of working from every angle/ and knowing/
the faith in the task/
in the repetition/

throw away the cast/
report to history/

turn the light off/
turn off the light/
The Imprint
The gallery staff have memorised the descriptions of the artworks that the curators wanted to include in the exhibition but chose not to for various reasons. If any visitor inquires, they will transmit these descriptions.
The sound work *eins und eins sind eins* (one plus one equals one) by artists Daniela Brahm and Les Schliesser reflects in an abstract way on the complexities behind the process of bringing a (utopian) realm of possibilities into actual being. The audio work consists of two contracts that form the legal basis of ExRotaprint, an industrial site that both artists transformed into an exemplary model of real estate development which is based on the common good and which they run today.

For the sound work *eins und eins sind eins*, the artists asked the solicitor to read out the articles of the partnership agreement of the non-profit GmbH ExRotaprint and the heritable building rights contract again while being recorded.

Both contracts stipulate aims and parameters, scope and dimensions, obligations and rights of the project. Notarised contracts become legally valid only when read aloud to the signee before signing. Therefore in this scenario hearing equates reading; the learning of the contracts content legally binds the parties and cannot be disputed. As with other artificially formalised procedures, the context of legal tradition is central to the performance. The rapid reading, the staccato of terms and formulations, the recited format – the ritual – lets the mediation of the content fail. Contractual constructs have their own hermetic aesthetic; yet at the same time their content means long-term and real-world outcome. The realisation of intentions and ideals only substantiates itself when developing the project on site.
The ExRotaprint Project
ExRotaprint is the former site of the Rotaprint printing press manufacturing plant in Berlin's Wedding district. Following the insolvency of Rotaprint in 1989, the then thousand square meter premises fell into a state of neglect, lingering in the redevelopment line. In 2004, artists Daniela Brahm and Les Schliesser formulated a concept for taking over the property by the tenants already on site. The goal was to develop the site to facilitate a heterogeneous mix of Arbeit, Kunst, Soziales (work, art, and community). Following grueling negotiations with the Berlin Senate and Liegenschaftsfonds (real estate funds), the tenant-founded ExRotaprint gGmbH took over the site in 2007. Today at ExRotaprint, a third of the overall space is rented out equally to work, art, and community. Businesses, community outreach organisations, and creatives are equally
working on the compound. The result is a balanced image of society, one that counters the superimposed monocultures of ‘return-on-investment dreams’ while promoting togetherness and exchange. Art-related strategies are utilised to create a reality on site that is socially, economically and culturally-minded. ExRotaprint as a social sculpture is an expansion of an art concept that takes form not as representation or citation but rather as constructed reality. This reality may be art, but it does not have to be.

The two contracts with interlinking and complementary aims form the basis of ExRotaprint’s legal structure. The contracts ensure the project’s long-term development as a non-profit organisation and its concept of usage; it also precludes real estate speculation at this location. They provide the framework within which to create the social sculpture of ExRotaprint and simultaneously set the boundaries against a fundamental reconfiguration of the project.

The ninety-nine year **heritable building rights contract** was signed with the trias and Edith-Maryon foundations on September 3rd, 2007. ExRotaprint decided not to purchase the property with a bank loan, instead it opted for heritable building rights in order to make the reselling of the property impossible. Both foundations are focused on approaching the notion of property and land in a new way and are therefore ideal partners for a project development in which profit making is not the goal. The heritable building rights contract places ExRotaprint gGmbH in an ownership-like position in which it is responsible for all aspects of the project’s development and financing. Solely the selling of the property is ruled out. As a legal means, heritable building rights separate the land and the building: the foundations retain ownership of the land, while the buildings are the property of ExRotaprint gGmbH.

The **non-profit partnership agreement of ExRotaprint gGmbH** was concluded on July 17th, 2007. Founded by tenants, ExRotaprint gGmbH is responsible for the preservation of the registered architectural monument
and for promoting art and culture. It is a recognised non-profit organisation. Rent surpluses must be reinvested in the non-profit aims of the project. ExRotaprint gGmbH partners do not profit from the revenue generated by the premises. The non-profit status prohibits capital outflow and ensures its use for the project’s specific developmental goals. 

(Translated from the German by Erik Smith)
Ladies and gentlemen, the point of interest here is about the old language from Galdoo, Sm'álgayax. Very little of that remains in the village because our descent moved down here over a century ago, and that just about extincts our own language. I heard my great-grandmother speak it, and I tell you that's real classic. You talk about Shakespeare compared to present English, that's how it was: really deep, with expression. I love to hear it; I want to use it all the time. I have no problem speaking English. I don't stutter or sputter around or stamp my feet when I speak it, but I'd much rather use my own. When we get together, guys like us, we don't speak English. But the next generation is entirely different. As soon as they start speaking, it's English. We call it Sm'álgayax [the true language].

K'uliltxw'm Saax (Bob Wilson, above)
The linguistic diversity of the world is under threat: it is estimated that between fifty and ninety per cent of the world’s six thousand languages will be gone by the end of this century. Losing a language means that the potential complexity of our understanding of the world is reduced, and the domination of a few global languages is no more likely to foster peace and stability than replacing biologically diverse rainforests with huge swathes of single crops is to improve the global ecosystem.

These images are from Anspayax, an installation based on seven speakers of Gitxsanimaax, an endangered indigenous language in Canada. Anspayaxw (Kispiox) is a small reserve in northern British Columbia, where I worked with linguist Tyler Peterson to record members of the Gitxsan community. The photographs, taken for me by Denise Hawrysio during the recording sessions, were digitally manipulated and printed on bespoke speaker panels so that sound comes directly from twelve large-scale images suspended in the gallery. The result is an immersive environment, which traverses the boundaries of documentation and abstraction using voice and sounds from the landscape.

Gitxsanimaax is one of several endangered indigenous languages in an area of remarkable but dwindling linguistic diversity. Today there
are roughly four hundred speakers of Gitxsanimaax, most of whom are middle-aged or older, and some of those we worked with have since passed away. Several of the speakers whose voices we recorded learned Gitxsanimaax as children, despite attending Indian residential schools where the use of Native languages was forbidden. Children from communities like Kispiox were sent great distances to boarding schools, where many suffered from neglect as well as from physical and sexual abuse. Funded by the federal government’s Department of Indian Affairs, most of these schools were run by the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

In 1963, Gary Williams (above) was sent to a residential school in Edmonton, a large city in a comparatively featureless landscape a thousand kilometres away from the mountainous and salmon-rich Gitxsan territory where his family lived. The cultural assimilation which the residential schools were designed to enforce extended to both language and diet: salmon holds a central place in the diet and culture of indigenous communities in British Columbia, but children in these schools were fed a monotonous diet of canned, processed meat. With typically dignified good humour, Gary told us about a ‘Spam riot’ when some of the older boys broke into the school’s pantry and threw boxes and boxes of the stuff onto the driveway leading to the school where the cans were run over by the police cars arriving to deal with the incident.
Deliberate efforts to suppress indigenous languages by colonising powers around the world are far from rare. Starting in the 18th century and continuing until the 1940s, children in English schools in Wales were punished for speaking their mother tongue. Children heard speaking Welsh were forced to wear a block of wood engraved with the words 'Welsh Not' or the letters WN around their necks. If the child wearing it heard another child speaking Welsh, the Welsh Not, as it was called, would be transferred to that child. At the end of the day or week, the child wearing the block would be subject to corporal punishment, usually caning.

Welsh Not image: Courtesy of University of Wales, Bangor Collection at Gwynedd Museum, Bangor.

When she was a teenager in the 1970s, Gwen Simms (above) was hired by the local Gitxsan council to rename the streets on the reserve. The federal government planners put up signs with generic names like 'Spruce Street' and 'Poplar Street', but Gwen and her friends came up with names in
Gitxsanimaax and made their own signs: a street where several families belonging to the Frog Clan lived became ‘Lax-see’l Street’ and the street where the softball team trained became ‘An-gol Drive’, an-gol meaning ‘to run’.

These images are meant to problematise the ethnographic gaze and to highlight the subjectivity and mediation involved in the process of translating lived experience into archive materials, research data, or indeed art. The mismatched perspective in these imperfectly mirrored composites suggests that reality is never symmetrical; that translation is never a complete substitute for original utterance; that the relationship between researchers and researched is inherently asymmetrical. The absence of the speaker from one side of the frame reflects the relatively rapid disappearance of a language that may one day only exist in recorded form.

Many of us hear languages other than our own on a daily basis, but we don’t/can’t really listen to them. Linguistic research and documentation offers one model of close listening, but in the still reverberating aftermath of colonialism, the politics of listening are complex, particularly in the context of research. For Maori writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “The word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary”, but she also acknowledges that “at some points there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions”.

As part of his ongoing research into the politics of listening, the artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan initiated a conversation with a theologian from Lebanon’s Druze religious community based in Beirut who wishes to remain anonymous. The little known religious community of the Druze is spread across Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine and Jordan. Their religious beliefs resemble that of Ismailism in its incorporation of platonic and other philosophies. Across the region the Druze name is synonymous with secrecy and they are stereotyped for their cross-border liminality as well as the malleability of their political positions.

In many ways the doctrine of the religious Druze minority has a specific interest in the voice; the speech of its members is highly conditioned through an ethico-religious practice called *Taqiyya*. By looking at the Druze theology and philosophy through the micropolitics of phonemes, this conversation attempts to show how minority thinking can allow us to re-read fundamental issues in regard to silence, free speech, proposing new ways in which to escape the territoriality of language.

**LAH:** I’m currently working on my PhD and as an artist I am making audio documentaries and art installations. My research focuses a lot on speech and the different ways of thinking about free speech and the politics of speech.
DT: What do you mean by 'free speech'?

LAH: I give you an example from my research: In the UK the home office and border agency has a policy for an accent test for asylum seekers. If you are an undocumented migrant coming to London e.g., they do a test to see if the accent matches the place where you claim to come from. But it is a very bad system.

DT: Why do they do it?

LAH: Because the home office wants to reject peoples claims for asylum. It is bad, as it doesn't take into account the itinerant biography of the refugee and the multilingual space of the refugee camp s/he might just have come from. The border authorities base their evidence on only a few spoken words in a fifteen-minute interview. The main story of my documentary on the subject, The Freedom of Speech Itself, is about a Palestinian guy named Mohammed who in such an interview used
the word *benadoora* [Arabic for tomato] instead of *bendoora* [which is considered as the correct Palestinian pronunciation of the word]. Based on this one little ‘a’ sound his request for asylum was rejected based on the assumption that he was lying about his origins and that he was Syrian.

**DT:** And they do the interview in their native language?

**LAH:** Yes, this is what the company that conducts these interviews says it does, but actually Mohammed told me it was an Iraqi person that interviewed him. They didn’t understand each other well and he had to shift his dialect in order to communicate, which makes the test even more questionable. But the point for me is, that it is impossible to take just the vowel ‘a’ and assert this person is from a specific place. When you treat the voice as if it is a birth certificate or passport, it affects the whole meaning of the freedom of speech and expression. It is no longer about what we say but about how we say it; the form of speech itself is under investigation. By the border agencies not listening to what the person is saying but to their accent, puts into question the way voices are policed and the way borders are being made discernible.

I’m also looking at other ways the non-verbal parts of the voice are used in legal cases. For example, there is now a lie detector that works by measuring the physical tensions of the vocal chords. I have thoroughly researched this issue and produced a documentary on the subject called *The Whole Truth*. Within the context of the broader research into speech, the freedom of speech and its politics, I am interested in reflecting about the Druze community, to understand what can be learned from the ways in which minorities negotiate speech. The various religious doctrines that relate to speech, phonemes and self-representation within the Druze faith really got me thinking, in particular when reading about the practice of *Taqiyya*, which seems to be one of the most misinterpreted aspects of the Druze.
DT: Definitely.

LAH: It is often wrongly attributed to concealing and lying in order to protect oneself from discrimination. What is your definition of Taqiyya?

DT: Let me ask you a very simple question, which I ask everybody in all lectures I do. In our part of the world, mothers talk to their newborn babies in a language called INGHH APOO. It is a two-syllable word composed of INGHH and APOO. It means nothing; it has no meaning. It is just two sounds – INGHH and APOO – used to communicate with the newborn child. The newborn baby perhaps does not understand, it doesn’t have any way of processing this information in its brain to really understand any meaning other than just an abstract sound of the mother’s voice. So what does the INGHH APOO communicate? What is flowing through these two syllables? It is love and care. So the child receives these two sounds that don’t make any linguistic sense but transmit the mother’s love, care and unity. The language will grow with the child as the mother will raise the communication skill to a higher level. When the child has grown older, the mother will say “let’s go for breakfast”. Then when the child grows older again and goes to school, the mother will instruct “take your sandwich with you”. When the child becomes a student in the college, there is no way the mother will say to her child INGHH APOO. If the mother would do that, the child would say, “Mum is crazy”. So Taqiyya is the means of communication that you adapt to any person, based on the amount of knowledge that s/he is capable of understanding.

The communication skills that you as a speaker adapt to transmit your message in the best possible language in order for the receiver to create the link, comprehend and behave accordingly, that is Taqiyya. In the attempt to translate the word ‘Taqiyya’ into English, the late Druze scholar Dr. Makaram used the word ‘conformity’; to conform, to create intimacy.
Let me give you a concrete example: if Einstein and Galileo, or Einstein and Newton, or Stephen Hawking and Brian Greene would be sitting together and they would be talking about something very complex like black holes, and then I would walk in, then they would tune their language for me so that I could comprehend the discussion. Why would they tune their language? Not because they are superior or egotistical – if that’s the motive, then you’re not really practising Taqiyya, you would be practising a superiority complex upon others. Tuning means here unifying. If Taqiyya is not based on unity, then it is a total misconception. You have to prepare people to be ready to listen to your knowledge.

**LAH:** And if they are not ready yet?

**DT:** You speak to them on the level of the other’s readiness to listen. This is the way Taqiyya is explained in the Druze faith.

**LAH:** So you feel the big misinterpretation is that Taqiyya is thought of to be only used by the minorities of Islam, when in actual fact everybody, in one way or another, practices Taqiyya?

**DT:** One of the mistakes of the Druze minority is that they are not practising Taqiyya properly. If you take the case of the Druze community worldwide today, or the Ismaili or any other minority, one of the mistakes that those minorities make is that they take on a group ego; they make a sign above their head saying, “Hey, look at us; we are a minority”. In the understanding of Taqiyya, you have to blend into your surroundings; taking on a collective ego is a breach. And in any minority, if they really are practising Taqiyya, they should not label themselves as an identifiable community, because the majority always wants to impose their ideas upon the minority.

Look at what is happening with the Daash in Syria [an Al-Qaeda affiliated rebel group fighting in Syria, that is said to be forcing entire Druze villages to convert to Wahabi Islam]: they want to enforce their mindset upon my
beliefs. This is rape; they are raping me – they are raping my society. Just in the same way nations and states force their beliefs on people through mass media and money; they are just invading the universe with their culture without preparing me for their culture. Any extremist who does not respect my level of education and who does not educate me in order for me to accept his, is abusing my freedom.

**LAH:** There is a quote from Dr. Sami Makarem: “If we put Taqiyya [which he translates as ‘dissimulation’] in its right context, then it would become totally in line with the core of human freedom; the freedom of speech.”¹ Could you explain the relationship of Taqiyya to today’s idea of the freedom of speech and expression?

**DT:** In the freedom of speech you are given the security that, when you speak out whatever you think, you are guaranteeing me that you will not take this legally against me. This is the fundament of the freedom of speech; I’m legally allowed to say anything, to say whatever I want. When we think about this in relation to Taqiyya, it is more like the freedom of speech is the freedom to remain silent; if I want to express my freedom by being silent, this is my speech. Silence is also a way of communication. So Taqiyya means that I’m allowed not to speak. And when I speak, I am guaranteed that whatever I say will not be taken legally against me.

**LAH:** So you think Taqiyya is less like the freedom of speech and more like the legal ‘right to silence’? The right not to incriminate oneself by saying the wrong thing rather than the freedom of speech?

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DT: Yes. Freedom of speech should not force you to speak. Silence is also a form of speech. If silence is not part of the freedom of speech, then speech will not be free. If you force me to talk, you abuse me.

LAH: This is what is happening with the Daash?

DT: Yes. Because by being silent, I’m respecting the community. Any minority that is seen by itself as a unit isolated from its surroundings is regarded a cancer cell. And with Taqiyya it is a cell that allows a community to blend in with its surroundings, to interact and to be continuous with it.

LAH: When in his book, Being a Druze, Fouad Khoury talks about Taqiyya he says: ”From a very early age, Druze learn how to pronounce correctly all the Arabic phonemes, which is not done to my knowledge in any other Arab group from the Gulf to the Atlantic.”2 He then goes on to show how in most places these phonemes are in fact mispronounced; the major example of course is that throughout the Middle East the letter [qaf] is dropped from the spoken language. And then he says “one of the main pillars of the Druze faith is to speak the truth, in this context, Sidq [truthfulness] has a double meaning: speaking the truth and speaking correctly, i.e., pronouncing the words properly”3. So my question is, what is the relationship between speech, the phonemes and the form of speech? Why do the Druze teach the phonemes, and how is the correct pronunciation of the phonemes a part of practicing Taqiyya?

DT: I understand, good question. Because Sidq means: the truth. Truth means that you have to respect the words. When you respect the truth of the language, you have to pronounce it as it is. To elaborate your pronunciation

2. Fouad Khoury, Being a Druze, 2004, p. 188.
3. Ibid.
properly as the language intends also carries a meaning within it on the level of truthfulness. We pronounce all the Arabic phonemes correctly in order to stick to the basic rules of the language itself. Because if I pronounce the Arabic letter qaf as ‘af [replacing the qaf with a glottal stop; similar to the cockney ‘t’ which, in the word ‘butter’ would be pronounced ‘bu’er’], I’m not saying it correctly, so I am also not speaking the truth.

**LAH:** So that means truth is more embedded in the form of the language than in its content?

**DT:** Yes, the pronunciation is linked to truly revealing the truth without causing any misconception to the listener’s ears.

**LAH:** But because the Druze are the only ones to speak the phonemes as properly intended, it has become an identifying feature of the Druze community. It is interesting in relation to Taqiyya: if you feel that it is your duty to keep something to yourself, to not reveal the full story of something, or to not reveal the knowledge – but at the same time you speak with the full pronunciation of the Arabic phonemes, you are also revealing something of yourself and your identity as a Druze.

**DT:** You are reflecting your identity.

**LAH:** Exactly. It becomes complex if you reveal your identity through your speech, which you are trying to conceal for the purposes of conformity. So one should not emphasise one’s Druze identity, but at the same time it is a religious precept to pronounce the phonemes correctly. So to put it in another way: if it becomes a mode of expressing one’s ego, then why wouldn’t we pronounce the letter as ‘af [with glottal stop] like the majority of the Lebanese, instead of qaf?

**DT:** Yes, if pronounced qaf, it is being used as a Druze. According to Taqiyya: if I am a Druze living in Beirut, I should pronounce it ‘af. If I’m
living in the mountain, I should not pronounce it ‘af, unless the ‘af would be accepted there, I should vocalise it qaf. But in general, if I speak ‘af or qaf in any community in order to get the attention to my ego, under Taqiyya, I’m doing something wrong. So it’s a very fine line, because speech is really interconnected and entangled with the ego. We have to add another value to the equation, which is intention. What is your intention when you pronounce the letter qaf or ‘af? I could pronounce it qaf in Beirut for ten years, but with a good and humble intention.

LAH: The intention to speak the truth by pronouncing the phonemes correctly?

DT: Yes, I am trying not to create a disturbance to the ear of the listener. So my intention plays a huge role in how I carry this language forward.

LAH: The other day when I was in Ashrafieh [the majority Christian area of Beirut], someone asked me for directions: “weyn Gemmaizeh?” [where is the area called Gemmaizeh]. I answered: “qedam shuay” [down the road a little further in front of you]. I had just come down that day from the mountains with my grandmother, we were sitting and talking, and so I got used to speaking with the qaf; the lady who had asked me for directions looked at me and she said: “‘adam?” [repeating what I told her, but omitting the qaf phoneme] in a very condescending tone. And then she drove off. What she wanted to do was to correct me. Yet, my intention was not wrong, I didn’t have an egoistic intention.

DT: Your intention in that case was not egoistic. But you were not aware that in Ashrafieh you should not speak with the qaf. Because the Ashrafieh people are French-educated; they speak half French, half Arabic. They have a problem with the Arabic culture in general and want to move away from it. The qaf is one of the phonemes that is really very traditionally Arabic and is not found in any European language. So that is why that
lady told you “adam?”, by making this glottal stop she imposed her ego and intention upon you. In Taqiyya you have to have enough knowledge within you to know how the other person will react, and prevent that reaction. To that level, you have to be aware.

**LAH:** The microlevel?

**DT:** Yes.

**DT:** If I put myself in your shoes again, and that lady stops to ask me where Gemmaizeh is, I would say it “‘adam”; I would not say “qadam”.

The question with Taqqiyya is always how do I live without identity?

**LAH:** OK, but what about when Walid Joumblatt [the political leader of the Druze community in Lebanon and leader of the Socialist party] speaks with qaf when he is on TV or in parliament etc.?

**DT:** Yes, and why does he speak with qaf?

**LAH:** He has to because he is speaking on behalf of a community that is identified as a community of people who pronounce properly the Arabic letter qaf.

**DT:** Yes, and he also wants to tell the other parties and politicians: “I am Druze. To the heck with it.” When Walid Joumblatt is speaking out in public with the qaf, he is representing his community properly; and he is communicating: “I am not superior, neither inferior. I am on an equal level with you.”

**LAH:** It could also be that for him speaking the truth is more relative to pronouncing the phonemes correctly than what he is actually saying?

**DT:** We could say that.
LAH: But isn’t he revealing a collective identity, a collective ego?

DT: I don’t think that, when Walid Joumblatt speaks in public with the *qaf*, he is breaking the rules and concept of Taqiyya as a principle.

LAH: But I was breaking this principle when I said “*qadam*” to the lady asking me directions in Ashrafieh?

DT: Yes. And here I need to introduce something else into the discussion. Taqiyya is also being practiced because of fear. For example, Ashrafieh is a hostile environment for the Druze, if you pronounce the *qaf* there, you could be killed – I am putting it in a very realistic scenario. But my awareness that I should be pronouncing the *qaf* as ‘*af* in the Ashrafieh community will protect me and it will keep me safe. So Taqiyya is also about safety. But when Walid Joumblatt is speaking in public as a Druze community leader, he does not fear for himself or his community because he is the one protecting the community.

But to be frank with you, the question should be whether the Druze need to be represented and known at all? And my answer would be “no”. A Druze person should be well accepted anywhere in this world by just being an ethical person, not because of being a Druze. Mispractising Taqiyya in the last one thousand years in this part of the world brought us many problems that we are still facing today. The Druze don’t need a collective ego and don’t need a country of their own; Taqiyya allows a Druze to live peacefully in any state.
Uneasy Listening: The Chronic Sonics of Life under Drones

These drones hover over our heads constantly and one can always hear the buzzing, mosquito-like sound they make.

The constant noise from drones has driven many villagers to insanity. When I hear a loud noise now, I am very frightened that a drone strike is happening and I live in this constant fear.

— Survivors of a drone strike in Datta Khel, FATA, Pakistan, March 17, 2011

The origin of the term ‘drone’ – used to describe unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – doesn't refer to the buzzing insect-like sound emitted by their whirring propellers as is commonly assumed, but rather to their visual resemblance to the male honeybee. During World War II, radio-controlled aircraft were used as air targets for training anti-aircraft gun crews as well as for collecting data on scientific missions. These early pilotless planes were painted with black markings along their fuselage much like the dark tail striping of bees, hence their visual designation as drones.

Planes without Pilots. Three radio-controlled B-17G-90-DL Flying Fortress drone aircraft in flight, probably out of Eglin Field, Florida, United States, August 6th, 1946. The image caption reads: “They’ve [drones] been clay pigeons in gunnery practice, bombed Jap and German targets, and brought back data from the heart of Bikini’s cloud. Uncle Sam's radio-controlled planes have missions in mind never remotely guessed at by Jules Verne.”

Source: Air Trails (February 1952). Collection of Bob Harmon.

The widespread misinterpretation of the contemporary drone’s etymological origins as derivative of the high-pitched noise of a bee in flight is today still further removed from the creature’s scientific classification within the *Apoidea* family of the *Insecta* class. While the drone bee is a stingless flying organism, whose main role is to assist in species reproduction, contemporary remote-controlled drones have become increasingly lethal and thus are surely no longer conceptually descendant from the harmless *Apoidea* line, but rather from the predatory species of the *Reduviid* family – that of assassin bugs, a creature which produces a rasping sound as an intimidation tactic to ward off predators.

As US strategies around the War on Terror shifted from secret prisons and detention camps to targeted assassination under the Obama Administration in 2009, Predator and Reaper drones have come to saturate the airspace over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Northwest Pakistan bordering Afghanistan. These armed drones troll the topographies of FATA in search of targets whose names are provided by the ‘Kill List’ (re-branded a ‘disposition matrix’ in 2011) compiled on ‘Terror Tuesdays’, the weekly counter-terrorism meeting President Obama holds with security officials in the White House Situation Room.

The drone’s ubiquitous presence – signalled by high-frequency emissions – has become a permanent feature of the skies along the Afghan border.
Although various organisations, most notably the Bureau of Investigative Journalism based in the UK, try to maintain comprehensive sets of data of reported casualties (fatalities and injuries) from drone strikes, these numbers do not begin to represent the injurious nature of what it means to live under the constant sonic menace of drones.

In order to grasp the full impact of this military technology upon civilian lives it is important to bear in mind that reported drone strikes represent but a small fraction of the total drone sorties flown, let alone hours they spend in reconnaissance mode. These flights are not short missions that traverse Pakistani airspace in search of targets, attack, and then head directly back to their Kandahar military air base in southern Afghanistan. On the contrary, these are extended sorties that track moving vehicles, loiter over villages and towns, and target adversaries for months in advance of a decision to strike.

In the absence of data documenting the actual numbers of drone missions undertaken in Pakistan, it is useful to extrapolate from similar data collected in Afghanistan to arrive at a general sense of the ratio between sorties and strikes; a calculation, which indicates that for every thirty armed drone sorties flown only one actual strike results. Given this ratio, the approximate number of drone sorties conducted from January 2009 to June 2013 may have already reached a possible 9,500 putting the Obama-era drone hours flown over FATA at 133,000 to 399,000.² Armed

2. Chris Woods, Project Leader of ‘Covert Drone Wars’ at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ), provided me with this estimate. The figures for drone strikes in Afghanistan, representing a ratio of approximately 30:1, can be found on the BIJ website in Chris Woods, “Revealed: US and Britain launched 1,200 drone strikes in recent wars,” December 4th, 2012, http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/blog/2012/12/04/revealed-us-and-britain-launched-1200-drone-strikes-in-recent-wars/. Using the same ratio to estimate the number of sorties in FATA over recent years, we arrive at the following figures:

- 2009: 53 strikes = ca.1,500 sorties
- 2010: 128 strikes = ca.3,800 sorties
- 2011: 75 strikes = ca.2,250 sorties
- 2012: 48 strikes = ca.1,500 sorties
- 2013 (up to June): 14 strikes = ca. 420 sorties
drone sorties are even higher in the towns of Miranshah and Mir Ali, where virtually around-the-clock drone surveillance is being reported. An altogether different dimension of the War on Terror and its expanded effects upon civilian life would emerge if flight logs documenting the hours that drones spend cruising the skies of FATA were made public. “They are like a mosquito. Even when you don’t see them, you can hear them, you know they are there.”

The etymological confusion as to the origins of the term drone involves a reordering of sound and vision that, I argue, is at the heart of the drone warfare today with its political claims around the efficacy of targeted assassination and overall reduction in civilian casualties. Drone vision is arguably precise, but drone sonics are vague and diffused, producing a difference in both, degree and kind of injury.

While the targeting accuracy of Predator and Reaper drones is conjoined to their ability to send almost instantaneous information back to operators who observe terrestrial life in FATA on screens sometimes thousands of kilometres away, their sonic impact is dispersed across village populations and ranges in volume from debilitating to benign, depending upon the aerial proximity of the drone and the varying acoustic properties and contours of the ground. The objective of drone surveillance is directed towards a vertical event – a laser-guided missile strike – whereas the by-product of such drone vision manifests itself as a horizontal distribution of acoustic emissions at varying intensities of amplification that result in psychological distress, more so than in physical injury. The high-resolution optical sensors carried by drones that, in principle, permit such laser-guided, pinpoint accuracy, underscores military and political assertions

that the use of armed drones dramatically lowers civilian casualties in comparison to conventional weapons such as cluster bombs – or even, according to some, eliminates civilian casualties altogether – transforming UAVs in effect into “moral predators.” However, the acoustic seepage from drone sorties is far from contained and thus radically expands their zone of impact upon the human ecologies of FATA with varying consequences for individual mental health as well as for the social dynamics of communities.

“Drones have been circling over Manzar Khel for two or three years now. They are all my children can think about and they cannot concentrate on their studies or play carefree like children should.”

The relative disregard paid to those living under the psychological terror of drone sorties is understandable given the limited resources and restricted access of human rights investigators and legal practitioners into a region such as FATA, who rightly focus on the lethal outcomes of actual drone strikes. At present, most observations are anecdotal and have yet to make their way into the legal analysis of US drone strike practices in Pakistan. Until a comprehensive study is undertaken to chart this acoustic phenomenon, it is unlikely that the implications of chronic drone sonics will be integrated into the legal framework of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as it bears upon the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. Acoustics are undoubtedly part of the arsenal of military operations and have been used for centuries to obtain advantage in warfare. Applying the principles of IHL to drone surveillance operations in FATA would mandate applying all feasible measures to limit the harm done to civilians and would prohibit conducting such missions if the harm is excessive in relation to the military advantage that they could be expected to achieve.

5. Witness to a drone strike in Datta Khel, FATA Pakistan, 17.03.2011.
For a period of five weeks following the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit on June 26th, 2006, Israeli Air force jets flew repeated low-altitude sorties over the Gaza Strip at night, generating a series of intimidating sonic booms. When questioned as to the use of sonic booms to generate an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert replied “thousands of residents in southern Israel live in fear and discomfort, so I gave instructions that nobody will sleep at night in the meantime in Gaza.”6 In response to these nightly operations, Physicians for Human Rights and the Gaza Community Mental Health CentProgrammeer led a petition in the Israeli High Court claiming that deploying sonic booms as an intimidation tactic was a form of collective punishment and thus in violation of IHL, specifically Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention governing the protection of civilians in times of war, which categorically states that “Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited”. According to lawyers at B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: “The use of sonic booms flagrantly breaches a number of provisions of International Humanitarian Law. The most significant provision is the prohibition on collective punishment. […] Air Force supersonic sorties also breach the principle of distinction, a central pillar of humanitarian law, which forbids the warring sides to direct their attacks against civilians.”7 The legal petition8 ultimately turned on the question of whether sonic booms constituted an attack as defined in the IHL rules governing the conduct of hostilities, with military lawyers arguing that the petitioners’ claims were unfounded since sonic booms do not constitute an “attack” and that consequently, their use was not accountable within the framework of IHL. Legal recognition of sonic booms as an instrument of collective punishment required a

7. Ibid.
redefinition of sound as a “weaponised” technology; a reclassification that did not convince the court, which dismissed the case in October 2008 as theoretical because the Israel Defence Forces had already abandoned the practice of generating sonic booms over Gaza by July 2006.

It is worth noting that many sound producing devices already have a quasi-legal status or have been involved in legal and human rights debates concerning the potential health risks of prolonged exposure to certain frequencies and decibels. Most European municipalities with airports are subject to by-laws that regulate the flight corridors of low-flying aircraft to minimise sound pollution. This entails controlling the effective perceived noise decibels (EPNdBs) resulting from air traffic as well as the aerodynamic noise produced by airplane propulsion systems.

Legal requests have also been made to the European Court of Human Rights to ban the use of the ‘Mosquito’, an anti-loitering device, which emits painful high-frequency pulses audible only to children and youths. The technical term for repetitive drone surveillance over one area is ironically also called ‘loitering’. The UN committee on the rights of the child “called on all governments to reconsider the Mosquito devices, insofar as they may violate the rights of children.” While the Home Office and the EU commission rejected this appeal on the grounds that there was “insufficient information to establish guidelines for safe exposure to high frequencies,” the ‘Mosquito’ was not endorsed by the Association of Police Officers (UK), who argued that, equally, there is no evidence to suggest that short-term exposure to its emissions is without health implications. Whether local constabularies choose to use the ‘Mosquito’ is, however, up to them.9 During the London 2012 Olympics the Ministry of Defence (MoD) confirmed that they used a similar device – in their own words a “sonic weapon” – to manage crowds. “The American-built

long-range acoustic device (LRAD), which has been used by the US army to control crowds in Iraq, can emit an ear-piercing beam of sound. A MoD spokesman said the device, which can also be used as a loudspeaker, was among a ‘broad range of assets’ being used by the armed forces to provide security during the Games.”

Recommendations and regulations governing the use and extent of various sound-producing technologies from aircraft noise to new modes of policing and control are increasingly implicated within discussions of human rights, even if the use of such sonic instruments is not always directly enforceable under law.

Together these examples raise a series of very pertinent questions that may also come to play a significant role in the legal claims being brought about by drone strike survivors on behalf of victims and their families in Pakistan. (1) How are we to understand the legal difference between the use of sound as an instrument of policing and control versus sound that is used as a weapon? (2) If sound waves, due to their radiating nature,

are unable to differentiate between a target [militant] and a community of civilians, does the argument around intentionality still hold legally when the continued deployment of a given weapon has known effects that supersede the technology’s intended use? (3) At what point is a sound-event that is the by-product of a specific military technology deemed to be sufficiently harmful to count as collateral damage? (4) If these side-effects are known, does a continued use of the technology constitute a form of legal liability? (5) Does the constant sonic presence of drone sorties (irrespective of strikes) violate the International Humanitarian Law principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions or might it even be considered a form of collective punishment in spite of the fact that the intent to punish a civilian population is arguably difficult to prove in relation to drone deployment in Pakistan?

While sonic warfare has a long history, legal arguments will need to be made that the sound-effects of drone warfare cannot be dismissed as an incidental feature of drone propellers and engine noise, but are well-known to health care professionals and are being systematically documented.11 The sonic bleed of a circling drone that one cannot necessarily see, but hear, is a constant reminder that a deadly strike may come at any time, quite literally out of the blue. A drone strike that lurks in the future, but whose effects are experienced in the present finds its disconcerting inversion in the US policy of targeted killing, which is designed to eliminate potential terrorist threats before they become actualized at some future date. Jeremy Scahill, in his documentary film Dirty Wars (2013) goes so far as to suggest that the assassination of the teenage son of radicalised cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki in Yemen in 2011 (both father and son were born in the United States) was undertaken not because of the terrorist the boy was, but rather because of the terrorist he

might one day become. When questioned about the drone strike that killed sixteen-year old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, Robert Gibbs, former White House Press Secretary and senior adviser to President Obama’s re-election campaign, replied that the boy should have had “a more responsible father.” The spatial dispersion of drone sonics brings the future into the present as a felt-effect, whereas drone vision is directed towards staving off a future event through targeted assassination. Together they conjoin to produce a state of continuous violence for civilian life under drones, one that categorically overturns President Obama’s most recent assertion that drone warfare is “a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defence” in other words within the legal framework of International Humanitarian Law.

During a CNBC interview in 2009 a determined fly kept buzzing around the president. “Get out of here,” warned Obama in irritation, yet the insect brazenly persisted. When it finally landed he struck, killing it instantly. “That was pretty impressive wasn’t it? I got the sucker.”

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If I am interested in the ‘natural order of things’, it is because it binds us to our hidden human genealogy. In the spectrum between nature and culture, behaviours such as mimesis, raise a lot of questions.

Through the ideas of Renée Descartes – that the past should be removed in order to build a new world, to follow reason and the logic of categories and measurements – modernity and rationalism have cut us apart from nature. One of the main aspects of modernity makes us believe that humans invent to evolve, when in fact they only repair. They repair to resist; they attempt to resist disappearance, the extinction of the human kind and death. In the evolution of the human species repair has been like a creative and artistic practice. I would like to understand art and artistic practice in this context as any form of creation which aims to improve a state of being and/or to transform a space/time of death to one of life.

The development of a culture of death could be considered a first form of such human artistic creation. For example, the Neanderthal when they started to become aware of their finiteness. Due to their desire for some kind of continuity for their dead beloved ones they developed practices and rituals like burials, or mumification, or representations in stone or wood. These practices are based on the desire to fill the absence of someone disappeared with something both concrete and abstract: a memorial of beliefs of a life after death.
‘Repair’ is an endless oxymoron; it carries both, the notion of destruction and reconstruction within the same terminology. It took me years of observations and investigations to understand that ‘repair’ is the core reason (*la raison d’être*) of the existence of ‘reappropriation’, and that in fact it applies to culture as much as to nature.

When any social or ethnic group is ruled by another cultural order – for example during colonialism or times of slavery – forms of creative or artistic ways of operating that carry signs of reappropriation instinctively emerge among the oppressed. My grandmother’s story might be a good example to explain how I understand reappropriation. During the Algerian War of Independence my grandmother, a single mother whose husband had been killed by the French army in the area of Setif, was a partisan. Her job was to collect all over the ‘Douar’ (the Algerian countryside in the eastern mountains) jewellery from women that they had received as brides. When her buckets (she had two) were full, she had to bring them to a cave located in a cliff nearby her farm. She would do this day after day until after two or three weeks, the jewellery would be transported at night with donkeys through the mountains to Tunisia. Tunis was the headquarter of the Algerian Liberation army during the War of Independence. There, the jewellery was melted into silver bars that subsequently bought Kalashnikovs. In circumstances like these, the notion of reappropriation is strongly linked to death and survival.

Another example for reappropriation could be the artefacts that the soldiers in the First World War would make to ‘kill’ time while waiting in the trenches in-between attacks. They were made with leftovers of deadly engines, bullets or shells of bombs welded together with gunpowder.
Remember the sentence by Breton: “L’art sauvage n’existe pas” (wild art doesn’t exist). To create something to enhance a situation through a gesture, I would consider as art.

During my research on reappropriation I discovered that already at the end of the 19th century, right during the Industrial Revolution, one of the fathers of Anarchism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, created a theory from an axiom: Property is theft! He was the first to use the terminology ‘reappropriation’ in 1840. Later, in the 20th century – first in Brazil with Oswald de Andrade and his Manifesto Antropófago (1928) on cultural anthropofagia, and later in Algeria with Franz Fanon who theorised the concept in relation to anti-colonialism (The Wretched of the Earth, 1961) – the term takes its political dimension. Processes of reappropriation still continue today all over the world, where men and women instinctively attempt to reappropriate the freedom from which they have been dispossessed. They first start by absorbing, integrating and mimicking the oppressing power, to then one day dominate it. Mimesis as Resistance. But what looks like a political phenomenon – a product of human thought – is in fact rooted in what has preceded and what will go beyond us: The ‘natural order of things’.

The Lyrebird, for example, is a ground-dwelling bird in Australia that is most notable for its superb ability to mimic natural and artificial sounds from its environment. It perfectly mimics sounds that range from other birds’ extremely complex singing to the aggressive sound of the chainsaw that cuts the trees of its habitat and environment; it is a good example of
nature’s absolute superiority over culture. Nature’s superiority determines the temporality of mankind, what humans’ coming days of technological evolution and its blind course towards ‘progress’ will be: an ephemeral superiority.

In the ideas of naturalist thinkers such as Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, the challenge of the human being is to adapt to its environment, whereas in reality, human kind needs to adapt to itself. Both Darwin and Wallace, who first formulated the Theory of Evolution by means of natural selection, thought for a long time that the biggest stake for evolution was the species’ ability to survive in its environment. The human race so far has been the best to do so.

But Wallace raised a question that caused a famous controversy between the two: if the Neanderthal was able to survive in the savannah and the forest, why did it develop further into the Homo Sapiens, when it easily could have survived and remained at its stage of evolution forever? For Darwin, in a determinist way of thinking, human evolution is led by pure chance. According to him, environment is changed by Man in order to contribute to his own development; hence it is an ambivalent relation that is constantly self-adjusting and changing by itself.

Alfred Russel Wallace did agree with this theory in principle, except for one detail: if the human species is constantly transforming and adapting to its environment for the sake of its survival – and thus indirectly contributing to the adaptation of its species – then why did the human race reach this extreme point at which it destroys its own environment? Bear in mind that these conversations took place during the industrial revolution, when environmental destruction started to become obvious and illogical in regard to the concept of ‘harmony’ between the human and its environment. For Wallace, the end of a harmonious state between the human species and its environment as part of Man’s evolution is absolutely illogical. He argues that, only if there is another element, an artificial intelligence that has a strong impact on evolution, it could mean the end of the human species whereas environment would survive.
Research material, front page of the newspaper "La Terre Illustrée", no. 64, January 21st 1892. Courtesy the artist.

Research material, front page of the newspaper "Journal des Voyages", no. 762, February 14th 1892. Courtesy the artist.
The project entitled 50 is a public participatory project that was developed in 2010, prior to Nigeria’s 50th independence celebration on October 1st, 2010. I had set up a webpage that asked the following question: “In retrospect and in one word, how would you describe Nigeria after 50 years of independence?” The feedback form on the webpage only allowed one-word inputs, leaving the respondents to come up with a word that they felt would best sum up a Nation aged fifty. The final fifty-one-word descriptions were selected from the pool of words generated online by the Nigerian public over a period of time. The selection was based on certain criteria, which included the frequency of appearance and the random selection of the words.

The project 50 was conceived during the period I started exploring historical audio files from radio archives in search of materials for new art works. In this process I discovered audio recordings from 1960, which were made up of prominent speeches given during the independence celebration. 1960 was the year Nigeria gained its independence from its British colonial master, on October 1st to be precise.

*The Ambivalence of 1960*, a collage of audio excerpts from some of these speeches, was one of the works that came out of my foray into the archives. The excerpts in particular are based on fragments of speeches
by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria’s first president), Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Nigeria’s Prime Minister), and Princess Alexandra of Kent (the representative of the Queen of England).

These speeches were highly fuelled with hopes of utopia and the aspirations of Nigeria to become Africa’s leading power as it steps out of the shackles of colonialism. The speeches also emphasised on relevant issues that were to be considered for national development, such as unity in diversity, upholding human rights, security, religious tolerance etc. 

*The Ambivalence of 1960* uses these archived sound recordings to highlight how Nigeria’s modern past, symbolised by the promises of independence, contrasts with the contemporary present characterised by failed hope and long forgotten dreams.

The work thus uncovers the ways in which nostalgia and memory play their part in imagining the nation.
Amazing *
Appalling *
Asleep *
Backward *
Blessed *
Chai *
Confused *
Crawling *
Developing *
Disappointing *
Disorganised *
Dysfunctional *

Ebullient *
Enigmatic *
Eclectic *
Erratic *
Evolving *
Failure *
Fragile *
Growing *
Great *
Home *
Hopeful *
Implausible *
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<th>Negative Words</th>
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<td>Resilient *</td>
<td>Untapped *</td>
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<td>Roundabout *</td>
<td>Visionless *</td>
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YOUR OWN PERSONAL FUTURE NON-EXISTENCE SYMBOLISED AS AN OBJECT. NOT YET. NOT WITHOUT YOUR NOT HAVING BEEN HERE. NOT WITHOUT ANYTHING. NOT WITHOUT END.

REVERSAL OF CONTAINER AND CONTAINED. NOT WITHOUT ANIMAL CUNNING. NOT WITHOUT THE EVOCATION OF MYTH. NOT WITHOUT DOUBT, TINGED WITH TERROR. NOT WITHOUT COMMERCIAL IMPLICATIONS. NOT WITHOUT A CHEERFUL EMBRACE OF STUPIDITY, SEEN IN THE THIRD CHAPTER AS A CRITICAL DISTANCE, GIVING RISE TO NEW THOUGHTS. NOT WITHOUT HOPELESSLY BEFORE A CROWD OF ONLOOKERS. NOT WITHOUT THE ANGER OF A DISAFFECTED CLASS. NOT WITHOUT SIMILARITY. NOT WITHOUT A BROADENING REACH. NOT WITHOUT RESPONSE. NOT WITHOUT A REGULAR ASSESSMENT MECHANISM. NOT WITHOUT A DEEPLY PERSONAL TRIBUTE. NOT WITHOUT A MORBID CURIOSITY. NOT WITHOUT BREAKING DOWN NOT WITHOUT SUDDEN CRIES, BARELY AUDIBLE ABOVE THE SOUND OF TRAFFIC. NOT WITHOUT INESTIMABLE COST. NOT WITHOUT CAREFULLY MAINTAINED TARGETS. NOT WITHOUT AN ASSOCIATION WITH PHYSICAL HEAT, AND THE CONCOMITANT EMOTIONAL MEASURE OF WARMTH EVOKING KINDNESS AND COMFORT. NOT WITHOUT THE WEIGHT OF OBLIGATION. TOTALITY, ALWAYS INCOMPLETE. NOT WITHOUT A BEAM OF SUNLIGHT FALLING THROUGH LONG WINDOWS BEING USED HERE AS AN EMBLEM OF CONTRAST, CARRYING AS IT ALSO DOES INTIMACY. NOT WITHOUT CHECKING FIRST. NOT WITHOUT DEMANDS. NOT WITHOUT SOMATIC EXPERIENCE. NOT WITHOUT THE OUTLINE OF SOMETHING FORGOTTEN. NOT WITHOUT OURSELVES PERFECTED. NOT WITHOUT AN OPENING THROUGH WHICH MAY BE SEEN THE WHOLE WORLD, SPARKLING IN MINIATURE. NOT WITHOUT SALTY DEPOSITS. NOT WITHOUT A CHANGE OF PACE IN THE FINAL SECTION, IN WHICH THREATS ARE MADE. NOT WITHOUT LIMPING HOME DEFEATED. NOT WITHOUT A SNEER OF DEFENSIVE CONTEMPT. NOT WITHOUT BEING DECEIVED. NOT WITHOUT DECEIT BEING REBRANDED AS PRODUCTION. NOT WITHOUT MOTIVE. NOT WITHOUT VALUE. NOT WITHOUT UNSPEAKABLE BRUTALITY. NOT WITHOUT FUTILITY. NOT WITHOUT INDIFFERENCE. NOT WITHOUT PRIOR AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE DATA BEING CORRUPTED. NOT WITHOUT THE CORRUPTION HAVING BEEN HIDDEN. NOT WITHOUT THE HIDING LENGTHENED TO ACCOUNT FOR FURTHER EXPENDITURE. SELF-DEFINED TASK. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TASK DEPENDING ON EXPERIENCE, EXPRESSED YEARS LATER. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION BEING REDUCED TO DATA. BUT UNNAMEABLE MELODY. NOT WITHOUT CURRENCY. NOT WITHOUT CREDIBILITY. NOT WITHOUT THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING. NOT WITHOUT A SINGLE THOUGHT. NOT WITHOUT CERTAIN FLAVOURS, FAMILIAR IN THEIR NOVELTY. NOT WITHOUT AROUSAL. NOT WITHOUT PERMANENCE. NOT WITHOUT PRINCIPLE. NOT WITHOUT A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING. NOT WITHOUT END. NOT WITHOUT ENERGY. NOT WITHOUT AGENC. NOT WITHOUT TITANIC EFFORTS. NOT WITHOUT IMPLICATIONS. NOT WITHOUT VALUE. NOT WITHOUT A SIDeways GLANCE. NOT WITHOUT AROUSAL. NOT WITHOUT THE DELUSION BEING SOMETIMES WELCOMED. NOT WITHOUT VACANCY. NOT WITHOUT A SELF-DEFINED TASK. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TASK DEPENDING ON EXPERIENCE, NOT WITHOUT THE DATA BEING CORRUPTED. NOT WITHOUT THE CORRUPTION HAVING BEEN HIDDEN. NOT WITHOUT LIMPING HOME DEFEATED. NOT WITHOUT A SNEER OF DEFENSIVE CONTEMPT. NOT WITHOUT BEING OBSERVED. NOT WITHOUT MOTIVE. NOT WITHOUT VALUE. NOT WITHOUT UNSPEAKABLE BRUTALITY. NOT WITHOUT FUTILITY. NOT WITHOUT INDIFFERENCE. NOT WITHOUT ANY AWARENESS OF THAT RELEVANCE. NOT WITHOUT CONTINUITY. NOT WITHOUT VIOLENCE. NOT WITHOUT THE RECOVERY OF OUR IMAGE OF OURSELVES COMPARED TO WATER LAPPING AT THE DAMP PLANKS OF A WOODEN JETTY AT LOW TIDE. NOT WITHOUT THE COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS IN THE SAME SCENE. NOT WITHOUT MIRRORED LIGHT REFLECTED UNEXPECTEDLY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING ASPECTS BEING RECORDED, THEN LOST. NOT WITHOUT LARGE TRACTS OF OPEN COUNTRY, SHOWN IN A FICTIONAL WORLD, MOTIVATING THE SENSE OF A HOMELAND SHARED BY MANY CHARACTERS IN THE SAME SCENE. NOT WITHOUT MIRRORED LIGHT REFLECTED UNEXPECTEDLY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING ASPECTS BEING RECORDED, THEN LOST. NOT WITHOUT LARGE TRACTS OF OPEN COUNTRY, SHOWN IN A FICTIONAL WORLD, MOTIVATING THE SENSE OF A HOMELAND SHARED BY MANY CHARACTERS IN THE SAME SCENE. NOT WITHOUT MIRRORED LIGHT REFLECTED UNEXPECTEDLY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING ASPECTS BEING RECORDED, THEN LOST. NOT WITHOUT LARGE TRACTS OF OPEN COUNTRY, SHOWN IN A FICTIONAL WORLD, MOTIVATING THE SENSE OF A HOMELAND SHARED BY MANY CHARACTERS IN THE SAME SCENE. NOT WITHOUT MIRRORED LIGHT REFLECTED UNEXPECTEDLY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING ASPECTS BEING RECORDED, THEN LOST. NOT WITHOUT LARGE TRACTS OF OPEN COUNTRY, SHOWN IN A FICTIONAL WORLD, MOTIVATING THE SENSE OF A HOMELAND SHARED BY MANY CHARACTERS IN THE SAME SCENE. NOT WITHOUT MIRRORED LIGHT REFLECTED UNEXPECTEDLY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING ASPECTS BEING RECORDED, THEN LOST. 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WITHOUT RENEWED INTEREST. NOT WITHOUT LOOKING SO HARD OUR EYES TOUCHED. NOT WITHOUT THING. NOT AGAIN. NOT WITHOUT LIMITS. NOT WITHOUT PRETENDING THERE WERE LIMITS, NOT WITHOUT A STORY IN WHICH WE ARE ALWAYS PRESENTING OURSELVES TO OTHERS WHO BUT REPRESENTED NOW THROUGH A SIMULTANEOUS FIGURE IN THE FORM OF AN ITEM OF AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT EXPECTING EACH FRESH EXPERIENCE TO BE CONTAINED WITHIN. NOT WITHOUT INTERCHANGEABLE ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIENCE. NOT WITHOUT THOSE SHOWN IN A FICTIONAL WORLD, MOTIVATING THE SENSE OF A HOMELAND SHARED BY MANY INTO A NEW PART OF THE ROOM. NOT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT THE CHANGING IN JETTY PROTRUDING OUT INTO THE OCEAN AT LOW TIDE. NOT WITHOUT THE COMPARISON FERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND INFINITY. NOT WITHOUT BEING PRODUCTIVE. NOT WITHOUT SOMETHING BEING EXCHANGED. NOT WITHOUT NOTHING BEING LOST OR GAINED IN PUSE. NOT WITHOUT IMAGES BEING MISTAKEN FOR ACTIONS, OVER AND OVER AGAIN. NOT WITHOUT CONTINUITY. NOT WITHOUT VIOLENCE. NOT WITHOUT THE RECOVERY OF OUR OT WITHOUT THE THREAT OF PURPOSE, CONTINUALLY DEFERRED. NOT WITHOUT BELIEF. NOT WITHOUT A CHEERFUL EMBRACE OF STUPIDITY, SEEN IN THE THIRD CHAPTER AS A CRITICAL DISTANCE, GIVING RISE TO NEW THOUGHTS. NOT WITHOUT HOPELESSLY BEFORE A CROWD OF ONLOOKERS. NOT WITHOUT THE ANGER OF A DISAFFECTED CLASS. NOT WITHOUT SIMILARITY. NOT WITHOUT A BROADENING REACH. NOT WITHOUT SUDDEN CRIES, BARELY AUDIBLE ABOVE THE SOUND OF TRAFFIC. NOT WITHOUT INESTIMABLE COST. NOT WITHOUT CAREFULLY MAINTAINED TARGETS. NOT WITHOUT A CHANGE OF PACE IN THE FINAL SECTION, IN WHICH THREATS ARE MADE. NOT WITHOUT ADDITIVES. NOT WITHOUT A FIRMER OUTLINE. NOT WITHOUT THE DREAM OF CONDITIONS. NOT WITHOUT INCREASED STORAGE. NOT WITHOUT A SOCIAL DIMENSION. NOT WITHOUT A LEONINE COUNTENANCE. NOT WITHOUT SHAME. NOT WITHOUT NEGATION. NOT WITHOUT SEXUAL SATISFACTION. NOT WITHOUT YOUR PRESENCE AT THE EVENT. NOT WITHOUT THE EVENT BEING OVER BEFORE IT WAS BEGUN. NOT WITHOUT IDENTIFYING PRODUCTIVITY WITH FAILURE. NOT WITHOUT BEING OBSERVED. NOT WITHOUT COMMITMENT. NOT WITHOUT EXPLANATION. NOT WITHOUT SAVAGERY. WITHOUT LIMPING HOME DEFEATED. NOT WITHOUT A SNEER OF DEFENSIVE CONTEMPT. NOT WITHOUT BEING DECEIVED. NOT WITHOUT DECEIT BEING REBRANDED AS PRODUCTION. NOT WITHOUT IT’S PAINFUL REMOVAL. NOT WITHOUT REPEATED ATTEMPTS, EACH A DIFFERENT AND INENCE, EXPRESSED YEARS LATER. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION BEING REDUCED TO DATA. NOT WITHOUT WALKING THROUGH A CARPETED LOBBY WHERE SOFT MUSIC PLAYS A FAMILIAR, NOT WITHOUT MEANING HAVING BEEN ATTACHED, DESPITE OUR EARNEST EFFORT. NOT WITHOUT THE Categories, INTO WHICH EACH WILL UNCOMFORTABLY BE FITTED. NOT WITHOUT A LOSSES OF POTENCY. NOT WITHOUT TRANSLATION. NOT WITHOUT SINISTER MOTIVES. NOT WITHOUT THE LAST ONE BEING DAMAGED. NOT WITHOUT THE DAMAGE BEING LINKED TO ENJOYMENT. NOT WITHOUT CAIRN. NOT WITHOUT CHARM. NOT WITHOUT HOPE. NOT WITHOUT BEING DELUDED. NOT WITHOUT IT’S PAINFUL REMOVAL. NOT WITHOUT REPEATED ATTEMPTS, EACH A DIFFERENT AND INENCE, EXPRESSED YEARS LATER. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION BEING REDUCED TO DATA. NOT WITHOUT THE HIDING LENGTHENED TO ACCOUNT FOR FURTHER EXPENDITURE. NOT WITHOUT FUTILITY. NOT WITHOUT INDIFFERENCE. NOT WITHOUT PRIOR AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT BEING DECEIVED. NOT WITHOUT DECEIT BEING REBRANDED AS PRODUCTION. NOT WITHOUT THE DATA BEING CORRUPTED. NOT WITHOUT THE CORRUPTION HAVING BEEN HIDDEN. NOT WITHOUT THE HIDING LENGTHENED TO ACCOUNT FOR FURTHER EXPENDITURE. NOT WITHOUT FUTILITY. NOT WITHOUT INDIFFERENCE. NOT WITHOUT PRIOR AGREEMENT. NOT WITHOUT BEING DECEIVED. NOT WITHOUT DECEIT BEING REBRANDED AS PRODUCTION. NOT WITHOUT CAIRN. NOT WITHOUT CHARM. NOT WITHOUT HOPE. NOT WITHOUT BEING DELUDED. NOT WITHOUT IT’S PAINFUL REMOVAL. NOT WITHOUT REPEATED ATTEMPTS, EACH A DIFFERENT AND INENCE, EXPRESSED YEARS LATER. NOT WITHOUT THE DESCRIPTION BEING REDUCED TO DATA. NOT WITHOUT THE HIDING LENGTHENED TO ACCOUNT FOR FURTHER EXPENDITURE. 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What would the show Hlysnan be like if we took Francis Ford Coppola’s film The Conversation away from it? Like cutting the shape of the story from out of the show, whether or not it is already there for us to do so. Can this subtraction of something that is already unavailable be productive? If so, for whom? Do we actually want to produce something when production is also always taken away from us?

Since we chose not to reveal the film Proof (Jocelyn Moorhouse dir. 1991) to the audience at Five Years Gallery in 2010, and to describe instead a story of a blind photographer, in the undirected detail of a first encounter, we have used the act of withholding the direct experience of a film from an audience to discover where narrative takes place, and to experiment with meaning produced as a duty or a task, rather than an aesthetic gift.

We gave ourselves the job of telling the blind listener what the image and the sound were doing, exactly as they happened. There was no time to prepare, to do the job well, and to be rewarded for it. They could always choose not to listen, and we would go on regardless, since regard is not possible when your eyes are only on the screen.

Conversation Piece for Hlysan is a live, one-off viewing by Sullivan and Flint of Francis Ford Coppola’s 1974 film The Conversation – a narrative intensely engaged with the act of listening, overhearing, and misinterpretation – on video glasses which prevent the artists seeing or hearing the audience moving around them. Their narrating voices will form two distinct channels of speech from which the audience assemble the story of the film through this ‘second-hand’ experience.
'Sonic Journalism' is the aural equivalent of photojournalism. It describes the practice where field recordings play a major role in the discussion and documentation of places, issues and events and where listening to sounds of all kinds strongly informs the approach to research and following narratives whilst on location. Travels have brought me into contact with some difficult and potentially dangerous places. Most are areas of major environmental/ecological damage, but others are nuclear sites or the edges of military zones. The danger is not necessarily to a short-term visitor, but to the people of the area who have no option to leave or through the location’s role in geopolitical power structures. Dangerous places can be both sonically and visually compelling, even beautiful and atmospheric. There is, often, an extreme dichotomy between an aesthetic response and knowledge of the ‘danger’, whether it is pollution, social injustice, military or geopolitical.

My visits to the Chernobyl exclusion zone to collect field recordings and other material for the project Sounds from Dangerous Places took place in 2006 and 2007, twenty years after the catastrophic nuclear accident that

brought Chernobyl to the world’s attention and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

Seven years later, it is interesting to consider which of the many memories from those trips have stayed with me most strongly. There are two in particular. One is the vitality and richness of the springtime dawn chorus. Birds were prolific and there is one singing on almost every recording I made. In the absence of humans (people had been evacuated), nature has spectacularly restored itself, creating a different ecological balance within a changed environment. The landscape was often very beautiful.

The other is the people I met and the significant realisation that, whatever the scale of a disaster, life for the vast majority goes on – for years, decades, whole lifetimes afterwards. Whatever help is, or is not, offered by governments and other agencies it is individual people, families and local communities who bear the brunt of adapting their lives to vastly changed circumstances.

For me, this reality is personified by Svetlana Tsalko, now approaching her eighties. Originally evacuated from her home village of Duminskoye after the disaster, she decided to return there (at first illegally) unhappy with life elsewhere. In response to the catastrophe, she began to compose poetry based on her acute observations of the relationships between people and nature and how these had been abruptly severed. Here is one of her poems.
“People, where should I look for you?”

I would walk out of my house,
And stand on the threshold.
Looking around me. And the tears would start.

Nightingales are singing in the green field.
The cuckoos are calling,
Calling and asking,
  “Why are you leaving us?”
The crane is circling above the ruined house
Circling and asking,
  “People, where should I look for you?”
Don’t look. You won’t ever find us.
All driven away like water
That disappears from the field.
Oh God, why do you punish us so,
Sending us away from our homeland
  To a foreign country?

Here at home I know every place I see.
Wherever I look I find nourishment.
In my native woods there are red berries.
Bread and mushrooms are food for us.
But in the foreign land the sun come up
In a different sky.
  And brings to us settlers such sadness.

What are we to say, what are we to do?
  Who should we ask, what should we expect?

Svetlana Tsalko
Svetlana speaks of an utterly interdependent relationship between humans and nature. Both have a long understanding of each other. Birds are as saddened and disturbed by the sudden absence of villagers as the people are at being forced to evacuate to unfamiliar areas where their knowledge no longer applies. The understanding is expressed culturally as well as in the practicalities of village life. It is a complete contrast to our view, which sees nature as separate from human existence and which has allowed us, until recently, to exploit natural resources with little regard for the consequences. That view is now under challenge. But the debate is still couched mostly in terms of hard science, competitive economics and geopolitics. The cultural dimensions of the issues are little discussed or acknowledged. At a time when we are trying to reshape our own relationship with the environment we can learn from people whose culture and practices have sustained them for so long.
"TILT" is an immersive installation, a state of suspension. The work focuses on sound as a physical sensation in response or conversation with the space. Its dimensions govern the configuration of the installation.

A sine wave is injected into a white void of a space through a single subwoofer, and results in a standing wave phenomenon. Standing waves occur when sound is reflected back off surfaces and interferes with the original travelling sound wave radiated by the sound source. At certain points along a standing wave, the direct and reflected waves cancel or reinforce each other. As a consequence, hills and valleys of intensities of volume are created that are measured and translated into the shape of a slanted floor in grid formation, transforming the whole experience of the room into an audio portrait of the space.

Without any recognisable, visible hints in this white void, observers enter and explore the space to experience tilt sensations in both their bodies and ears.

When the listeners move around the space, they perceive the sound disappearing correlating to the speed in which they explore the space. At some point, a very fine pencil line on the wall can be perceived – subtly revealing the height that is based on an average man’s ear height, at which the acoustic topography of the hills and valleys were measured. The pencil
line disappears as he or she moves away towards the centre of the space. Both disappearances are heightened through the subtle changes in the /f_l floor heights, making the whole experience unsettling.
492.40 m$^3 \text{TILT}$
Topography of standing wave in the space at 185 cm height at Casino Luxembourg
Installation, 3D simulation showing aural topography in the space at Casino Luxembourg
492.40m³
Floor details of TILT at Casino Luxembourg
I am standing in a stairwell of a university building with a security guard, watching the rain pelting down outside, rivulets slanting down the window in front of us. “Hope it’s not raining like this tomorrow”, I say, “I am going to be doing a soundwalk.” “What’s that?” she replies, with curiosity. “It’s a chance to listen together with a group of people, paying attention to everyday sounds and listening experiences.” “Everyday sounds?” she answers. “That’s interesting. It’s like when I go to visit my mother and I always find the noise from her cooking stove to be so comforting. It’s a particular sound that always makes me feel that way.”

On this occasion in the university stairwell, I think about the significance of domestic noises and then tell the security guard about another soundwalk that I had done in Montreal, and how one person on that walk found the sound of traffic heard at a distance in the city to be reminiscent of the sound from the vacuum cleaner that her mother had at home when she was a child (Kline 2013). She used to follow her mum along and curl up close to the vacuum cleaner, listening intently to this comforting everyday noise, a particularly domestic broadband whine that gave her a feeling of sonic containment and security. Another sound that became the focus of a listening conversation was that of a lawnmower
that accompanied another soundwalk. While some listeners resented this machine noise as an interruption to birdsong and animal sounds in a quasi-natural park setting, one listener spoke of how the sound of a lawnmower and the coincident smell of cut grass was pleasantly reminiscent of his grandfather and life at his farm.

I treasure chance meetings with listeners and the opportunities that they give for exchange of memories, perspectives, and listening standpoints. In my research, I create opportunities for everyday listening conversations, by making moments for informal exchange, group discussion, writing in participant listening logs and guest books that employ open questions and suggest various modes of address (such as prose, poetry, imagery) to encourage the opening exchange of ideas about listening experiences and to provide opportunities to reflect on those experiences and learn from them.

Everyday listening conversations are ways of creating situated knowledge, partial knowledge, in the way that Donna Haraway uses that term (partial as in a part of, not whole, and partial as in partial to, liking and desiring connection):

“The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position, not of identity, but of objectivity, that is, partial connection.” (Haraway, 1988: 587, my emphasis)

Here, Haraway focuses on how the partial in all its guises – the desiring, wanting, loving as well as the fragmentary, the incomplete; and I would add, thinking sonically, the tone within a more complex harmonic timbre – the partial listener relies on connections with
others for objectivity and the creation of knowledge, as a sound relies on all its partials to be heard fully. I would also add to Haraway’s formulation that the idea of partial knowledge provides the possibility to listen together. This listening and this knowledge is partial, both in the sense of being part of, imperfect, as well as in the sense of being partial to, or desiring. Approaches to listening are affected by desires, needs, and wants of listeners, as well as their backgrounds, cultures, and disciplinary perspectives, and no listening perspective, no matter how expert, is complete. It is always worthwhile to search for listening conversations.

Everyday listening provides possibilities to think beyond the categories of music, ambience, voice, and sound effect. People who would feel unqualified to comment on music or the complexities of soundtracks, are willing to discuss everyday sounds, which do not have the same connection with musical or media expertise, or need for knowledge of sonic history, form or genre. Yet, already the everyday is colonised to some extent. Consider, for instance, the idea of the hifi soundscape in acoustic ecology (the study of sounding environments). The complex responses to different everyday sounds that I discussed at the beginning of this paper are an indication of why this concept needs to be approached critically (McCartney 2010). In its association with the desire for isolation of sounds and acoustic clarity of the sound studio, the concept of the hifi soundscape values broad acoustic horizons that have clear sound signals with few overlapping sounds, which are sought by acoustic ecologists through nature excursions in wilderness areas far from home. In contrast, the concept of the hifi soundscape devalues many of the everyday machine noises of domestic spaces that were discussed in the listening conversations that I bring attention to here, and yet these sounds were clearly valued highly by some listeners.

This idea of the hifi soundscape, so prevalent in acoustic ecology, can be considered an interpretive routine in the sense that Stanley Fish (1980)
uses that term, to mean an acceptable way of interpreting experience in a particular academic discipline or school of thought. Each listening community has particular interpretive routines that structure the kinds of listening (and sound production approaches) that are encouraged in that community. For instance, the focus on personal experience and the individual voice in biographical documentary, the importance of sonic abstraction in orchestral concert music or the search for hifi soundscapes in acoustic ecology.

Everyday listening conversations with people from different backgrounds and listening communities can challenge people’s ideas about appropriate ways to listen, opening up new possibilities. To illustrate a few examples of how this works, I will focus further on listening to domestic sounds, and how conversations about these listening experiences can challenge concepts of public and private spheres, and the roles of women, men and children within them.

Listener responses to children’s voices became an issue in a recent project, Soundwalk to Home. This began as a recording project, in which I wished to listen to sounds of my neighbourhood by recording a series of short walks from the end of my street to my house, over the period of a year. The project later travelled to Chicago, where it was shown at the School of the Art Institute gallery in 2001–2002, as part of a group show on sound art. I sent along a listening logbook and invited listeners to respond to the work. Listeners would also often respond to the comments of other listeners, creating a conversation through time in the book. One recording included the sound of children laughing while playing. A listener responded, "I hear children and it makes me happy. Simple, I know, but what’s wrong with that." Her response questions her own listening practice by describing it as simple because it focuses on the sound of children’s laughter. Another listener responds confrontationally, "I prefer sharp knives clanging in my shower", asserting violence over domestic harmony with an implied reference to
Hitchcock’s *Psycho* film and its murderous shower scene – the invasion of domestic peace and privacy with violence, which was famously depicted sonically with shrieking violins. The juxtaposition of these two comments in the logbook highlights the confrontation of very different perspectives on everyday domestic sounds.

Another type of everyday listening conversation again brings into focus different ideas on the representation of the public and the private, this time directly through recording as a listening practice. As part of a project to listen to the sound surrounding the Lachine Canal in Montreal, my research assistant, Sandra Gabriele, and I did a series of soundwalks at night, wanting to think through the experiences of women alone at night in public places. On one of Sandra’s walks, while she was doing a sound recording of her listening experience on a public path in a park, she was approached by a man who asked her to stop the recording so that he could ask her something privately. She did not stop recording, and eventually he moved away. In this case, the recorder worked as a kind of personal security device, asserting her agency as a listening subject, her right to be in a public place, recording her listening experience. The conversation between them was recorded, as she did her work of listening to the sound environment, as he attempted to interrupt that, and as she continued with the work.

These listening conversations indicate some sharply different concepts and beliefs about what is properly public and what is private, and in what contexts listening, performance and playback of certain sounds is desirable. The confrontations and discussions that take place show how conversation has possibilities for expanding thinking about listening beyond disciplinary boundaries, to explore partial connections and partial knowledge. Listening conversations can be elicited through discussion, logbooks, and other means; the responses become more surprising and revelatory the more open this space is to honest exchange, providing possibilities for listener confrontation in a safe space, with discussion,
and reflection. These conversations and confrontations can lead to new questions about listening to everyday sounds. What are the acoustic and meaning horizons, the ecotones and border zones of domestic noises made manifest in public places? How do people listen to those sounds and relate to each other through them? What feelings of attraction, revulsion, and desire for control affect how people respond to particular everyday sounds and those who make them?

References:

Fish, Stanley, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).


“DORMIPHONICS is a new tool for the language student. It implements established and accepted audio-visual conversational methods (phonograph records correlated with illustrated textbook) such as the Linguaphone Method. With the aid of the Dormiphonic technique – described further on – the student can utilize the time he can best spare for his task – his periods of relaxation: On going off to sleep and just before emerging from sleep, as well as during sleep. By this combined technique the full value of learning on the principle of ‘association’ of related matter is utilized. Classroom learning and ‘homework’ become a unified event. This occurs at a time when the learner is in his most receptive and impressionable state.”

_The Modern Language Journal_, vol. 34, no. 6 (October 1950).
My practice as an artist has always been about negotiating rules of sound and unlearning or disrupting social rules toward sound, in other words, ‘sound etiquettes’.

For example, in October 2013, I was invited by the organisers of the Sound Live Tokyo Festival to do a performance at Ueno Outdoor Stage in Tokyo, Japan. Before I started conceptualising the work, I was informed about the sound policy in which the performers were asked to keep sounds under 80 dB, as the residential apartment complexes built around the venue are close enough for 80+ dB sounds to reach them. Even though exceeding this threshold was most unlikely to occur, the venue’s notice read: “We have set a standard of loudness: lower than 80 dB, measured at the end of the rows in the audience seating area. We would ask the users to meet this standard.”

All of a sudden, the focus on sound became mathematical and about numbers, and, of course, there was a wide range of measurement tools at hand to determine the level of each sound.

Because I have been deaf since birth, the hearing in my left ear starts at 95 dB and at 115 dB in my right ear. An average person starts hearing between 0 and 25 dB. Technically, any sound that falls below 95 dB automatically makes up as society’s collective reality that is right in front of me, while
I have my own sound reality that is still constructed within that range, but rather, set at a different calibration. Not everyone’s hearing starts at 0 dB (almost total silence), which is ironic because it actually indicates that everyone is ‘deaf’ at different degrees and at their own calibrations. People with excellent hearing could go past 0 dB, as low as -15 dB!

Back to the stage situation in Tokyo. I had a long dialogue with a friend about the sound limitation policy in which I realised that I have always perceived silence as subjective and loudness as objective. However, the more I look into loudness, the more subjective it becomes — just like it applies to the notion of silence. I also became intrigued by how that particular sound policy conflicted my current attempts to unlearn sound etiquettes. With trusty Google, I have found various sounds which people generally associate with a range of 70 to 90 dB. They are all set on community life, industrial, and domestic noise levels. To my amusement, they are mostly produced by machines. It also felt that my 95+ dB reality instantly became distorted as I saw how highly subjective each sound is, and how it continues to pose as being objective. Naturally, each stated noise depends on its power, its surroundings, and how far you stand from it. I compiled a list of these noises:

washing machine  busy urban street  newspaper press  loud singing
air conditioner  diesel truck  living room music  subway
electric shaver  food blender  radio  band
snowmobile  garbage disposal  motorcycle  symphony
vacuum cleaner  dishwasher  power mower  police siren
hair dryer  average factory  car wash  ringing telephone
alarm clock  freight train  plane flyover  jackhammer
flush toilet  freeway traffic  diesel train  milling machine

I wrote a letter to the Tokyo audience informing that I would convert this list into a score and proposed that I use “their voice as my voice”, hoping that they would trust me with unknown instructions coming their way, as
it is essential to the performance. Considering my non-verbal reality and communication, it is difficult to find my own standing in society, which is why it is fundamental to my artistic practice that I bring into play the audience’s voice as a tool and/or platform for me to express and legitimise my voice. I function as a conductor using my own body language and real-time text to communicate and direct. In Tokyo, the sound’s volume and density throughout the space was based on the degree of the audience’s participation and my control over two hundred mini-speakers and microphones. In the beginning, I had the audience read this list of noises simultaneously, then I instructed them to only voice what they read on cue cards that were given to them (both in English and Japanese), to then pass them on to the person sitting next to them. As we proceeded through a few sets of cue cards, the list slowly got broken down as people started to depart from clear speech to pure vocalisation. Removing this list of noises from possible grammar, context, and phonology, it was an attempt to tune out of the ‘linguistic machinery’ of spoken words. The listed noises of machines were originally meant to reflect upon and determine the limitation of sound, but in the end, they became the score for the audience to vocalise. The words provided the sonic materiality to be listened to, instead of considering each noise’s social and linguistic parameters. This performance piece was titled *Subjective Loudness*. 

Christine Sun Kim
Telephone Piece
Téléphone Piece
for Kupenberg
Pick up the phone whenever it rings

Lora Cown
2014
Appendix

Texts in original language

Udo Noll [DE]
Marco Godinho [FR]
Daniela Brahm & Les Schliesser [DE]

Artists biographies
Es erhob sich das leichte, ätherische Gewölbe des Himmels und schuf sich seinen Platz in der obersten Sphäre. Fast so leicht wie der Äther, schloss sich daran im Raume die Luft an. Dichter als beide, zog die Erde gewichtige Stoffe an sich und sank, durch eigene Schwere.\footnote{1. Ovid, \textit{Metamorphosen}. Hörbuch, Patmos Verlag 2008.}

Dieser Äther, der obere Himmel, beginnt in etwa achtzig bis hundert Kilometern Höhe über der Erdoberfläche, am Ende der Homosphäre. Hier, oberhalb der schützenden Ozonschicht, trennen sich die Bestandteile der Luft. Es findet eine Entmischung statt; die physikalischen und chemischen Bedingungen verändern sich dramatisch unter dem Einfluss von Strahlung und nachlassender Schwerkraft.


Die kraftvollen Bilder von der Entstehung der Welt, von Schöpfung,

Die Welt zerzählt. Und Raum und Zeiten und was die Menschheit wob und wog, Funktion nur von Unendlichkeiten – die Mythe log.2


Hin mit einem Hier, das massiv und positiv hier ist, einem kompakten Relief von Hier, auf dem du gehst und stehst, wo Berg, Tal, Ebene zuverlässig benannt sind, alles mit Wegzeichen versehen, die

Richtungen bekannt oder feststellbar: Himmelsrichtungen.3


Attendre/Écouter

Cartographie d’un an de moments d’attente à travers l’écoute


À côté des lieux d’attente publics et privés, il y a aussi d’autres contextes où l’on attend – quelqu’un ou que quelque chose se passe – de façon moins formelle et plus spontanée. Ce sont surtout ces moments qui m’intéressent, ces instants où l’attente se transforme en un geste poétique, voire politique et l’écoute devient l’expérience de ce geste. Une attitude, une énergie – être dans l’attente, dans le désir (au sens temporel) – qui tente d’introduire des moments de faille, de doute, qui ne participent pas à une activité rentable dans notre monde effréné où seuls la vitesse, le rendement et la productivité comptent. Quand on y prête vraiment attention, ces moments précaires et fugaces, qui semblent sans importance à première vue, se transforment en de véritables paysages sonores immersifs révélant ainsi chacun une expérience très singulière. Le silence y joue autant d’importance que les sons qui révèlent l’activité pratiquée pendant ces interstices temporels et spatiaux.

Attendre est aussi un moment de transition, de passage, un état d’entre-deux qui tend vers quelque chose qui adviendra. Tendre l’oreille, être attentif, se diriger vers, faire des efforts pour capter ce qui semble inaudible, pour être dans l’anticipation de comprendre
les différents contextes sociaux qui nous entourent.

Chaque prélèvement sonore est accompagné d’une légende écrite qui indique l’endroit, la durée et le contexte précis de la prise de son. L’accumulation des différents fragments dessine une cartographie de ces temps d’attente et de mes divers déplacements au cours de l’année 2014.

Ce processus de travail ouvre ainsi à un questionnement plus large sur l’idée de mémoire, de notre environnement sonore au quotidien et des traces qu’on garde de ces moments en apparence volatils.

Les sons de Attendre/Écouter sont archivés sur une plateforme, une sorte de mappemonde des sons, créée par l’artiste Udo Noll (http://aporee.org/maps).
Die Audioarbeit *eins und eins sind eins* der Künstler Daniela Brahm und Les Schliesser reflektiert auf abstrakter Ebene den komplexen Prozess eines real gewordenen Möglichkeits(Utopie)raums. Sie besteht aus den beiden Vertragstexten, die das rechtliche Fundament von ExRotaprint bilden, ein Industriegelände, für das die beiden Künstler eine modellhafte, am Gemeinwohl orientierte Immobilienentwicklung durchgesetzt haben und das heute von ihnen betrieben wird.

Das Projekt ExRotaprint


ExRotaprint vermietet heute zu je einem Drittel Flächen an Arbeit, Kunst und Soziales. Hier arbeiten Gewerbebetriebe, soziale Einrichtungen und Kreative. Es entsteht ein gesamtgesellschaftliches Bild, das sich gegen die Monokulturen aufgesetzter Renditeträume wendet und stattdessen das Miteinander und den Austausch fördert.

Realität wird vor Ort mit kunstverwandten Strategien sozial, wirtschaftlich und kulturell gestaltet. ExRotaprint als soziale Plastik bedeutet eine Dehnung des Kunstbegriffs, der nicht als Abbild oder Zitat, sondern als gestaltete Wirklichkeit Form findet und Kunst sein kann, aber nicht muss.

Die rechtliche Struktur von ExRotaprint bilden zwei Verträge, die sich in ihren Zielen verschränken und gegenseitig ergänzen. Die Verträge sichern langfristig die Gemeinnützigkeit der Projektentwicklung und das Nutzungskonzept ab, und schließen Immobilienspekulation an diesem Standort aus. Sie bilden den Rahmen, innerhalb dessen die soziale Plastik ExRotaprint gestaltet werden kann und setzen gleichzeitig die Grenzen gegen eine grundsätzliche Umorientierung des Projekts.

Der 99-jährige Erbbaurechtsvertrag mit den Stiftungen trias und Edith-Maryon wurde am 3. September 2007 unterzeichnet. ExRotaprint hat sich gegen den Kauf des Geländes mit einem Bankkredit und für das Erbbaurecht mit den Stiftungen entschieden, um den Weiterverkauf des Geländes unmöglich zu machen. Beide Stiftungen arbeiten an einem neuen Umgang mit Grund und Boden und sind daher ideale Partner für eine Projektentwicklung, die nicht am Profit orientiert ist. Über das Erbbaurecht ist die ExRo-
ExRotaprint gGmbH in einer eigentumsgleichen Position und verantwortet die Entwicklung und Finanzierung des Projekts in allen Aspekten. Einzig der Verkauf des Grundstücks ist ausgeschlossen. Das Instrument des Erbbaurechts trennt Boden und Gebäude, der Boden bleibt Eigentum der Stiftungen, die Gebäude sind in Besitz der ExRotaprint gGmbH.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan

is a London-based artist. Recent solo shows include *The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012) at Showroom, London, *The Whole Truth* (2012) at Casco, Utrecht, and most recently *Tape Echo* (2013) at Beirut in Cairo. His works have been part of exhibitions at Tate Modern, MUHKA Antwerp, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and Lisa Cooley, New York. Additionally Abu Hamdan’s ongoing project, *Aural Contract*, has been recently presented at HKW, Berlin (2014), Arnolfini, Bristol (2013), The Taipei Biennial (2012) and as part of his residency at IASPIS, Stockholm (2013). Abu Hamdan is one of the four artists comprising the group Model Court whose first major solo presentation was *Resolution 978HD* at Gasworks, London (2013). His hybridised practice means that he has written for various publications such as Cabinet Magazine and the 10th Sharjah Biennial, and has curated events for Batroun Projects, Lebanon (2011–current) and at the Reitveld Academies’ Studium Generale (2014). Abu Hamdan is a part of the research team for Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths College where he is also a PhD candidate and lecturer.

www.lawrenceabuhamdan.com

Angie Atmadjaja

was born in Jakarta, Indonesia and is based in Manchester, United Kingdom. Her practice explores acoustic and psychoacoustic phenomena. By articulating sine waves and filtered noise, she creates works that place viewers in a realm of pure experience where sound is perceptually tangible.

Selected exhibitions include: *Bikkuri,*
Kader Attia was born in Paris, France, and is based in Berlin, Germany. His work tackles the relations between the Western thought and extra-Occidental cultures, particularly through architecture, the human body, history, nature, culture and religions. Selected exhibitions include *Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder*, a solo show at Whitechapel Gallery, London; *Reparatur 5 Acts*, a solo show at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; dOCUMENTA(13), Kassel; *Construire, Déconstruire, Reconstruire: Le Corps Utopique*, a solo show at Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; *Performing Histories (1)* at MoMA, New York. 

Daniela Brahmk was born in Düsseldorf and is based in Berlin, Germany. Her practice focuses on the built environment and its social complexity. Together with Les Schliesser she initiated the social sculpture ExRotaprint in Berlin-Wedding, a model for an inclusive and non-profit approach to urban development. Selected exhibitions include: Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin; Museo Tamayo Mexico City; *Ideal City/Invisible Cities*, Zamosc, Poland.
Peter Cusack was born in London, United Kingdom, and is based in London and Berlin, Germany. He is a field recordist and sound artist long interested in the sonic environment. In 1998 he initiated the Favourite Sounds Project to discover how people interact with everyday sound in the places where they live. It has been carried in cities worldwide including London, Beijing, Prague and Berlin. His project Sounds From Dangerous Places (described as sonic journalism) investigates the soundscapes of sites of major environmental damage such as the Caspian oil fields and the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

http://favouritesounds.org
http://sounds-from-dangerous-places.org/

Marco Godinho was born in Portugal and lives in Paris and Luxembourg. As a conceptual artist he focuses on our subjective perception of time and space which disrupts the convictions we have regarding the world that surrounds us. The notions of errancy, displacement, exile, memory, language and communication lead to (poetic, philosophical, political) questions rising up from daily experiences. Selected solo exhibitions include: Museo Universitario de Antioquia (MUUA), Medellín; Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg; Mois de la Photo, Montréal; Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy. Selected collective exhibitions include: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA), Santiago de Chile; Insitu, Berlin; Galerie José Bienvenu, New York; FRAC Lorraine and Centre Pompidou, Metz; Musée du Quai Branly, Paris; Musée d'Art

Clare Gasson was born in Birmingham. She lives in London, United Kingdom. Her practice originates from writing – her own and text she finds around a city or in an archive. She works in a variety of structured ways, often with voice. Selected exhibitions and performances include Solid on Our Source Planet, Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridgeshire; Soundworks, ICA, London; The River, Live Art, South London Gallery.

www.danielabrahm.de
www.exrotaprint.de
Brandon LaBelle was born in Memphis, United States, and lives in Berlin, Germany. His practice focuses on social life, using sound, performance, text and sited constructions. His work has been presented at the Marrakech Biennial (2014), Whitney Museum, New York (2012) and Image Music Text, London (2011). He is the author of Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian, Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life and Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art. 

Andra McCartney was born in Britain, and is based in Montreal, Quebec, and Norwood, Ontario, Canada. She is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Concordia University, teaching Sound in Media. Her recent research project, Soundwalking Interactions, investigates the listening practices of people on soundwalks and listening to art works derived from soundwalking. She is a soundwalk artist, leading public walks and creating gallery installations, recordings, performances and radio works. Her works can be heard on the Internet, on CBC radio, and on CDs produced by Deep Wireless, Terra Nova, and the Canadian Electroacoustic Community. Major creative projects include Eavesdropping on the Waterfront (2007), Journées Sonores canal de Lachine (2004), and Soundwalk to Home (2001). 

John Menick is an artist, writer, and programmer born in White Plains, New York. His work has been exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13), Kassel, Germany; Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna, Austria; and CCA Wattis, San Francisco, USA. He lives in New York City. 

Angel Nevarez (born in Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in New York) and Valerie Tevere (born in Chicago; lives and works in New York) are multidisciplinary artists whose projects and research investigate contemporary music and sound, the electromagnetic spectrum, dissent, and public fora. Selected exhibitions
include: MoMA, New York; Henie Onstad Art Center, Hovikodden, Norway; Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain; Creative Time, New York; The New Museum, New York; Museo de Arte Raúl Anguiano, Guadalajara, Mexico; ICA, Philadelphia. Their recent fellowships include a Creative Capital fellowship, an Art Matters grant, and an NEA project grant. Nevarez and Tevere were both Studio Fellows at The Whitney Museum’s Independent Study Program and artists-in-residence at the International Artists Studio Program in Sweden (IASPIS), Stockholm. Nevarez is a Lecturer at MIT’s programme in Art, Culture, and Technology. Tevere is a Mellon Resident Fellow at the Center for the Humanities, The Graduate Center, CUNY, and Associate Professor of Media Culture at College of Staten Island, CUNY. www.nevareztevere.info

Noll is also the founder of radio aporee, an open and collaborative platform about new practices in sound art and space. For a selection of projects, exhibitions and workshops, see http://aporee.org/aporee.html.

Emeka Ogboh whose works contemplate broad notions of listening and hearing as its main focus, was born in Enugu, and is currently living in Lagos, Nigeria. He works primarily with sound and video in exploring ways of understanding cities as cosmopolitan spaces with their unique characters. His Lagos soundscapes project is a corpus of recordings that documents the mega city through sound. www.14thmay.com

Yoko Ono is an artist known for her groundbreaking conceptual work, performance, films, writing, and music. Yoko’s creative influence and prolific artistic output continues to inspire new generations.

Udo Noll, media artist, was born in 1966 in Hadamar, Germany. He lives in Berlin and Cologne, Germany. He studied film and media technology at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences, and has worked as an artist and media professional in numerous international projects and exhibitions.

Les Schliesser was born in Nürtingen, and is based in Berlin, Germany. His practice focuses on the
chaos of individual experience within a tenuous cultural consensus. Together with Daniela Brahm he initiated the social sculpture ExRotaprint in Berlin-Wedding, a model for an inclusive and non-profit approach to urban development. Selected exhibitions include: Tirana Biennale, Albania; Ideal City/Invisible Cities, Zamosc, Poland, and Potsdam, Germany; Postmoskau Berlin.

www.lesschliesser.de
www.exrotaprint.de

Susan Schuppli was born in Canada and is based in London, United Kingdom. Her practice examines media that emerges from sites of contemporary conflict and violence. She received her doctorate from Goldsmiths (2009) and participated in the Whitney Independent Study Program after completing her MFA at the University of California San Diego. Her creative projects have been exhibited at the Kitchen, New York; Artspace, Sydney, and the Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul. She is author of the forthcoming book, Material Witness: Forensic Media and the Production of Evidence (MIT Press, 2015), which is also the subject of an experimental documentary.

www.forensic-architecture.org

Christine Sullivan (United States) and Rob Flint (United Kingdom) are based in London, and have collaborated since 2006 on works which explore the sensory derangement of image and sound technologies, using speech, text, image and sound in a speculative way to de-familiarise or make ritualistic things which are already well known. Their practice is experimental, combining elements from ongoing research towards an unknown public outcome. Sometimes documentation of the activity becomes the work itself. Recent work specifically addresses the voice – embodied, and disembodied, spoken and written, and the way in which limiting or withholding sensory experience can re-activate narrative. Exhibitions include Fading Lights Are Fading at FLOOD, Dublin, Ireland (2013/14), Hiding in Plain Sight – A Mystery Play, in ‘This Is Not Public’ at Five Years Gallery, London (2013). A fragment of an ongoing project, The Bill Burroughs Memorial Choir: Part One – Where Are You, Bill?, was selected for the Aspex Gallery show ‘Emergency5’ in 2011/12.

www.sullivanandflint.com
California born, New York-based artist Christine Sun Kim uses the medium of sound through technology, performance, and drawing to investigate and rationalize her relationship with sound and spoken languages. Selected exhibitions and performances include: Sound Live Tokyo, Tokyo; Recess Activities, New York; nyMusikk, Oslo; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She was a recipient of Youth Insights Artist Residency at Whitney Museum, Residency at Southern Exposure, and Fellowship at TED.

www.christinesunkim.com

John Wynne was born on a Canadian airbase at Zweibrücken, Germany. He is a Reader in Sound Arts at University of the Arts London and has a PhD from Goldsmiths College. His diverse practice includes site-specific works such as Installation for 300 speakers, Pianola and vacuum cleaner, the first piece of sound art in the Saatchi collection. His award-winning projects with heart and lung transplant patients and with speakers of endangered languages traverse the borders between documentary and abstraction through sound and photography. In 2013 he had a solo show at the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, and collaborated with filmmaker Atom Egoyan on an installation at Snape Maltings, United Kingdom.

www.sensitivebrigade.com
EXHIBITION

HLYSNAN: The Notion and Politics of Listening
Casino Luxembourg, 17.5 – 7.9.2013

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Berit Fischer, Kevin Muhlen

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