



**Audio
Interzone**

Twilight casts an eerie hush over the world. In densely populated urban areas, where activity never ceases, it unfolds a kind of visual muteness, a slowly dissipating light that overtakes us before the curtains are drawn, briefly revealing the intricacies of our private lives to an audience of passing voyeurs. Outside the city, well beyond the artifice of suburban enclaves, nightfall is preceded by a sudden dampening of wind and birdsong, a moment that Pascal Quignard once described as “*le ‘point zéro sonore’ dans l’ordre de la nature**”—neither positive or negative, at once real and vaguely hallucinatory.

In both urban and rural contexts, the break between day and night is rich with narrative potential, an edge of darkness beyond which our imaginations are free to run wild. A similar interzone of possibility marks “degree zero” for *Nite Ride*, a project that delves into the experience of nighttime driving, while seeking to expand our sonic horizons. Originally envisioned by Ryan Stec during a dark drive through Northern Ontario, this ambitious venture began when two different, yet oddly complementary artists—Tim Hecker (Montreal) and Marla Hlady (Toronto)—were commissioned to produce a composition or sound work linked to a specific driving route in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. It has since taken shape as an open-ended series of enactments, rather than a single audio format or listening experience, which

* Pascal Quignard, *La haine de la musique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), 134.

together comprise a sustained consideration of how sound paradoxically ties us to a shared social reality and enables us to escape into a dreamlike “cinema of the ear.”

Tim Hecker’s experimental, electro-acoustic practice eludes easy categorization and borrows from a wide range of sources, including rock and ambient music, acousmatics, and noise. His dense, textural compositions play with, and intuitively combine, elements of white noise, found sound, samples and melodic phrases, creating sonic landscapes that overlap, dissolve, and move endlessly towards an imaginary horizon. The multilayered, unfurling quality of his work makes it particularly exciting to listen to while driving, as its dream logic fosters and enhances the sense of suspended reality that often accompanies night travels.

For *Nite Ride*, Hecker chose to expand upon and rework material from his celebrated album *Harmony in Ultraviolet* (2006), which he recorded while living in Ottawa. Although written and timed for a specific driving route through Gatineau Park, the final composition is a fluid, evocative work that stands on its own. Falling out of synch with the route does not necessarily compromise one’s experience of the work (indeed, the 5.1 surround-sound version will most likely be played on a living room sound system), and its gothic, psychoacoustic qualities are only enhanced by unpredictable factors, such as the sound of rain hitting the windows, condensation on the inside

of the glass, or the headlights of other cars. As a project, Hecker's work balances the mysterious, yet tangible landscape passing outside the vehicle's windows with cinematic vistas of one's own imagining. Sound artist and writer Brendan LaBelle once described this tension—the opening of acousmatic investigation to narrative context—as an invasion of “dreaming with the hard edge of actual environments.”*

Marla Hlady is a multidisciplinary artist best known for kinetic installations and sound sculptures in which she takes a conceptually rigorous, yet playful approach to theories of duration and sonic architecture. An admirer of John Cage and minimalists such as Terry Reilly, her work emphasizes and questions social constructs and conventions. Inspired by the spatio-temporal experience of night driving and the history of portable music, Hlady's *Nite Ride* project eschews recognizable, motivic musical composition, and is instead founded upon a series of experiments designed to challenge traditional modes of musical reception and production. Her project began with a recording of a drive around the Ottawa-Gatineau Region, during which she rolled down the car windows and played various albums from her collection. This recording was then sampled and turned into a set of semi-abstract loops—pockets of sounds in which aural phenomena such as wind, traffic, musical instruments, and birdsong

* Brendan LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 32.

emerge from a chaotic sonic background. These loops were then grafted into a series of portable “sound objects”—wooden boxes the size of an LP, finished with the high-gloss urethane of stringed instruments, and outfitted with handles like briefcases. Each box also contained a mercury switch enabling the user to manipulate the sound loop in a straightforward, albeit rudimentary way.

For the inaugural *Nite Ride* bus route, these boxes were distributed to the passengers, who experimented with them collectively. The numbers of, and chemistry between, people on the rides drastically altered each performance, taking it from a jagged orchestration of sounds and bodies in motion to a hypnotic repetition of loops jostling in a darkness studded with streetlights. People sometimes got out of their seats and physically played with the positioning of the boxes, working together to create an improvised work of sonic performance art. The final recording of the project was made later, when Hlady invited a group of artists to play with the sound objects specifically for this DVD. In order to preserve the non-intentional character of the work, this recording is accompanied by a set of driving instructions. One, an homage to Vito Acconci's famous *Following Piece* (1969), instructs the driver to simply follow another car until they reach their destination or the recording ends; the other asks the driver to follow the flow of traffic, drifting aimlessly until the end of the recording is reached.

Although Hecker and Hlady are working at different ends of the experimental sound/music spectrum, their work seems to share a common destination: a space somewhere between the real and invented, the material and the social, in which our perceptual habits are challenged by, and become receptive to, the unexpected. In his book *Noise/Music: A History* (2008), Paul Hegarty describes similar practices as testing “commonplace notions of hearing and listening” in an effort to destabilize our expectations. For him, and perhaps also those who participate in *Nite Ride*, the most interesting point of such encounters is “a loss of controlled listening,*” a kind of sonic dusk in which paying closer attention to what we hear paradoxically helps us drift away.

Emily Falvey, Co-Curator

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* Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 5.

