

# Heard and Misheard Notes

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How do we hear ourselves at first? As an endless singing-to-oneself, and in the dance. Both are still nameless. They have no life in themselves, and no one personally gave them form. Where one encounters them, they possess the appeal of every ordinary beginning. But one had to go through something else in order that expression be amply and securely equipped.<sup>1</sup>

Ernst Bloch

## Entries

*a home speaker, a barely there murmuring*

This page has a volume, albeit an infrathin one.<sup>2</sup> Barely audible, though immanently playable and amplifiable, therein the infrathinness of the page lies a heard volume. It is in the past now. The notes were played, they are presently elsewhere. Attempts to revisit *Volume: Hear Here* have to contend with this reduction. But to reduce also suggests to concentrate, and from it one can tentatively reconstitute. I shall not assume you were there then, but I shall also refrain from dwelling on the merely descriptive, favouring instead an elusive poetics that will let you heuristically meander through the exhibition's various registers (spatial, temporal, aural, conceptual)—an interpretation of what Geertz terms *thick* description.<sup>3</sup> From thin to thick. From page to igloo, geodesic dome, curved space with speakers as walls—a home for waves. A space inactive along with you, unless you decide to enter, and opt to play. A regressive or generative act? The basic cue given by a microphone in an exhibition space is *speak into me*. Or is the invite only heard or heeded by the exhibitionists? Perhaps the quandary solicited by this incitation, even if it is unanswered, is enough. In Alexis O'Hara's *SQUEEEQUE! The Improbable Igloo* a choir lies, at home, waiting to congregate, conjugate. Cacophony and melody acquaint—improvisation at the ready.

Whispers suggest appearance, they don't impose it; they are insidious insertions of in-betweens. In *Whisperfield*, Oswald recorded individuals describing their appearances in their native tongues, the resulting collective murmuring played back at background levels might be mistaken for the vocalizations produced by visitors inside Alexis O'Hara's speaker igloo. For instance, they could be thought to be the playback of past participants. The potential confusion is welcome. Whispers float in that blurry band of the aural periphery—words not quite discernable, not quite graspable, but there nonetheless. Due to their recorded form the whispers shift the liveness and all the attendant improbabilities of O'Hara's installation to a more defined and controlled mode of diffusion. The present passes even though the *sotto voce* might fool the ear. Not quite aloud, though the layers of whispers do aggregate to a semblance of a din, at least some kind of insistence is instilled.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford University Press, 2000 [1918]), 34-5.

<sup>2</sup> Duchamp's neologism originally appeared as two words, *infra mince* (infra thin). I opted to make it slimmer. More importantly, the two emblematic examples of the term Duchamp provides are: "the sound or music which corduroy trousers make when one moves" and "the hollow of the paper between the front and back of a thin sheet of paper." In *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 194. In "Some Remarks Concerning Marcel Duchamp," Alain Badiou theorizes: "The infra thin is the exercise of the critical point as a point of minimal discontinuity; the point of discontinuity from the same to the other same. The new productive and reproductive thought must pass by this point." Alain Badiou, "Some remarks concerning Marcel Duchamp," *The Symptom: Online Journal for Lacan.com*, accessed June 17, 2014, [http://www.lacan.com/symptom9\\_articles/badiou29.html](http://www.lacan.com/symptom9_articles/badiou29.html).

**Images 94-95; Track 3, side A**

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<sup>3</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1973]), 20: "So, there are three characteristics of ethnographic description: it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms."

## Heads

*a pair of feedback headphones, a cluster of deracinate devices, a tale for head and mind*

Amidst this dialogue between sets of voices, one hears another insistence, this time it is not verbal but tonal. Minute but piercing; something’s awry. The source is a pair of headphones on the back wall, Dave Dymen’s *Untitled (Headset)*. Put on the headphones to stop the feedback. The piece works when the headphones do not. “Your head gets in the way,” as the artist says; it unsounds it.<sup>4</sup> One ear no longer hears but speaks, this rewiring thus creates feedback when it nears the other ear. But is your head the way to the piece? The way to internalize the inputs and outputs, an exteriorized and amplified synaptic? Dymen claims that the silence resulting in putting on the headphones is a “blunt metaphor for the inability to understand infinity.”<sup>5</sup> Or, by adding the (de)activating head of the listener to the equation: we interrupt eternity with our mortality. Or, it’s a (failed) attempt at the comprehension of the eternal return by way of a sonic and ouroboric contraption.

Dymen’s *Nothing (for Robert Barry)* accompanies the above with another type of thwarting.

A range of ultrasonic pest control devices populate a power bar seemingly there for a utilitarian purpose. But this is not intended for us, or at least the emissions bypass us, we have immunity. Whether they succeed in their function as reverse Pied Piper machines is debatable (they are notoriously ineffectual), but their import to our ears is that they delimit our hearing range. Inaudibility is species-specific, this address targets non-human listeners. A perceptual challenge; an art form not intended for us. Unlike Laurie Anderson’s *Music for Dogs*,<sup>6</sup> here the instruments are more insidious, nevertheless they emit and they point to a xenophilic drive via a xenosonics.<sup>7</sup> The art of the electromagnetic spectrum goes beyond the thin sliver that corresponds to the audible frequencies.<sup>8</sup> The linguist C.K. Ogden asserted that in the same way that “we cannot be more dead than dead, [...] there is no anti-volume, opposed to volume and *beyond* one-volume, no anti-mobility *beyond* rest, no anti-light *beyond* darkness, no anti-sonority *beyond* silence.”<sup>9</sup> A list of terms that denote limits and include their own antithesis. A surfeit of *beyond*, yet all negated. Consider if the oppositions were removed—*beyond* the audible, to a wider spectrum.

Nauman’s Room/Mind duel aggressively staged in his 1968 sound installation *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room* shifts to a Head/Mind binary in Charles Stankieveh’s *Get Out of My Head, Get Out of My Mind* (2008). Has the room been swallowed by the head in this revision? “Where is my mind?,” Charles channels the Pixies, and perhaps ELO’s or Kylie Minogue’s “I can’t get you out of my head.” The wireless headphones sit on a shelf, they can be donned or just eavesdropped. The volume here is layered by the solipsistic loops of the content and its vehicle. The artist states that it “denies architecture and explores the unique relation between virtual space and psychotopology.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the room has been excised (twice, Nauman’s and the Blackwood Gallery’s), but the construction is now between the ears, immersed in a solitary exercise of soliloquized listening (another doubling). Headphones, unless they are integral to the work (which is the case in the aforementioned works), should be a curatorial or artistic

choice of last resort. Headphones may be practical but they reinforce the pretense that a work has a non-porous integrity that must be maintained when it is presented. Exhibition conditions are vexed circumstances, the public inadvertently bumps into things, or they intentionally steal (which happened during this exhibition), or they miss the point, or they quite generously offer a reading not foretold by either the artist or the curator—in other words, an exhibition is always partial because a) a space is heterotopic and b) reception is beyond our control. These two conditions resound with intensity via the anaphoric *Get Out*.

## Theories

*an act of sounding, a performative volumen, a somatized volumizer*

From the utterance stems the establishment of the category of the present, and from the category of the present is born the category of time. The present is precisely the source of time. It is that presence in the world that only the speech act makes possible, since (if we reflect on this) man has no other way of living “now” at his disposition besides the possibility to realize it through the insertion of discourse in the world.<sup>11</sup>

*Volume: Hear Here* is conceived around the vexed question of presence in its entwine with absence—the *da* of *dasein*. An ontological discussion considered through the tenuous objecthood, but resolute materiality of sonic phenomena. Benveniste’s epigraph gives primacy to the *speech act*, what if we supplanted it with the *sound act*? If the speech act is the condition of possibility for presence, how does the sound act function in relation to the original’s privileging of discourse as an ontological determinant? The event of language taking place in time replaced by sound as infiltrator, enveloper, occupier of both time and space. Perhaps this is a moment akin to Tony Smith’s famed conclusion following his experience of driving on an unfinished and unmarked portion of the New Jersey Turnpike: “There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.”<sup>12</sup> The incompleteness, which is a corollary of the decision to dwell on unframed experience, is what Michael Fried in “Art of Objecthood” so vehemently resisted and is the condition of possibility of this exhibition project; its curatorial DNA if you will. Returning to Benveniste, the other bias his statement foregrounds is the role discourse performs as a framing function.

There is a desire in the works assembled in this curatorial project, however temporary and fraught the exercise of this desire might be (and certainly ascribing desire to an artwork is), to go *beyond* meaning, *beyond* interpretation. Why this need to seemingly bypass the straight path to knowledge? Hans-Georg Gadamer spoke that while a poem is able to convey a “meaning intention,” simultaneously a “truth lies in its performance.”<sup>13</sup> Serendipitously, he dubbed this dimension *volumen*. Following Gadamer’s notion, the volumes at play here are not measurable or quantifiable, they are *sung* by the artists

<sup>9</sup> C. K. Ogden, *Opposition: A Linguistic and Psychological Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 46-7. Emphasis added. He precedes the quote with: “Abstract and generic terms, which have an infinity of dynamic oppositions, are opposed by their negations but have no negative qualities which are their own image reversed.” And he follows the main quote with: “Volume or extension is a general quality of figures which are symmetrically opposable.”

<sup>10</sup> Charles Stankieveh in this volume, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Émile Benveniste in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 36.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Smith in Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 131.

<sup>13</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Dave Dymen in this volume, 174.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Laurie Anderson, *Music for Dogs*, premiered outside the Sydney Opera House, June 5, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Maharaj, “Xeno-Epistemics: Makeshift Kit for Sounding Visual Art as Knowledge Production and the Retinal Regimes,” Documenta 11 Catalogue (Hatje Cantz, 2002), 73 and 76.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Kahn’s recent book, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (University of California Press, 2013) hinges on aesthetic approaches that are tuned to electromagnetic phenomena expanded from the merely audiovisual.

<sup>14</sup> Gumbrecht, 107. “[I]n addition to the dimension that can and must be redeemed through interpretation, poems have a ‘volume’—a dimension, that is, that demands our voice, that needs to be ‘sung.’”

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Buren, “Function of the Museum” in *Museums by Artists*, ed. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 59.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Morris, “The Present Tense of Space” in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (New York: October Books, 1995), 197.

<sup>17</sup> Sarat Maharaj, 76. I want to thank Christine Shaw for pointing me to this revelatory essay in early 2014, not only is it pertinent to this project but in it Maharaj deploys the term *sonic somatic*, and my prior ignorance of his usage in light of my 2012 book (and 2007 PhD dissertation) titled *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, ensured that I was thereby not burdened (or paralyzed) by this knowledge. That being said, the quandary that prior knowledge would have caused would have surely been offset by the abundant usefulness of his essay to that previous writing project.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

#### Image 107

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “The Inaudible. Music and Postmodernity” in *Miscellaneous Texts I. Aesthetics and Theory of Art*, ed. Herman Parret, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 209.

and mixed by the curator.<sup>14</sup> The desire I attribute to the works to go beyond meaning and interpretation is an unabashed curatorial imposition. They each have their own volume, and as curator, I just temporarily have my hands on the dials. Or more precisely there are more than one set of dials by which to listen to each of the works.

In a gallery context, which Daniel Buren said “flattens”<sup>15</sup> the artwork and which Robert Morris describes as “antispacial or nonspatial,”<sup>16</sup> the fixity and rigidity of the gallery (non)space is interrupted by a playful sound(song)track. This is not to assert that all the works presented here sing by producing actual sound, but certainly in an expanded sense, they can all be heard. And certainly hearing is the interpellated sense in this visual art context. But it is by no means a hearing conducted only cochlearly; as Sarat Maharaj asserts, “sound is a volumizer. It stacks up spatial blocks around the image, amplifying the feel of architectural-somatic expanse.”<sup>17</sup> Evidently, a relationship to the visual is articulated here, one of interdependency, or even one which comes to the aid of the retinal in order to impede that input from being the sole arbiter. However, the move would be trite if its endgame was merely to invert the sensorial hierarchy. Maharaj appears to lean in this direction when he thereafter writes: “sound is a corrective blast against retinal surfeit, it’s a deretinalizing force.”<sup>18</sup> But the strident tone is temporary. What he ultimately advances is a notion of *xeno-sonics*, or a “noise as an overall, feral, unknown possibility.”<sup>19</sup> This kind of unbound unsound is akin to Lyotard’s prescript that “the task of the artist is to let the sound perform an act that seems to exceed the audible, and to record the trace of it in the space-time-sound that determines the field of the audible.”<sup>20</sup> The *beyond* returns and is reintroduced within the realm of discern-able materiality once it is instrumentalized with a test function. But again, such a reduction can operate generatively: a play of dynamic tensions between the conceptual (inaudible) and the tangible (audible) staged through a body not only with opened ears but also one committed to mishearings and unhearings. Lyotard’s hyphenated entity of the *thought-body* suits the task at hand: “the defining paradox of art consists in giving to this thought-body a perceptibility as a sensible and moving arrangement, certainly, but one that also suggests the ‘presence’ in it of an act that exceeds the capacity of this thought-body.”<sup>21</sup>

### Dances

#### *a joyous choreography, a cycle of subtle static rings*

The quintessential love song of a generation torn apart. The registers are torn asunder, gesture of love, memory triggers, a song moving in space. Ian Skedd’s laborious title, *Sign Singing: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division, 1979, Deaf Choir, 2009* indexes simultaneously the source, the method, the performer, and the three-decade gap. The video stages Ian Curtis’s sombre vocal delivery transmuted into a collective celebration imbued with deference, muted save for the minimal robes swaying along with the hand and arm gestures and the reverberant church room tone—a prime instantiation of Fred Moten’s notion of *phonochoreography*.<sup>22</sup> The camera pans to the organ during the instrumental section of the

song that we cannot hear. The pipes play nonetheless, they are activated by the camera pan. The camera listens. Beside the choir is another choir (but one even less literal than the last) and another dance, a dance of electrons. They share the Blackwood’s smaller gallery space, the e|gallery (name intended to allude to all things electronic). Darsha Hewitt’s installation posits that static is not static, but a subtle kinetic trigger in the form of an electrostatic charge harnessed to activate an array of bells. The components and the reaction chain are decidedly pre-digital: an inventive bricolage of obsolete technologies. Contextualized by an often clamorous atrium adjacent to the exhibition space, the sporadic freneticism of the ringing bells mirror or mimic the neighbouring activity. The periodic discharge of accumulated energy causing the bells to sound is hopefully echoed in the multitudinous synaptic firings occurring throughout this learning institution. If not, the bells will have to sound the alarm.

### Breaths

#### *a paper bag breath, a cryptic monster music video, a tale of acoustic architecture, a song unsung*

A breath is donated into a bag, and not by just anyone, by Pauline Oliveros’s lungs; the composer reverses the airflow of her instrument of predilection, the accordion. Once the paper bag is filled, it is breathed mechanically by Lozano-Hemmer’s apparatus. The automaton lung hangs in the gallery space, somewhat alien and clinical though retaining an anthropomorphic semblance. A breath manifests the *I* at its most present and bodily, but desubjectivized. Returning to Morris, he establishes a distinction to his model of *presentness* between a “real-time ‘I’ and a reconstituting ‘me.’”<sup>23</sup> The latter is predicated on a *re-*, a second-order, a trace of the precedent. The recurrent cleavage between the moment and its passing, the present and its absence, the immediate and its mediation, the I and its other, animates a profusion of theoretical debates from a plethora of philosophical traditions. How does sound inform or deform this discussion? Can an exhibition, focused on sound and foregrounding its play at display, propel the question to a position heretofore unheard? To synchronously stage here and un-here, to place and dis-place, to orient and dis-orient, constitute the modus operandi of a practice (curatorial, artistic, and beyond) constantly negotiating paradigms, polemics, and paradoxes. The confluences and contradictions amongst those three axes produce the rhythmic agents that animate discourse as well as the beyond-discourse, the remainder.<sup>24</sup> *The Last Breath* may be expertly constructed and statistically averaged to render the breaths of a typical adult over the span of a day, but it also produces a poetics of fragility, a pump dutifully moving its parts while life-breath hangs by a filigree of conduits.

A white crowbar plugged into aleatory digital processes accompanies a voice in a ritualistic performance. The whole produces sounds both alien and animal. It is hermetic; it is teratological. Then the video shifts to Alexandre St-Onge licking a toilet bowl captured in grainy footage—desublimation in action. The video displayed almost at floor level is lined with the paper bag breath across the corridor—orificial alignment. North and south winds meet at the equator. Confronted by the somatic, even when

#### Images 61-62; Track 6, side B

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “The Inaudible. Music and Postmodernity” in *Miscellaneous Texts I. Aesthetics and Theory of Art*, ed. Herman Parret, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 209.

<sup>21</sup> Lyotard, 213.

<sup>22</sup> Fred Moten, *B Jenkins*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 102.

#### Images 27-29; Track 1, side B

<sup>23</sup> Morris, 77-78. Morris borrows this concept from George Herbert Mead.

<sup>24</sup> The remainder is discussed under various names and through a variety of configurations. One salient reference in literary theory, though perhaps not well known, is Jean-Jacques Lecerclé, *The Violence of Language* (New York: Routledge, 1990). One can liken the remainder in language to noise in sound.

#### Images 37-38; Track 3, side B

<sup>25</sup> Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 22. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>27</sup> Georges Perec, *L'infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 12. Emphasis added. Translation mine. “Perhaps we should start our own anthropology: one which will speak about us, which will seek in us what we’ve sought so long in others. No longer the exotic, but the endotic.”

<sup>28</sup> Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 107 and passim.

**Images 45-46; Track 2, side B**

**Images 50-51**

flattened by the screen, can cause a recoil. Understandably, understanding may be hindered by what may resemble a puerile shock tactic. However, the work can be accessed and appreciated if one changes the tuning to the visceral instead of the rational. In Bataille’s speculation, in the animal world “nothing is posited beyond the present.”<sup>25</sup> The linearity of the rational cannot function on a point, it thirsts for a line, whereas the visceral thrives as the undertow of the circular, spherical, lenticular domains. These are the realms working in consort with the unknowable and they provide complexity to the present:

The animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me. In a sense I know this depth: it is my own. It is also that which is farthest removed from me, that which deserves the name depth, which means precisely *that which is unfathomable to me*. But this too is poetry . . .<sup>26</sup>

The scenes in St-Onge’s video seem to emerge out of such a poetic present; it is as if we were witnesses to mere glimpses of still ongoing hermetic rituals; they depict perplexing actions perhaps but ultimately ones steadfastly *endotic* as opposed to exotic—the animal is our *bruit de fond*.<sup>27</sup>

According to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht there is “a tension or oscillation between a meaning culture and a presence culture” where the former overwhelms or silences the latter.<sup>28</sup> *Hear Here* (a sonic progeny of *différance*<sup>29</sup>) attempts to stay stuck in its presence mode, and sound may be the apt sensorial mode for such wanton disregard for an interpretable product. Or a stuck mode not so dismissive of paths yet to come, just content to temporarily stall, a kind of neutral disengagement which is “attentive and not arrogant.”<sup>30</sup> Press pause, stop right in the middle of that “indivisible point of the present.”<sup>31</sup> Sound in this mode does not construct a time, it foregoes memory, it forestalls recording. Even if it did record, it is as if the play button acquired an amnesiac function where it simultaneously erases. However tempting this line of argument, which appears to privilege presentness, may be, it is chimerical. But this trap is instructive for it is where the recurrent paradoxical twinned *desire for and dismissal of* presence (material, body) paired with *distrust of and dependence on* meaning (logos, reason) find their stage. One such instance, albeit a contorted one is Pivato’s *Yesterday Wants More*. Once a day, every day of the exhibit, the Carpenters’ song is sung by the artist. *Those old melodies / Still sound so good to me / As they melt the years away*. The contortion is that the song is unsung, it’s sung backwards, *yawa sraey eht tlem yeht sa / em ot doog os dnuos llits / seidolem dlo esoht*. An attempt to get to yesterday by going backwards; temporality in space. A Sisyphean gesture repeated every day of the exhibition. Attempt to enact an ontological asynchrony.

Another daily occurrence was David Lieberman’s “performance *performity performativity* performance”. The title’s repetitive variations on *perform* and the deliberate formatting jumble speaks to the work’s anomalous presence in this already heterogeneous curatorial mix. For the piece is inherently self-reflexive, indeed it is a poetic and theoretical essay presented in the hybrid mode of a pedagogue raconteur. While the neologism *performity* might perplex the attentive reader, the performed text discusses the term as used to describe “space as an active participant in both the production and engagement of its

use.”<sup>32</sup> He later adds “performity is intended to address architectural space *beyond* its material physicality and to embrace its emotive character.”<sup>33</sup> I read that as yet another entry point for a *poesis*. An analogue of this can be found in Lacoue-Labarthe’s discussion of Mallarmé contra Wagner where the *archi-theatrical* and the *archi-musical* are advanced to describe “Volume as a rhythmic *organon*.”<sup>34</sup> Space rhymed; time punctuated by the appearance of the musician architect and his talismanic array, including a “sketchbook filled only with sounds.”<sup>35</sup>

## Expanses

*a turning bass floor, a box of hearing aids of the ocean, a patient sweeping*

For Mallarmé, the titled word *Volume* appears in the following to function as a utopic merging place: “I believe that literature, taken up at its source, which is Art and Science, will furnish us a Theater, whose performance will be true modern worship; a Volume, explanation of man, sufficient to our most beautiful dreams.”<sup>36</sup> *Basement Bass* is a repurposed theatre stage fitted in such a way that the visitor must walk on it in order to go from one end of the gallery to the other. The visitor is thereby momentarily on Marla Hlady’s stage, unwittingly performing. The single upstep and bare stage might at first imply some sort of non-performance, but as the title suggests, there is a downward thrust at work here—lower frequencies, lower architecture. This is non-theatrical Theatre, bass and base.<sup>37</sup> First, the floor functions as a speaker thanks to a surface transducer that uses the material of the floor to disseminate the recorded sounds. This favours the bass, resulting in a floor woofer that induces a somatized listening, especially if one surrenders to the downward pull and opts to sit or lie down on the butt-kicking floor<sup>38</sup>—the bones hear, the viscera vibrates. Second, the recording is of the sub-basement of the building (Hart House) where the gallery is located. The architecture, *archi-music, archi-sound*, of the site is sampled and encapsulated and rendered as a bass track. Further, it is figuratively grooved for the stage floor slowly rotates (this type of floor is called a *revolve* in theatre parlance). It resembles an oversized turntable, enabling those on it to move about the space while staying still; they are languidly spun by the work.

Nearby, at the other end of the frequency spectrum lies the small mirrored box with the piercing high end of John Wynne’s hearing aids. The feedback is necessarily produced live, it is of the present—a befitting property for a piece which is in memoriam of the artist’s father (the original user of the hearing aids). Accompanying the sound and object elements of this small installation is a video projection of waves far from shore, in the expanse of the ocean. The smallness of the box and its aids (tiny) and the smallness of the high frequency waves (tinny) contrast with that captivating immensity. Continuing to add to the full-frequency sonic mix of the works that occupy that side of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery is *sweeper* by crys cole. Another video, another expanse: a large empty warehouse space methodically crisscrossed by the artist as she sweeps the room. The sweeping is framed in such a way that it plays with the distance of the figure within the enormous room in contradistinction with the proximate sounds

<sup>29</sup> The homophonic play shared between the exhibition subtitle and Derrida’s *différance* manifests a connection at the surface-level; a more extensive study would delve further into the theoretical links as they pertain to the issues at play here between presence and meaning and the related metaphysical and logocentric processes addressed by Derrida. Interestingly, from a curatorial perspective, David B. Allison, the translator of *La Voix et le phénomène* (where *différance* first appeared), points to the dual spatial (*différence*, differentiate) and temporal (*différer*, deferral) aspects of Derrida’s term. See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: and other essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 82 fn. 8.

**Images 18-19; Track 5, side A**

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 83.

<sup>31</sup> Vico in Barthes, 83.

<sup>32</sup> David Lieberman, script for the spoken word performance titled “performance *performity performativity* performance,” unpublished.

**Images 78-79; Track 5, side B**

<sup>33</sup> Lieberman. Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford University Press, 1994), 77.

**Images 92-93; Track 8, side A**

<sup>35</sup> See list in this volume, 175.

<sup>36</sup> Mallarmé in Lacoue-Labarthe, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe, 71: “The Theater is literature itself, Volume or Poem . . . If you prefer, the Theater, in its truth, is not theatrical”; and 76: “Volume is not, in essence, theatrical. It is rather *archi-theater*, and origin of representation.”

<sup>38</sup> The brand name for the low frequency audio transducer used by Hlady is ButtKicker.

<sup>39</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 2*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2008 [1961]), 45.

<sup>40</sup> Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier, “Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities” in Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 2004), 95.

#### Images 21-22

<sup>41</sup> H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing In Books* (Yale University Press, 2001), 264. The recent but instant classic case of artistic project with marginalia is Nick Thurston’s *Reading the Remove of Literature* (York, England: Information as Material, 2006) where the author kept only the marginal notes and underlines he had written in Maurice Blanchot’s *The Space of Literature* and removed the commented text but kept the layout and pagination.

#### Images 34-36

<sup>42</sup> John Cage, “Lecture on Nothing” in *Silence*, 109.

produced thanks to a wireless contact mic ensconced in the bristles of the broom. The discrepant soundtrack vis-à-vis the static wide shot enables the repeated minimal gesture to go beyond its acknowledged banality: “the repetitive part, in the mechanical sense of the term, and the creative part of the everyday become embroiled in a permanently reactivated circuit.”<sup>39</sup> For Henri Lefebvre, this informs a critical stance, and certainly issues of labour and gender are not swept away here, but can implicitly be read through the lower-case titled work by the artist with the lowercase name. A variant formulation, from a collaborative text by Lefebvre with Catherine Régulier, foregrounds another important aspect of this piece, its soma-space-rhythm:

In and around the body, the distinction between two sorts of rhythm is found as far as in movements [*gestes*] [...]: from the everyday (the way one eats and sleeps) to the extra-everyday (the way one dances, sings, makes music, etc.). The extra-everyday rhythms the everyday and vice versa.<sup>40</sup>

The empty space is swept with an accent on the *extra*, it is an additive sweep. In other words, the space is swept dirty—sonically at least.

### Marks

*a graphitic silence, a tarred instrument and a wall in the middle of nowhere, drawings of the here and now, moiré pattern compositions, a bookwork tracking sonic movement*

The marginalia of a book constitute a reader’s engagement in dialogue with a text and its author, it is a supplemental authorship, a gesture of *philia* that is both “responsive” and technically “unauthorized.”<sup>41</sup> With Ryan Park’s graphitic obliteration of John Cage’s book *Silence* we witness marginalia run rampant, an absolute noisification of silence attesting to the overabundance of commentary that this iconic book has generated since its first printing in 1961 (culling texts written from 1939 onwards). Park’s bookwork can also be read as a silencing of silence, a uniform undoing of language such that the now illegible words on silence are silent to the reader. Cage relished in contradictory propositions that mimic such apparent dichotomous readings, for example: “What we require is silence, but what silence requires is that I go on talking.”<sup>42</sup> In an extensive study, “John Cage: Silence and Silencing,” Douglas Kahn mounts a virulent critique of Cage, the gist of which is in the following: “he did not incorporate the social, or the ecological for that matter, into the immediate materiality of sounds, but only simulated their compass and complexity through undifferentiated totalization.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the composer functions as the architect of all sound, enfolding it within the rubric of music despite an ethos of radical openness which proves to be merely rhetorical. Neil Klassen’s tandem *Requiem and Ruin #1* and *Requiem and Ruin #2* touches on one of the underlying arguments in Kahn, that of “human centeredness” in relation to ecological concerns.<sup>44</sup> Tar silences a trumpet and a cinder block wall sits in a forest. The *Ruin* could refer to the biblical story of the blowing of the trumpets enabling the crumbling of the walls of Jericho,

but more generally (and contemporarily) the sculpture and the photograph stage statements of negation, they instill an arrest—etymologically *requiem* is related to *rest*. The idle mode is pertinent to the issue of presence we have been tracking throughout, and it implies a definition of time like Heidegger’s: “time itself, in the wholeness of its nature, does not move; it rests in stillness.”<sup>45</sup>

Drawing is a practice of arrested gestures, stilled movements, spent time occupying flat space. With the added parameter of sound, music, and composition, drawing acquires extra-dimensionality. David Merritt approaches this conjoining in the two large-scale drawings by using key words germane to this curatorial project, *here* and *now*. These operate as ciphers, which guide the viewer through an audiovisual *parkour* throughout the page—an obstacle course of interweaving lines tracing the formation of syntax particular to song lyrics. These drawings sound because “as soon as these words are read as song titles, they cease to be silent.”<sup>46</sup> The memory jukebox automatically responds once a lyrical thread is recognized. The convoluted array is organic, like memory, remembering provenances but not always conclusively, a kind of practice that “echolocates rather than actuates possibility.”<sup>47</sup> Hence, there is a haze in these dissections; they seem to emerge out of the infrathinness of the paper that is the depth of language. A depth denoted by language’s infinite iterability, and manifested here not only in the work itself but in its titling. The untitling leaves the door open, defined only by the endlessly recombinant workings of words. The bracketed appendages, (*here*) and (*now*), momentarily specify the key by which we will be able to enter the door that has no lock. In other words, there is a contingent selection made.

With *In Every Direction*, the selection effuses both randomness and discernment—idiosyncrasy inserted in the encyclopedic impulse. The poetics of tables, lists, and schematics structured as inconclusive evidence—evident strictly of research, process, investigation, not of teleological aspirations. A bookwork that has a left to right, a beginning to end, but no end to begin with, and no right to end up with. Sylvia Matas would probably concord with Daniella Cascella’s provisional proposition: “I think of writing as *the other side* of sound. Instead of looking for answers it echoes questions with questions, riddles with riddles, it adds complexity to complexity. Writing sound traces the shifting in the tuning of my words, of my questions, of sounds drifting.”<sup>48</sup> A bookwork splayed end to end on a single wall, contained and conventionally readable but also going past both of its delimiting corners, as if the line of pages continued every which way, like the multitude of arrows contained therein. Similarly, Chiyoko Szlavniks’ drawings drift. They wander in such a way that perception is destabilized and challenged. These works are “perpetual essays” and are “always at work.”<sup>49</sup> The moiré patterns oscillate vision while transfixing the viewer—the back and forth it engenders works at a micro-level, minimal movement or even just a tilt of the head best reveals the pulsation. The three-dimensionality thereby induced parallels Szlavniks’ sentiment regarding her durational compositions: “A stillness enters the music, allowing listeners to notice things, to think, and to reflect. That’s part of what space in music means for me—that space of listening.”<sup>50</sup> Arranged on the wall in such a way to evoke a waveform, a sound wave on the wall, further forwards the peculiar spatiality of listening instilled by the three drawings—a quieting replete with infra interferences, a noisy quietude.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Kahn, “John Cage: Silence and Silencing,” *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 4, Winter 1997, 556-598, 589.

#### Images 88-89

<sup>44</sup> Kahn, 587.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger in Daniel Charles, “De-Linearizing Musical Continuity: John Cage’s Aesthetics of ‘Interpenetration Without Obstruction,’” *Musicworks*, No. 52, Spring 1992, 19-23, 23.

<sup>46</sup> David Poolman, “Silence / Debris / Duration,” *David Merritt: shim/sham/shimmy* (London, Ontario: Museum London, 2010), 23.

<sup>47</sup> Carl Wilson, “The Music of Not Listening,” *David Merritt: shim/sham/shimmy*, 52.

#### Image 6

<sup>48</sup> Daniella Cascella, *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2012), 73.

#### Images 40-41

<sup>49</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Sur le pli* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2013), 12. Translation mine. In the context of this book, the phrases are more about heuristic strategy and open interpretation as opposed to perceptual play, but I do not think that the latter precludes the former.

<sup>50</sup> Chiyoko Szlavnic in Julian Cowley, “Chiyoko Szlavnic: Draws the Ear Towards Infinity,” *Musicworks*, No. 119, Summer 2014, 38-45, 44.

**Image 69; Track 1, side A**

<sup>51</sup> Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards A Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (London, UK: Continuum, 2009), 100.

<sup>52</sup> Steven Connor, “Photophonics,” text of lecture given at the Audiovisuality conference, University of Aarhus, May 27, 2011, 15, accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/photophonics/photophonics.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Derrida in Rosalind Krauss, “The Blink of an Eye,” *The States of “Theory”: History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 177.

<sup>54</sup> Mladen Dolar, “The Burrow of Sound,” *Differences*, Vol. 22 (2011): 112-139, 122.

<sup>55</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Instants poétique et métaphysique,” in *L’Intuition de l’instant* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1992 [1939]), 103-105. Translation mine. Interestingly, Bachelard characterizes this poetic instant as being *androgynous*. To intersect this moment with the recent book by Tara Rodgers might lead to generative results (Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)).

<sup>56</sup> Bachelard, 104.

## Tracks

### *a skull turntable, a voluminous conclusion*

The actualization of Rilke’s fantasy by Mitchell Akiyama, according to Seth Kim-Cohen, is a fruitless exercise: “to drop a phonographic needle into the suture’s groove is meaningless. As sound it no longer maintains any connections to the conditions that produced it. As sound, it is contextless data, pure noise.”<sup>51</sup> Steven Connor further amplifies the critique: “sonification prolongs a mystical sound-obscurantism that gives sound studies much of its impetus while yet also enfeebling it intellectually.”<sup>52</sup>

The work however, especially how it is titled (*Ur-sound, or, the noise no writing can store*) and how it was installed, is clearly a referential work. It has no pretense to *actualize* Rilke’s romantic notion of a skull-score unearthing the ur-sound, it merely performs the technique Rilke proposed. Transpositions of this sort, especially from a literary source, are by no means an unusual artistic practice. The piece presents the sonic results, and indeed they are noise, but not pure, far from it. The prominent literary reference provided ensures the contrary. Plus, I would argue against the necessity of the didactic apparatus; in other words, even without it, the sound work would nevertheless retain (however opaquely) its citationality. One could even argue that the audio work deflates the mystic aspirations in Rilke’s quest, for after all, what we hear is materiality at its degree zero, needle against skull, nothing more. No point of origin, just a reference, and that is *in* the material—what we also hear is the page and its words, as now record and sound. Nothing more, just a closed groove on a record, on continuous play mode, a playback mode that brings it forward: “for the ideality of the form of presence itself implies that it be infinitely re-peatable, that its re-turn, as a return of the same, is necessary *ad infinitum* and is inscribed in presence itself.”<sup>53</sup> So there is a kind of doubling at work here, or “an excessive presence, a presence too much,” a complex equation composed of perpetually accumulating derivatives.<sup>54</sup> The whole enterprise, from concept to form, behaves like an obstinate obstreperous machine.

Gaston Bachelard says that the poetic instant occurs on a “vertical” axis of time, correspondingly we might say that the sound art object performs a peculiar song whose duration does not flow, rather it is sudden and discontinuous.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the collective song played by the disparate chorus of assembled artworks, is resolutely abrupt, staccato, improvised. As part of the manifestation of this instant, Bachelard includes the “harmonious relation of two opposites,” which creates a “dynamic, excited, and active ambivalence.”<sup>56</sup> So, the instant is by no means simple or singular, it is vexed. Similarly vexed, the reluctance of the artist, the curator, the writer to be pegged to sound (as an art form, as a discipline, as a sense) in an exclusionary mode, as per Jean-Luc Nancy’s caveat that “nothing can be said about sound that is not also valid *for* the other registers and *against* them, [. . . they are] in an inextricable complementarity and incompatibility one from the other.”<sup>57</sup>

Each work in *Volume* functioned as a stage, in some cases literally, in others metaphorically or conceptually. The concomitant reception (*hear*) and presence (*here*) required volume to act, to activate

and be activated—the feedback of poetics. Each stage (t)here was present(ed) as the ground zero for a sound event. But as alluded earlier, the sound event may not produce actual sound, it may only reference it. In either mode, the possibility of *resonance* arises. Martin Seel characterizes resonance as “an occurrence without something occurring” and as such it enables a “forming beyond the formation of forms.”<sup>58</sup> For resonance to occur and provisionally materialize, an a priori condition must be met. A constant, a base state is required. The formless forms, including silence (sound’s rhythmic foil), emerge out of a plural or hyphenated space, a space beyond space, a performative space. A voiced space, a sung space, in other words, a *volumen*—a Volume heard, a volume misheard.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy in Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012), 176. Translation mine. English original in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. John Farrell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 143 and 152. Seel makes a distinction between *mere* resonating and artistic resonating that I am glossing over here.