

the line of History, but mere lines traversing, intersecting, crossing, knotting space. Time here is *volumed*. A language without time is one that has incurred a paradigmatic assassination. It straggles aimless, barely able to put one word in front of another.

1.3 PROVISIONAL PLACE AND SPEECH

Speaking in the state described above is at best provisional. David Merritt's work with twigs presents a vulnerable, fragile language that is less installed than stalled, its immobility is liminal, its arborescence fractured by the rhizomatic. Twigs barely held by pins, barely suggesting words, barely holding in place, or holding on to place. Merritt has found the ellipsis in the ellipse, and what better manner to concretize that acentered interior of language which refers to something outside of itself. Something unpinnable is evoked in this murmuring, something echoing Jean Lescure's remarkable formulation that "unknowing is not ignorance but the difficult act of going beyond knowledge."²⁰ In Merritt's spatial depiction, language is tentative and frail, yet nonetheless obstinate – it remains, it litters and lingers. Merritt's work performs a dismantlement. Tenuous form here flirts with formlessness, in the work *glot'l* (not pictured) the twig-words are gently thrust down the throat into the opening at the center of the larynx, the organ of the voice, where muscled air forms speech. This "interference with a moving body of air"²¹ which describes the somatic production of speech can be easily transposed to the kind of voicing we heard in Lucier's *speech-room* and to any space one enters in hearing, any space heard. This kind of lowercase implosion within a confined space is a recurring condition (of which I will be outlining just a few examples here), and could be said to be the condition of possibility of unsound art.

²⁰ Jean Lescure in Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 1957, 15. Translation mine. Original: *Le non-savoir n'est pas une ignorance mais un acte difficile de dépassement de la connaissance*.

²¹ A paraphrase in an unpublished essay by David Merritt, of Francis Katamba from *An Introduction to Phonology*, San Francisco: Addison Wesley, 1989.



fig. 35

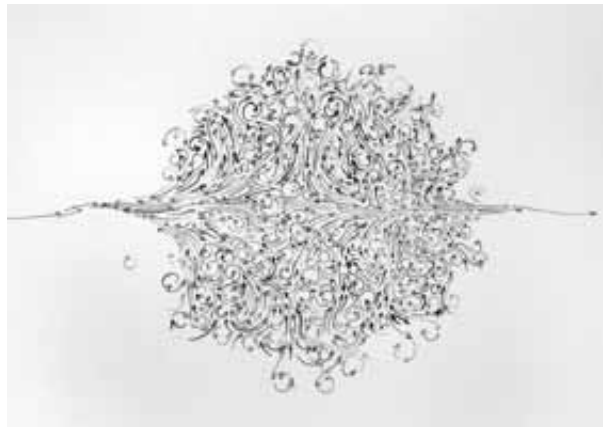


fig. 36

fig. 35 David Merritt, *moritat* (detail), 1995. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 36 Marla Hlady, *Proposition for tracing a conversation No.5*, 2005.
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Bradley Art & Projects.

A confined space could also be said to be the prime characteristic of the area of play created by a conversation. Toronto-based sound artist, Marla Hlady's impressionistic drawing (from a series focusing on conversations) renders in a delicate and detailed manner the swirls of our words and phrases as they navigate between the mouths and set of ears at play. The twirly arrows cluster and then escape (or attempt to), we can imagine them to be an amalgam of words, phrases, and perhaps even intentions, double-entendres, surreptitious games, snide asides, etc. The ephemerality of discourse is maintained by the contingent quality of the amassed strokes, they flurry and scatter in directionless directions, they come back on their word, they suggest rather than delineate. In order to explore this further, let us examine an installation by Samuel Roy-Bois where conversation is forestalled. With Roy-Bois language is not *volumed* along the gallery walls but is housed. In *I heard a noise, I ran away* the only sound we hear is in the title. While we are free to take the hint at a narrative and imagine an actual incident, let us consider this title as a description of one's self-hearing (the aforementioned work by Hlady could be reconsidered in this light as well). José Gil states that: "In the soliloquy of 'hearing oneself speak,' subjectivity, not coming out of itself, discovers the presence of the object."²² Then he reflects that "the subject hears itself as mediated by the body, and it is in the *infinitesimal interval* separating the speaking and hearing subjects that this object places itself."²³ We can thus posit the volume Roy-Bois proposes in this installation as a manifestation of the objecthood which emerges out of that separation. In other words, we are in our bodies as both subject and object. This is not a Cartesian split, this is a transmission circuit, we are both transmitter and receiver, we are in the space of the relation. We are singular plural. We are not self-contained, the foreign element is introduced by this very circuitry and expands infinitely outward. The installation is in affinity with Bachelard's notion that "vastness is an intimate dimension."²⁴ It is a space we no longer just face, but one

²² José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, trans. Stephen Muecke, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 190. Emphasis added.

²³ Gil, 191.

²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1957, 177. Translation mine. Original: *l'immensité est une dimension intime*.

where we are thrust inside, inside the *infinitesimal interval*. In other words, it is a volume which *takes place*. Taking place, which in this instance is the running in place of the speaker upon hearing its own noise – *I heard a noise and I ran*. In the installation you enter the room and every surface of the room is in conversation with the outside, the room is a sieve, holes have been manually poked through its walls, floor and ceiling, the resulting pores are breathing in light. Such a space performs, it performs “the placing in movement of the place” as discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman regarding Parmeggiani’s *Delocazione*.²⁵ Thus the *infinitesimal interval* is the movement whereby place can no longer be accurately determined. And whereby movement in place becomes the mechanism by which hearing enables a self to come into presence.

I heard a noise, I ran away does not tell us whether the running escape was successful, or even possible. Concerning self-hearing, as Jean-Luc Nancy explicates “a self is nothing else than a form or function of a return: a self is constituted by a relation *to self*, or by a presence *to self*.”²⁶ So the subject can only place a claim on itself through this reflexive act. What might be at stake when self-hearing is undetermined or malfunctioning? What is this running away from? In the tale of Veronique Le Guen, the speleologist (see ch. 3 p. 153), her reflexive apparatus has undergone a radical destabilization, Le Guen’s *I am not her(e)* locates the “I,” or rather, confirms its dislocation. The “I” is unhinged from a place, its function derails and becomes a spiral of malfunctions and dysfunctions. The spiral is at its most tragic here for it marks a point of no return for the psyche. Yayoi Kusama undergoes an analogous descent (along a visual register, but is nevertheless useful in this discussion):

One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows, and the walls, and finally all over the room, my body, and

²⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Génie du non-lieu*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2001, 34. Translation mine. Original: *la mise en mouvement du lieu*.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l’écoute*, Paris: Galilée, 2002, 24. Translation mine. Original: *Un soi n’est rien d’autre qu’une forme ou une fonction de renvoi : un soi est d’un rapport à soi, ou d’une présence à soi*.



fig. 37

fig. 37 Samuel Roy-Bois, *I heard a noise, I ran away*, 2003. Courtesy of the artist.

the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothingness ...²⁷

Once a space is in movement can it remain absolute? “What is expressed when one says not space, but *a* space: a disturbing expression that defines something that is at the same time empty and well circumscribed.”²⁸ In the same passage Caillois describes a desire which echoes with Kusama’s reduction: “I wanted to cross the border of my skin, live on the other side of my senses; I practiced watching myself from a given point in space.”²⁹ Of confinement and infinity, edging towards a self without self, a distancing which blurs one’s cognitive hold. What is the place of sound in this? What stakes does sound amplify? Keeping in mind Nancy’s caveat that “nothing can be said about sound that is not also valid *for* the other registers as well as *against* them, [the registers are] in an inextricable complementarity and incompatibility one from the other.”³⁰ A discussion on sound involving space and place in particular demands a certain synesthetic sensibility; furthermore, the movement that we have focused on is at play on many levels, and the tensions between the senses Nancy ably describes is certainly one of these instances. But to return to the questions posed, we can posit that sound, in its specificity, crowds the place, it saturates, “[it] invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us.” Deleuze and Guattari continue their outline of the power with: “It takes leave of the earth, as much in order to drop us into a black hole as to open us to the cosmos. It makes us want to die.”³¹ This

²⁷ Yayoi Kusama, “Fortress of Shooting Stars” in *Grand Street*, No. 53 *Fetishes*, Vol. 14 No. 1, Summer 1995, 32.

²⁸ Roger Caillois, *The Necessity of the Mind: An Analytic Study of the Mechanisms of Overdetermination in Automatic and Lyrical Thinking and of the Development of Affective Themes in the Individual Consciousness*, trans. Michael Syrotinski, Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1990, 105. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Caillois, 104.

³⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l’écoute*, Paris: Galilée, 2002, 24. Translation mine. Original: *[Q]u’on ne perde jamais de vue que rien n’est dit du sonore qui ne doive à la fois valoir pour les autres registres aussi bien que contre eux [...], dans une complémentarité et dans une incompatibilité inextricables l’une de l’autre.*

³¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 348.

dramatic contrast between a black hole and the open cosmos further echoes with Caillois, Roy-Bois and Kusama and presents a kind of *thanatopia*, a place of death within the living that renders the latter incapable of stability or inertia. Here is death, literally. No longer relegated temporally to a future, it is present and occupies a place. Blanchot depicts a similar space, predictably for one whose biographical note reads “his life is entirely devoted to literature and to its inherent silence,” it is one occupied by words:³²

This even word, spaced without space, affirming underneath all affirmation, impossible to deny, too feeble to shut up, too docile to be contained, not saying anything, only speaking, speaking without life, without voice, with a lower voice than any other: alive amongst the dead, dead amongst the living, calling to die, to resuscitate in order to die, calling without recourse.³³

Philip Monk in his discussion of Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* views the appearances in the film of the two inert objects, the bookcase and the corpse, not as comments on narrativity in film but as observations on the place events take. The seemingly self-evident statement that “events *take place*” is pertinent to our discussion for these “representational” events are contrasted by Monk with the “‘abstract’ sine-wave glissando” which becomes the other soundtrack at this point in *Wavelength*.³⁴ That the representational and the abstract are not as disparate as one might think is a recurring strategy for Snow. He places these opposite in play, Snow’s game is depth – of field, of interpretation, of signification. By *Wavelength*’s end the flat screen regains its flatness, but only for a moment, soon we internalize the zoom we have just experienced and

³² Maurice Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 155, 7. Translation mine. Full original: Maurice Blanchot, *romancier et critique, est né en 1907. Sa vie est entièrement vouée à la littérature et au silence qui lui est propre*.

³³ Maurice Blanchot, *L’Attente L’Oubli*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 155–6. Translation mine. Original: *Cette parole égale, espacée sans espace, affirmant au-dessous de toute affirmation, impossible à nier, trop faible pour être tue, trop docile pour être contenue, ne disant pas quelque chose, parlant seulement, parlant sans vie, sans voix, à voix plus basse que toute voix : vivante parmi les morts, morte entre les vivants, appelant à mourir, à ressusciter pour mourir, appelant sans appel*

³⁴ Philip Monk, “Around *Wavelength*” in *The Michael Snow Project: Visual Art 1951–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/The Power Plant, 1994, 327.

find ourselves deep in the waves of the photograph on the wall that was initially at the opposite end of the loft from the camera. In *Two Sides to Every Story* Snow juxtaposes the flatness with the voluminosity of the screen in the very installation of the piece. The same scene is shot from opposite ends of a room and is then projected on a double sided screen in the middle of the room. Simultaneously projected, we see the front of a person on one side and the other side shows us the back. The arrangement according to Bruce Elder, “re-enchants a dead metaphor by literalizing it”,³⁵ it also obligates the viewer to pick a side. In both instances I saw the piece exhibited, I observed viewers eventually drifting to a place beside the screen where one can witness the thinness of the story and its flirtation with virtuality. Interestingly, from that position, with a back and forth motion, one is also able to see both the back and front of the protagonist. With this to and fro motion we enter a paradoxical space where materiality is located in the nowhere of the in-between. Indeed, by being on the side and moving side to side, we are literally *in* the action. By thwarting conventional viewing, spatial movement is enhanced. It takes this relocation to the screen’s side to remind ourselves simultaneously of the work’s fiction (meta) and of its liveness (physics).³⁶

A space in movement is an amplified topography, one that inscribes notions of utopia and heterotopia to the heretofore singular space. In this plural context, sound could be conceived as the jukebox of place. As Rick Altman points out in his appropriately titled essay “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound,” in a recording we hear double, we hear both the sound of the site it was recorded and the site where the recording is being

³⁵ Bruce Elder, “On Sound, Sound Recording, Making Music of Recorded Sound, The Duality of Consciousness and its Alienation from Language, Paradoxes Arising from These and Related Matters” in *The Michael Snow Project: Music/Sound 1948–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/The Power Plant, 1994, 244.

³⁶ In fact, Snow called *Wavelength* “metaphysics”. He called another one of his films “philosophy” (*New York Eye and Ear Control*). From Philip Monk, “Around Wavelength” in *The Michael Snow Project: Visual Art 1951–1993*, 326

³⁷ Rick Altman, “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound” in *Sound Theory – Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman, New York: Routledge, 1992, 27. Also cited in Sean Cubitt’s worthwhile essay “Sound: The Distances” in *Definition of Visual Culture II: Modernist Utopias – Postformalism and Pure Visuality*, ed. Chantal Charbonneau, Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 1996, 98–111.

played.³⁷ This dissonance induced by the playback of recording can destabilize self-hearing by adding an elsewhere to the mix, as a result the here and now can no longer be clearly delineated. Xenakis is pertinent at this juncture, Louis Marin writing on the composer/architect provides us with a generative definition of utopia: “U-topia, no-place, the nowhere does not mean the unreal or the imaginary, but the indetermination of place, the neutral space of difference and the force of differentiation. Place which is neither here nor there, utopia presents an absence in the here and now of space.”³⁸ The multiplicity implied in the work of difference is the theoretical underpinning of this image of the juke-box of place. Sound negotiates (activates and enables in equal measures) the various levels of heightened hearing a space can generate. Xenakis worked with densities of space, from the 400 speaker array at the Philips Pavilion for the 1958 Brussels World Fair to his *Polytopes*. The multiplication of sites here is again along the arrangement suggested by the idea of the *singular plural*, that is to say that we have a single topos which is then polymorphed (understanding morphing here as not necessarily pertaining only to physical form). In the concluding statement of his study on *Les Polytopes*, Olivier Revault d’Allonnes makes this paradoxical statement “the Xenakian polytopia is the right to be a self, that is to say the right to be other.”³⁹ The movement of space under the sign of sound, as we see here and have seen earlier, causes ontological questions to resonate. Foucault’s discussion in “Of Other Spaces” on the conjoined utopic and heterotopic aspects of the mirror with the regards to the self provides a useful analogue.⁴⁰ We are both *in* the mirror and reflected back, with the mirror we are performing in image the act of self-hearing. We are returned to ourselves, as other. We are in a dialogue of one.

Amplifications of these various kinds all echo the space. The volume of air has thickened. This is the resultant ambiance of Emile Morin and Jocelyn

38 Louis Marin, “L’utopie de la verticalité” in *L’ARC Xenakis*, No. 51, 1972, 74. Translation mine. Original: *U-topie : le non-lieu, le nulle part qui ne signifie pas l’irréel ou l’imaginaire, mais l’indétermination du lieu, le lieu neutre de l’espace de la différence et de la force de la différenciation. Lieu de ce qui n’est ni ici, ni là, l’utopie présente une absence, dans l’ici et le maintenant de l’espace, autour de laquelle celui-ci s’organise.*

39 Olivier Revault d’Allonnes, *Xenakis : Les polytopes*, Paris: Balland, 1975, 129.

40 Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres” in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, vol. IV 1980–1988, Gallimard 1994, 752–762. In English in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, trans. Jay Miskowicz, Routledge, 1998, 237–244.

Robert's *La Salle des Noeuds III (The Hall of Knots)* (2001), an installation working in an interesting parallel to Xenakis, using hyperbolic mathematics and speaker array, but using remote links on various continents and systems of "orderly disorder" to manage the inputs of images and sounds.⁴¹ Another room where we are enveloped by a volume, by layers of inputs and outputs, is *Room of Fears* by Michael Fernandes. In this performance/installation, Fernandes wrote and filled the walls in longhand with the fears contribute to him by the visitors to the gallery. Here are selections:

I am afraid of losing my wallet / I am afraid of beautiful women / I am afraid that the sky is falling / I am afraid of never having another idea / I am afraid of my art coming between me and my partner / I am afraid of clever people / I am afraid of sitting on my uncle's lap / I am afraid of craving the quick fix / I am afraid of bedtime / I am afraid of cops with bad tempers / I am afraid of large open spaces / I am afraid of insanity / I am afraid I don't speak properly / I am afraid of choking in my sleep / I am afraid there is no place for me / I am afraid of Mike Tyson / I am afraid of visa bills / I am afraid of Old Man River / I am afraid of stupidity / I am afraid of tall people who look important / I am afraid that squeaky wheels get the oil / I am afraid of ways and things that have nothing to do with me / I am afraid of doing something that is out of control that haunts me for the rest of my life / I am afraid of eros / I am afraid of cornering a rat / I am afraid I'll do all this work and then die / I am afraid of anyone who tells me that I don't know what I'm missing / I am afraid to date boys from other cultures / I am afraid of Edmund the bully at our school / I am afraid of my ego / I am afraid of performing / ...⁴²

While here the volume is unsound, the performative element of the work makes the room vibrate, it is not static, it is a *becoming-afraid*. Presumably, this becoming is also a shedding, an unbecoming, a fading of fear. But the

⁴¹ Émile Morin and Jocelyn Robert in Corinna Ghaznavi, *Computer Voices/Speaking Machines*, Banff: Walter Philips Gallery, 2001, 10.

⁴² Stephen Horne, *Michael Fernandes: The Everyday Escapes* in Parachute, No. 87, 1997, 22.

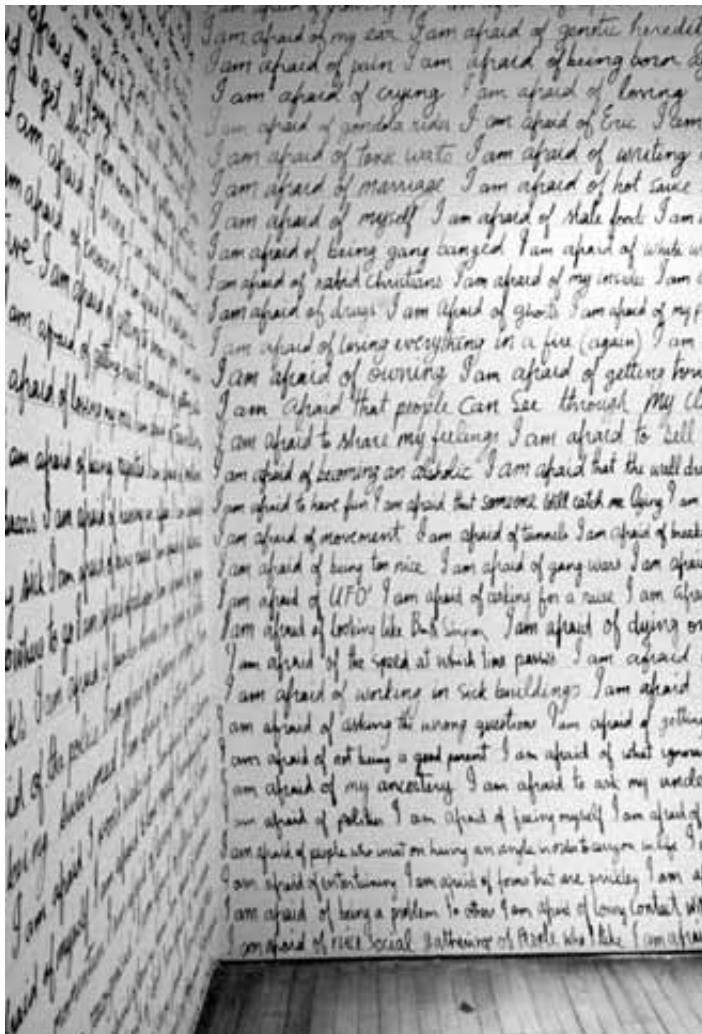


fig. 38

fig. 38 Michael Fernandes, *Room of Fears*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery.

room also opens your every pore and injects fear inside. It stages a backfiring catharsis, a purging full of leaks, an undertow. The anaphora of every phrase and the arrangement of each phrase into lined rows heighten the amplification. It is an enumeration, a taxonomy, a systematized graffiti.

Snow's *Wavelength* offers a comparable performance, it is a focused study of "how our communication creates a membrane over chaos: laughter so easily becomes slaughter, but only in writing."⁴³ Arguably *Wavelength's* principal aim might not be to make a statement on communication, but given its metaphysical aspirations, we must pay attention the possible slippages between various lengths of wave. Variability of wave has immediate effect on our apperceptions of the room. The room wavers. The viewer's uncertainty is not merely with regards to the occurrence of the events but to their placing. This spatial tampering occurs, paradoxically, because the zoom and glissandi assert their inexorable certainty throughout. The waves are both measured and lengthless.

Raymond Gervais' work often delves into similar questions; regarding a piece from 2001 he writes: "It is the listening not the sound that is rendered in space. It is the gaze which plays the music, in silence."⁴⁴ In the mutism of his work, Gervais makes sound resonate at a level which addresses the question and referentiality of listening. Gervais scores sound, reads it and places that literalization in space. The work provides a "space in quotation marks",⁴⁵ and enters a back and forth where site rhymes with cite, and citation with situation. The *space in quotation marks* is synonymous, of course, with Cage's 4'33", the

⁴³ Michael Snow in "On Sound, Sound Recording, Making Music of Recorded Sound, The Duality of Consciousness and its Alienation from Language, Paradoxes Arising from These and Related Matters" in *The Michael Snow Project: Music/Sound 1948–1993*, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario / The Power Plant, 1994, 235. This statement was not made in reference to *Wavelength*, I take the responsibility of this inference.

⁴⁴ Raymond Gervais, *Via Charles Ives: La Symphonie Universe (via La Question sans réponse)*, Orford: Centre d'arts Orford, 2001, 14.

⁴⁵ Louise Déry, *Are You Talking to Me? Conversations(s)*, Montréal: Galerie de l'UQAM, 2003, 44. While the exhibition includes work by Gervais, this phrase was used by the curator, Louise Déry, in reference to the exhibition as a whole.

⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that Cage has referred to 4'33" as a work that could be pronounced "four minutes, thirty-three seconds" or "four feet, thirty-three inches". Reference in John Cage, *Conversing with Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, New York: Routledge, 2003, 70.

former makes explicit a spatial frame, the latter a temporal one.⁴⁶ Both activate each other.

Next time you enter a gallery or museum, close your eyes. You will enter the space of the relation. You will hear Vito Acconci in *Seedbed* (1972) saying, “I’ve done this for you, I’ve done this with you, I’ve done this to you.”⁴⁷ You will realize that there is an embodiment ever present in this unsound art, this thinking art. You will have a work that might be concealed and confined, but with undeniable materiality, corporeality. You will face the plethora of spaces conjured here: the speech-room, space volumed by sound, thanatopia, the jukebox of place, the infinitesimal interval, polytopia, the unsoundtrack. You will then open your eyes, and see the volume of your listening.

1.4 SLIPPERY THREADS

My first anxiety attack occurred during a Louis Armstrong concert. I was nineteen or twenty ... the atmosphere warmed up fast ... my heart began to accelerate, becoming more important than the music, shaking the bars of my rib cage, compressing my lungs so the air could no longer enter them. Gripped by panic at the idea of dying there in the middle of spasms, stomping feet, and the crowd howling, I ran into the street like someone possessed ... “I’m going to die. I’m going to die. I’m going to die.”⁴⁸

Marie Cardinal is facing death by contamination, death by Artaud’s plague. Not the death *of* performance, but death *by* performance. She is running, she

⁴⁷ Vito Acconci, *Vito Acconci – Writings. Works. Projects*, ed. Gloria Moure, Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2001, 154. In *Seedbed* (performed at Sonnabend Gallery, New York in 1972), Acconci masturbated for some six hours a day, twice a week, while concealed under a low wooden ramp built into the gallery. Brandon LaBelle’s discussion of *Seedbed* echoes and complements mine with regards to the situational, relational and spatial specificity of the voice (Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London: Continuum, 2006, 130):

Acconci’s orality seems to suggest that the voice is always housed within a structure that is not Universal but architectonic, that one speaks from a situated and social position that is partly uncontrollable, and that the interior state that the voice exposes, amplifies and presents to another, is at times violating, disgusting and unstable within its own processional intensities.

⁴⁸ Marie Cardinal in Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, 181.