



Music, the Avant-Garde, and Counterculture Invisible Republics

Edited by
Anabela Duarte

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FOREWORD

Since it was first used in a French military report of 1793, to describe “a detached part of an army which precedes it and reconnoitres the route ahead” the term “avant-garde” has undergone multiple and various mutations. It disappeared after the French Revolution, only to reappear after the 1848 Revolution, when it became popular on both ends of the political spectrum, claimed by the bourgeois militants of the right as a description of their program and as an emblem of the republican and revolutionary left. The term only entered the cultural domain during the Second Empire, when romantic socialism and early Marxism, seeing history as a forward march, used it as a standard metaphor for political movement, progress, advance, and revolution.

The “avant-garde” became a proper literary term in the 1880s, when a plethora of small literary journals in Paris appropriated the term, making it a byword for experiment, daring, and, above all, the forward movement of art, politics, and history in concert. Momentum gathered in the first half of the twentieth century, when “avant-gardism,” as a tendency and attitude, became the defining mark of Dadaism, Surrealism, Lettrism and Situationism, all for now still head-quartered in Paris, but soon to move to London, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid, Bucharest, Berlin, and other centers. This, allied with the modernist belief in aesthetic and artistic progress as the newest and most powerful redemptive force in human history, turned the word and concept of the “avant-garde” a key historical trope, along with words like Bolshevism, Communism, and Fascism. The question to be asked, then, is why and how the “avant-garde” or “avant-gardism,” which persists into the early twenty-first century, has survived history?

That is partly what this book is about and why it exists. More precisely, although the essays and analyses in the present volume follow a roughly chronological historical pattern, there are also consistent detours into the contemporary. This all makes sense, since the “avant-garde,” in the age of the Internet has made the transition from a mainly French movement in the nineteenth century, to an international (but still mainly European and Western) movement in the twentieth century, and now to a globalized tendency.

The seeds of this twenty-first-century global turn can already be detected in the work of twentieth-century avant-gardists. Famously, the avant-garde has never respected any borders, which were sneered at or ignored as left-overs from nineteenth-century nationalism and the building of the nation state (the Dadaists were the first to denounce the nation states and the imperialism that they engendered as murderous folly, which they had witnessed firsthand in the carnage of the First World War; the Surrealists denounced the Rif War of 1921 to 1927 as colonialist madness). Later avant-gardists, from Surrealism onwards, saw their task of transforming human reality as an inherently political project, one of whose aims, among many, was to abolish all frontiers, whether physical or mental, in favor of unleashing an untrammelled subjectivity on the world. This was utopian and romantic of course, but for a figure like the Lettrist Isidore Isou, who is happily resurrected in several guises in this volume, this is only the prelude to a complete revolution, announcing a new era in the history of humanity. This is entirely and allright messianic, and for that reason Isou has been dismissed by skeptics and critics (including fellow travelers like the Situationists), but it also contains something of the “chiliastic serenity” that the art historian T. J. Clark found in the writings of Guy Debord, writings that Clark saw as prophetic and that we can now, in 2024, see as prophecies that have come true.

However, the fact that the avant-garde has now become global is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is obvious that the domination of the “spectacle,” theorized by Guy Debord in his 1967 work *The Society of The Spectacle*, is everywhere in contemporary life, from TikTok to X (formerly known as “Twitter”) to Instagram and beyond. Never in human history, he would no doubt have remarked, have we been presented with so much information and so little knowledge. Never have human beings been so far removed from the reality of their own lives and the lives of others. Debord predicted this in 1967, and it is now truer than even he could have imagined.

On the other, it is worth remembering that Guy Debord intended *The Society of the Spectacle* not only as a diagnosis of modern forms of alienation, bringing Marx up to date, as it were, but also as a dialectical weapon which is meant to be used. In simple terms, returning to the early military origins of the term “avant-garde,” the highest aim of the contemporary avant-gardist is to actively resist the “spectacle” of modern life, subverting and undermining the dominance of the “spectacular” forms of domination that make up our globalized realities. The resistance begins with the fusion of art and politics, a revelatory praxis understood not only as a historical tradition within avant-garde movements, but also as a still-living critique of reality. The “chiliastic” mood that characterizes Debord, Isou, and others is entirely shaped by the need to connect the historical past not only to the present, but also to the future.

This is why and how the avant-garde, as an impulse and imperative, has survived the wreckage of the twentieth century. This volume exists to demonstrate the truth of this notion; that the avant-garde does not belong in a museum, but is a vital, living component part of our century and its challenges. To return to Guy Debord, and again to a military metaphor, before his suicide in 1994, Debord was known for often misquoting the famous “mot de Cambronne,” uttered by Général Cambronne at the Battle of Waterloo in the face of sure defeat, detourning Cambronne’s words, when the Général announced that “Merde! La Garde meurt. Mais il ne se rend pas!” For Debord, the formula became “The avant-garde dies, but it does not surrender!” As the reader will find in this volume, this is still now the battle cry of the “Invisible Republics.”

Andrew Hussey
Paris 2024

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NOTE

1. This volume originated in the research undertaken during a post-doctoral grant by FCT over a period of six years devoted to the aesthetics and politics of invisibility in music, sound, and narrative modes. It is also the result of a successful three-day conference held in Lisbon on October 25–27, 2017, entitled *Invisible Republic: Music, Avant-Gardes and Counterculture* (see <https://invisiblerepublic.info/>), which contemplated academic sessions, artistic events, workshops, multimedia sessions, films, dance, musical performances, and installations.

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PART I

Avant-Gardes Revisited



CHAPTER 1

On Listening to the Avant-Gardes: Introduction

Anabela Duarte

In the current cultural landscape, the term “avant-garde” appears to be omnipresent; some argue that its influence has waned. A Google search from 2007 yielded 11.2 million pages on the term, a number that has likely grown significantly since then (van den Berg 2009). A preliminary examination of the term’s use on websites pertaining to both artistic and non-artistic topics reveals a tendency to trivialize its meaning, as evidenced by terms such as “Covid Avant-garde,” “Avant-garde Vegan Hotel,” “Arab Avant-garde,” and “Avant-garde Jazz.” Despite this, such usage paradoxically highlights the term’s hybrid nature, constant appropriation, and multiplicity of meanings. This demonstrates the term’s continued relevance and vitality within the contemporary discourse. In the arts, the term is more carefully chosen, yet its heterogeneity regarding movements and ideas is a well-known fact. In the present volume, we aim to recover this heterogeneity and the rhizomatic character of the term, as well as its countercultural hubris, by bringing to the fore works that pay some sort of tribute to the original sense of the notion, in search of a creative life, unconventional language, audacity, and outrage. As Richard Huelsenbeck,

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in *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer* (1991), puts it: "... we killed a quarter of a century, we killed several centuries for the sake of what is to come." Accordingly, our understanding of the avant-garde is multiform, although it developed from two main ideas.

On the one hand, the image of the cave in *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (1998), where, according to Greil Marcus, a new language and a new consciousness were being forged. In the invisible realm, far from the public eye or system of representation, a different enlightenment was taking place: one opposed to clarity, where the unseen, the secretive, and the unnamed became the unsettling elements of the dominant powers and knowledge. Thus, our notion of the avant-garde reflects the particular aesthetic strategies related to the invisible, taken as a discursive and creative tactic. It is evident that this position also has consequences in the socio-political sphere, as it calls for alternative epistemologies and practices, and there are some articles that acknowledge that, but our primary concern is within the art field, particularly in the music and sound domains.

Conversely, Lettrism, a historical avant-garde artistic movement of the 1940s, exerted a profound influence on the overall design of our book. Isidore Isou's claim for a new "Republic of Letters," aimed to reshape language and poetry into pure sound and noise. Creation was the key mode of the movement, in which a poetry liberated from words and syntax would liberate mankind from all national boundaries and conflicts—a true democratic goal. This turn to the audible, to the ear, to listening, and to creating new poetry and music was conceived as a powerful tool for the destruction and reconfiguration of language and the arts. Our notion of avant-garde is thus conceived both as a strategy related to the politics and practices of invisibility and to the world of music and sound, immaterial elements but nonetheless powerful tools to challenge normative constructs and systems of representation. It encompasses phenomena from different periods, geographies, and disciplinary fields. All of the essays share an antiauthoritarian and libertarian attitude toward art and culture, as well as more technological subjects, such as cybernetics or coding. In our view, this turns out to be a cohesive set of essays that attempt to provide a hybrid and fresh perspective on the field.

The existing literature on the subject is neither vast nor very recent. However, more or less recently a challenging debate has emerged about the opening of the term "avant-garde" and its legacy to other musical and cultural geographies, focusing on how these in turn have influenced the

evolution of the term and its outcome. This shift is informed by the post-colonial critical apparatus and seeks to challenge the Eurocentric notion of the avant-garde by exploring alternative, non-Western, and postcolonial modernities (Burkhalter 2013). Nevertheless, such a move toward action against the exclusive canons of the avant-garde in search of an avant-garde elsewhere was already on the agenda of Lettrism. Isidore Isou, a Romanian, was the “oriental” man of the 40s in Paris, just like his ancestors, the founders of Zurich Dadaism, Tristan Tzara, the Janco brothers, or Arthur Segal, the painter, were the oriental men of Hugo Ball back in 1916–1917. They were all Romanians and Jews, hailing from the Eastern regions of Europe, and situated outside of the major centers of culture and the arts, such as Paris. Their aim was to propose highly radical and imaginative works. Lettrism, according to Andrew Hussey, one of our authors, was not founded in Western rationalism but rather in the Kabbalistic tradition of the Jewish Orient. If that is indeed the case, what can we say about Western conceptions of the avant-garde? Perhaps they are not as exclusive as previously thought; perhaps their origins and creativity are more hybrid than expected. In fact, the term “avant-garde” has been problematized since its very inception by both Westerners and people from the Eastern side of Europe, the so-called oriental men. The claims for cultural rejuvenation were already at work with anti-art works (1914) and Dadaism (1916), which fought the boundaries of logic and aestheticism in modern capitalist society and its imperialistic agendas. In this book, we intend to explore a significant body of works and artists that challenge the Eurocentric rationale within European and North American space. In this sense, such an approach is also a process of artistic and cultural decolonization. Not just in music but also in cinema, literature, hypergraphic works, cybernetics and code, and experimentalism at large. Despite the apparent diversity of subjects, perspectives, and genres, the volume demonstrates a strong cohesion, suggesting that the spirit of the avant-garde as subversion and its transgressive aims persist in every field, not just in music, radical politics, or the arts per se. In fact, the Dada group of Berlin considered art to be only one expression of the creative power of humans. At times, they would dismiss it completely and deny its very existence.

By including in this volume works on alternative cultures (Jonathan Lindley), antiviral music (Eric Lyon), cyborg poetry (Ana Silva), underground cinema (Kostoula Kaloudi), music technology (Telichan-Phillips and Marchwinski), cybernetics (O’Sullivan), and other less canonical subjects of art, we are expanding the self-containing narratives and definitions

of the avant-garde to other domains, testing its multiplicity in theory and practice, and contributing to the originality of the collection.

Despite its interdisciplinary and music and sound-based nature, the work goes beyond the mere search for the invisible realms of cultural production. Instead, it seeks to analyze the developments and impact of cultural production in the present circumstances. Similarly, our focus is not on the processes of “Globalizing the Avant-Garde,” the title of an international conference organized by EAM and held in Lisbon in 2022. Rather, we are interested in exploring the radical killings of avant-gardists and the killings of centuries of culture, made *tabula rasa*, “for the sake of what is to come” (1991: n.p) in the words of Huelsenbeck. And how these “killings,” so to speak, gave rise to a systematic and powerful inquiry into the nature of experimental works, conventional boundaries, and critical yet playful ways of dealing with the system. The idea of eclecticism as a cohesive or unifying feature did cross our mind, as it makes the whole inquiry flexible (applies to multiple fields), effective (diversity works), and continuous (not rigid but open to complementary insights or theories).

Each chapter in this volume draws on new archival research, papers not yet published, innovative work on significant figures of different periods, short texts that came out of musical performances or happenings, such as “Diário da República” and “Gravitas,” or “Antiviral Music,” whose form and style or theoretical engagement contrasts positively with the other more academic fashioned papers, and the majority of articles draw on lesser-known figures or events. The book is divided into five parts, but such division only intends to highlight shared concerns among the contributions and not to treat each part as an autonomous focal point. Similarly, it draws attention to some of the topics and methods that were part and parcel of our research.

The term “avant-garde” is scholarly and is used in more academic papers; other times, it is more loosely employed, to refer to radical departures from tradition or opposition to contemporary commercialism; it is also implicit in the concepts of counterculture and invisibility. The terms “music” and “sound” are employed flexibly to make them continuous and smooth in order to follow the eclectic principle, unless otherwise specified. The first part includes six chapters of which this introduction is the first one. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 highlight the overlooked legacies of historical avant-gardes and the re-articulation of avant-garde discourses in the contemporary era, with a particular focus on Lettrism. Andrew Hussey employs an experimental song by *The Beatles* as the *motto* (and the title) of

his essay on Isidore Isou and his Hypergraphic Novels (1950), which anticipate the modern forms of the so-called graphic novels by more than sixty years. Since creation is the highest form of action in Lettrism, where the artist takes the place of God, Hussey demonstrates how such a philosophy is consistently explored in *Les Journaux des Dieux*, a book consisting of a series of multicolored diagrams, drawings, and musical notations. Here, color is the language of the unconscious and the mystic, a dream language, whose Jewish oriental background has deep implications in Western avant-gardes and movements such as Situationism. Paul Ingram looks at Theodor W. Adorno and his entangled relationship with Dada. He reveals Adorno's largely unawareness of Dada's experiments with music, "an area which historically has been neglected by scholars," as Peter Dayan also noted in his seminal work *The Music of Dada* (2019). Following such a line of inquiry, Ingram proposes an expanded understanding of Dada by reconstructing Adorno's interpretation of the movement and critically drawing on some of the author's key concepts, such as "alienating infantilism." In addition, by discussing Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Brecht/Weill, with passing reference to Dada, Adorno's incidental comments on the movement are scrutinized and supplemented with various sources that connect the missing points and suggest new perspectives on the field.

The fourth chapter, by Michal Zdunik, presents and discusses the work and legacy of the multifaceted Polish composer Boguslaw Schaeffer (1929–2019), but given the breadth of his output, he focuses only on his dramatic texts. Schaeffer's work has also recently been reassembled by the electronic pop duo Matmos, in 2022 (*Regards*), while earlier, in 2006, it was part of a soundtrack for David Lynch's film *Inland Empire*. Describing Schaeffer as one of the pioneers of experimental and electronic music in Poland, as well as the father of "avant-garde and new music," Zdunik identifies three modernist sources of the composer's aesthetic—Dadaism, Surrealism, and Total Art—that are a crucial component of Schaeffer's postmodern techniques of deconstruction, parody, and the blurring of artistic categorizations. Finally, he shows how these elements are reinterpreted in innovative and independent ways in Central and Eastern Europe. The next chapter draws a parallel between Lettrism and the Argentinian artist Alberto Greco, who recently, in 2021, saw a renewal of his work with an important exhibition at the Museo Moderno, in Buenos Aires. Considered a groundbreaking artist who destabilized the art scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s and was even expelled from Italy for one of his

theatrical and devastating performances, this essay explores how Greco's ephemeral public actions, called *Vivo-Dito* (Living Finger), in the streets of Paris, Madrid, and elsewhere, opened up "exploratory avenues in which the artistic self was both inscribed and dispossessed." Fernando Herrero-Matoses, the author, also argues that these practices have much in common with Isidore Isou's conception of the "prophetic and messianic dimension of the artist as a proper name," discovering the underlying poetic forces of Lettrism at work.

Finally, the last chapter of this part, challenges all the previous essays by posing a provocative assumption: if avant-garde means an anti-conventional passion for change and renewal, the Gothic can be considered the first avant-garde art. Drawing on the works of some contemporary artists, such as Mike Kelley, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and others, Antónia Lima, an expert in Gothic Studies, connects their expressive and transformative artistic practices to contemporary fears and anxieties, a desire for the irrational and primitive impulses. Many art movements share similar interests with Gothic, and Richard Huelsenback, for example, signaled Gothic (medieval) art as an important aesthetic source for Dadaism because it "made the first attempt to express movement in stone" (1991: 66). This is important, and shows how Gothic sensibilities were already at work in earlier centuries in terms of a break with more stiff and stylized forms, far from the emotional and disruptive forces of historical and contemporary "barbarians."

The next part, Chaps. 7, 8, 9, and 10, focuses on transatlantic avant-gardes and countercultures, although it includes a case study of Sunbird Records, a British alternative label run by the late Jonathan Lindley, who kindly participated in our 2017 conference. Chapters 7 and 8 bring to the fore the work of the American-French avant-garde poet, literary critic, and editor of the influential magazine *transition*, Eugene Jolas (1894–1952). Olga Sokolova and Vladimir Feshchenko, two Russian scholars and researchers in linguistics, delve into Jolas' legacy in search of the meaning of his so-called revolution of language and the universal word. By emphasizing the *fin-de-siècle* linguistic turn in both the scientific and artistic spheres, they focus on the poet's conception of a new aesthetic and creative communication between individuals, which lies in his shift from "vertical poetry" to "vertigalism." A different but complementary take on Jolas, based on his modernist editorial project *transition* (1927–1938), is offered by Barrett Watten, himself a poet. Taking up the editor's trilingual background in English, French and German, Watten sees the

magazine's activity as an attempt to transcend difference through the juxtaposition of global literatures and languages. In this ocean of diverging and even opposing modernisms, such as "American objectivism and French Surrealism," and languages, including non-Western ones, he foresees the coming decolonization and the construction of a global universality that anticipates the postwar search for aesthetic and ethical universals. As a "region of the Modern" then, *transition* already projected into the future a "global crisis of modernity and its next, post-modern period."

Such labors of language and creative experimentation have been at the heart of radical Dada activity since 1916. According to Kathryn Floyd and Brett M. Van Hoesen, a renewal of Dada's centennial celebrations has inspired a "new wave of scholarship" and revised historiographies of the movement. What remains to be done, however, is a more situational and spatial study of Dada's critical strategies with respect to institutions themselves and even anti-institutional frameworks. But what does a movement characterized as "unruly, playful and anti-establishment" have to do with the more serious and systematic realm of academia? That's what this essay is about. Taking the University of Iowa as a proper "Invisible Republic," the authors explore its practices in the field of experimental music, visual, and performing arts in the 1960s, in some ways illustrating what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) have called "undercommoning" cultures, that is, a theory of resistance that works from within institutions, such as universities and other higher education structures. The final chapter of the part, by Jonathan Lindley, is a kind of case study that aims to explore how post-subcultural and countercultural discourses have influenced and helped to shape an independent record label, namely Sunbird Records, and its working methods for cultural and musical production. Drawing on Maffesoli and his concept of disindividuation and neo-tribalism, as well as Raoul Vancigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), among others, he finds in these authors a need for an alternative arrangement as a direct response to massification or, in contemporary times, globalization. Far from the idealism of Jolas and his construct of the universals, what is at stake here is the transcendence of the individual into self-organizing groups and smaller micro-societies as a form of the "retribalization of contemporary life." Sunbird Records is thus conceptualized as a neo-tribe, a post-subcultural entity that generates difference in its musical and graphic production, not against the so-called culture cartel, but in a continuous dialogue and critical *tête-à-tête* with it.

Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, Part 3, highlight the multifaceted formats of poetry, especially those that deal with the visual arts and digital media, and that engage with the verbivocovisual and aural. Maggie Rosenau's chapter explores a unique close reading of the poem "Some Variations on 4⁴" by the Swiss-Icelandic artist Dieter Roth. Challenging previous readings of Roth's books as art-objects, she brings to the surface their deep visual articulation with lyrical poetry. Not only with lyrical poetry, but also with the haptics of reading: "touching, opening, looking, flipping, unfolding, closing." Furthermore, behind the materiality of the poem and its concrete nature, there is an effective musicality, as the very title "Variations" indicates, pointing to a "dialectic of the visual, musical, and the poetic." Another perspective on literature focuses on aural and cyborg poetry, that is, a hybrid form of textuality. By analyzing two cyber-texts, *THE LISTENERS*, by John Cailey and *AIM BAD*, by Jhave, in which "language is inscribed through sound," Ana Marques Silva posits the voice as the axial point of today's literary scene. This scene is not about sound poetry, audio books or anything else, but about using the voice as a form of language mediation with artificial intelligence systems. The symbiosis between man and machine, literature versus "aurature," thus challenges and disturbs the numerical logic of digital systems, creating a space (or a possibility) for aesthetic and poetic fruition.

Chapter 14, by Eric Lyon, is written in a more fragmented style, but still contrasts positively with the other contributions, giving a straightforward picture of modern music culture through the analysis of mainstream music and antiviral music. Defined as a space that averts the gaze of larger economic forces, antiviral music has potential qualities that are admired by a very small group of followers who seek alternatives to the technocratic musical system—what Lindley calls the "culture cartel." However, as a form of cultural resistance, it finds affinities with a very different concept of "the masses." Here, according to Braudillard (2007), the masses have no desire for consumerism and are opposed to all powers and systems of meaning. If viral music uses cultural engagement, Twitter and trolling, antiviral music refuses to engage and responds with indifference, is a "troll free zone" and a private avant-garde. It functions as "negative art, made with negative space, for a negative culture." The following essay aims to develop a coding practice for music technology that avoids the limitations and restrictions of the commercial industry, namely platforms for music creation that respond to ideological and profit-based interests. While Lyon's essay focuses on a negative intensity and denial of meaning in

contemporary society, Andrew Telichan-Phillips and Daniel Marchwinski exacerbate the hidden nature of critical information in coding practices and software music development, making it difficult for musicians to seek (and achieve) creative freedom. In clear opposition to indifference, they propose solutions for the empowerment and musical autonomy of artists and programmers.

The last work in this part deals with American underground cinema. While the previous works draw on innovative poetics and hidden strategies in music and technology, in *Ciao! Manhattan* (1972), Kostoula Kaloudi recognizes that there is a sense of a shift, a rebuttal in the boundaries of reality. Considered a “singular example of avant-garde cinema,” the film depicts an example of the rise and fall of the underground—a glamorous world of mythological dimensions based on New York countercultural icons and Warhol’s muses, such as Edie Sedgwick. Somehow, the subterranean feel of underground cinematography drives its characters to self-destruction and abuse, to decline and exhaustion, making them puppets of the death of an era—“a requiem for the Sixties.”

Part IV, Chaps. 16, 17, and 18, overtly addresses the thematic of the politics and aesthetics of invisibility, but in most of the chapters invisibility is acknowledged in a variety of ways, so the reader should not take the title of each part as an exclusive area of inquiry. In fact, the subtitle of the volume, *Invisible Republics*, recognizes this by giving unity to the other three topics of the research.¹ Moreover, many of the chapters could have been arranged differently. The invisible is neither a blank space nor the non-visible. It is actually in the visible realm and within our reach, just like the purloined letter in Edgar Allan Poe’s short story: it is there but still unseen. The main point is that when “visibility seems no longer to be a means of emancipation but rather the qualification of a social order of controlled and mediated conformism,” as Daniela Zyman states, in *Invisibly Visible* (2010), what remains is a “suspension of the representational,” which leads us to conceptualize the invisible and its practices as tactics of artistic intervention. In this sense, Jye O’Sullivan’s work on the Argentine artist Luis Bénédict, a member of CAyC, is a good example. In the exhibition *Laberinto Invisible* (1971), the artist uses cybernetics and interaction with participants to reveal invisible spatial and political dimensions of the work, which, in addition to its focus on art and technology, does show an important social problematic. In this way, Bénédict interactive model “forces the participant” to become aware of invisible communication and control, drawing a parallel with the socio-political repression in Buenos Aires in the

1970s. At the same time, it draws an attentive eye and ear to “alternative trajectories of cybernetics and conceptual art in Latin America,” which have long been excluded from a discourse dominated by the Western Anglophone world.

The next chapter, by Heitor Alvelos and Anselmo Canha, two scholars and musicians with a Design background, shares many concerns with Lyon’s *Antiviral Music* and the invisible inquiry, as well as its form and style. In this case, however, with a Heavy Metal band that has been deliberately operating under the radar since 2016. *Diário da República*, the band’s name (and the national official journal), is an exploratory and provocative musical project based on three fundamentals: controlled public and online visibility, to avoid digital ubiquity and reduce the “googlization” factor; risk maximization, to respond to the dangers of stagnation; and poetics in legislation, to denounce the ever-growing body of self-reference and the inscrutable legal language of jurisdiction. The result is a cacophony of voices and sounds that challenges even the most reticent Dadaist.

My chapter focuses on the avant-garde Jazz composer John Zorn and his “aural cinema” productions *Spillane* (1987) and *Godard/Spillane* (1999). Inspired by Mickey Spillane, the master of the hardboiled novel, or what you might call postpulp, Zorn’s work brings to the fore lesser-known issues in literature, music, and experimental film. My aim is to explore the notion of “aural cinema” as introduced by the composer in the liner notes to *G/S*, and the influence of Lettrism, an avant-garde artistic movement of the 1940s, on the building and development of such a concept. In my view, aural cinema opens up the field of possibilities for experimental film and a cinema without images by placing the emphasis on aural perception and on speech rather than on the filmed image. However, as much as Godard and others have contributed to this new cinema of the ear, by challenging the rhetoric of visibility, there has been an overwhelming neglect of the real perpetrators of this paradigm shift: the Lettrists and the Lettrist legacy.

Our last part, or part, draws more explicitly on music and its relationship to the other arts: literature and cinema, voice as a countercultural construct, sound art and audiovisual experiments that favor chance methodologies. Caitlin Woolsey, turns to the French artists Henri Chopin and William Burroughs, who, through the use of portable tape recorders and tape-recorded transmissions, developed a new kind of sound poetry based on multiple media and the sonic/intimate intensities of the voice. Chopin,

was interested in the sonic and concrete particles of his voice and body noises, while Burroughs explored the voice (and language) as a virus. It is an indefatigable journey, inspired by the postwar “underground aesthetics,” that traverses the “aural, optical, tactile, and fully embodied.” A more classical intermedial assemblage is made by Francesco Bacci, who focuses on “modernist and postmodernist literary works, and contemporary cinematic works,” such as Fitzgerald’s short story (*Three Acts of Music*), Pynchon’s seminal *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange*, and Larrain’s *Jackie* films, in order to prospect under-discussed issues of contamination and estrangement. By analyzing the use of music/song in literature as well as in cinema through a multidisciplinary approach, Bacci reveals the underlying instability and mutability of both the narrative process and structure.

In keeping with both Chopin and Burroughs in terms of an alternative approach to the voice and its politics, the trajectory of Egyptian-Greek-Italian singer and musician Demetrio Stratos (1945–1979), is a remarkable example of a “growing awareness of voice and body as political weapons,” in the words of Fabio Guidali. A member of the Italian jazz-rock-electronic avant-garde group Area, and himself an experimenter and interdisciplinary researcher, Stratos performed vocal pieces by Cage, Artaud, and other avant-gardists and explored the vocal techniques of distant traditions in order to liberate language from words and melody, with the goal of “liberating the expressive potential of human voice.” Independent of any political party system, his activity was of a more radical vein, seeking to disturb the social and psychic apparatus, and undermine its privileged and institutional frameworks. Chapter 22, by Bert Van Herck, deals with the properties of sound and how sound art can be more of an attitude than an exact focus on sound. Drawing on the work of Alvin Lucier’s “I am sitting in a room” (1969) and Tristan Murail’s “Mémoire, érosion” (1976), the author acknowledges that both composers use sound as a model but produce very different and contrasting works. How did this happen? What does this mean for contemporary music culture? Comparatively analyzing both composers’ works through Michael Polanyi’s lens and theoretical framework on concepts of knowledge and perception, the author concludes that their difference lies in the “application of sound.” Lucier, of the experimental branch, processes sound as a continuum and focuses on its “gradual transformation,” while Murail, of the spectralist school, uses sound as a vehicle for meaning. At last, a very short but intense text, in the form of a report on the audiovisual piece

Gravitas—video and audio editing—presents a studio reconstruction of an improvised sound performance that took place in 2015. According to Heitor Alvelos and Daniel Brandão, *Gravitas* is a “journey from infrasound to ultrasound. From uncertainty to clarity, from rootedness to elevation.” Part of a larger project (The FuturePlaces Medialab for Citizenship) that promotes unorthodox uses of new media, it can be seen as an “antidote to the lexical reduction” that currently prevails in online contexts.

This preoccupation with language and avant-garde experimentation has been seen in several other chapters, and how the contributors persist in moving beyond the traditional fictional/textual focus, offering fresh theoretical interpretative tools and meta-linguistics constructs to enable a more refined and acute understanding of music, literature, and experimentation in the arts. The volume also shows how universities can be deeply innovative, transformative, and educational by focusing on controversial artists and movements that significantly expand the range of interests beyond words and their impact in today’s world. The hidden element and the search for invisibility also added an important and meaningful direction to the overall research, as most of the contributors to the volume felt compelled to excavate new ground and bring to the fore unknown, or at least more nuanced, realities in music, the avant-garde, and counterculture. It is our hope that this book will make a valuable contribution to the field and open the doors to other significant research projects in the near future.

NOTE

1. The original title was *Invisible Republic: Music, Avant-Gardes and Counterculture* and was changed because there was already another publication with the same title.

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CHAPTER 2

“Listen to the Colour of Your Dreams”: Lettrism, Isou and the Hypergraphic Novel

Andrew Hussey

Abstract The movement known as Lettrism (*Lettrisme*) was founded in Paris in 1947, by the Franco-Romanian artist Isidore Isou (1925–2007). One of the central tenets of Lettrism is that societies develop not because of the human instinct for survival, but because of the desire to create. More than this, if creativity is the highest form of action, and art its most visible form, then humanity is in charge of history. In this way, the artist takes the place of God, the first creator or artist. This philosophy takes visual form in the so-called “Hypergraphic Novels” created by Isou—a new form of artistic expression that would take writing, painting and thought beyond even Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce’s book was an endless source of inspiration for Isou). The aim of this chapter is to examine these works and, most importantly, to investigate how Isou brought the culture of Jewish mysticism to the Western avant-garde, an argument that fundamentally changes our understanding of movements such as Situationism, which were directly rooted in *Lettrisme*.

Beatles. Tomorrow Never Knows. EMI, 1966. LP.

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Until recently, Isidore Isou has largely been forgotten or ignored by historians of culture. This is partly because he believed something which was absurd and impossible. He was a fanatic who held the fantastical belief that he was the Jewish Messiah sent to lead all Humanity to redemption. Isou started to believe this as a young Jew, trapped in war-time Romania, then the most dangerous place in Europe to be a Jew outside the Third Reich.

In 1945, Isou escaped, and made it to Paris. It was there that he founded the avant-garde movement called *lettrisme* (or Lettrism in English).¹ Then, for a brief moment—he was only twenty years old—he was suddenly famous, courted by Jean Cocteau and André Gide, profiled in the *New York Times* and interviewed on film by Orson Welles (Brown 1947). He was now a star on the Left Bank of Paris captivating all who met him with his charisma and good looks.

Isou died in obscurity in Paris in 2002. Now, all of a sudden, however, it seems he may be about to become famous again. In recent years, a major retrospective of his work took place at the Beaubourg in Paris 2019. His archive—dauntingly massive—has been acquired by the Bibliothèque Kandinsky. Most crucially, the consensus in the art world is that historically Isou's Lettrism is the missing link between Dada, Surrealism and Situationism—the key reference points in the history of Western modernity.

The overall aim of the present essay is however to make an argument against the contemporary consensus that Isou's work is merely a period piece. More to the point, this chapter will demonstrate that although Isou's thought is indeed a component part of Western modernity, it has its origins elsewhere. Lettrism was in fact not founded in Western Rationalism but in its opposite: the traditions of the Jewish Orient where Isou—like his near-contemporaries Marc Chagall and his friend Paul Celan—had his roots.

Isidore Isou was a polymath who wrote at least two hundred books, manifestos and tracts. Many of these were published by small and short-lived publishing houses and are not always easy to find. Isou's philosophy however is a total system based on his belief that societies develop not because of the human instinct for survival but because of the desire to create. More than this, if creativity is the highest form of action, and art its most visible form, then humanity is in charge of history. In this way, the artist takes the place of God, the first creator or artist. In revealing and explaining this philosophical system, the largest ambition of this essay is to restore Isou to his true place in history, as well as demonstrating his

lingering influence on all forms of contemporary art, from film to the visual arts, music, poetry and fiction.

Apart from his paintings, Isou's philosophy partly takes visual form in the so-called “Hypergraphic Novels” a new form of artistic expression that would take writing, painting and thought beyond even Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce's book was an endless inspiration for Isou). What I want to look at in this essay is two of Isou's hypergraphical works and ask what they can tell us about the historical context of Isou's philosophy—particularly with regard to the three apparently unrelated categories—colour, sex and mathematics. The first and most important of these is *Les Journaux des Dieux* (The Journal of the Gods, 1950). This work consists of fifty plates of multicoloured diagrams, drawings and musical notation that form an “unreadable” but fascinating puzzle. Isou composed the book with the help of his friend Maurice Lemaître, who used the skills he had acquired during his apprenticeship making prints in the *École des Arts et Metiers*.

The ambition is staggering but the work is also beautiful and hypnotic. The hypergraphic novel consists of fifty plates of text, diagrams and drawings in a variety of colours, over-laying each other as “unreadable” but fascinatingly cryptic puzzle. Central to *Les Journaux* is the meanings which Isou gives to his use of colour. It is related to an older religious tradition of the illuminated manuscript. This is the most important point. For Isou colour is both the language of the unconscious and the religious mystic. This explains why to hold *Les Journaux* in your hand is to feel a visionary intelligence, conveying a religious significance. Most importantly, this is how this text leads us towards answering the complex question of what Isou's philosophy is, or to put it another way, what Lettrisme really means. When I once asked him for a definition, Isou, with his typical ludicrous grandiosity, compared Lettrism to the Renaissance. It was, he stated, no less than the complete re-invention of culture and what it meant to be a human being. He was completely serious when he said this. Actually, you do not need to believe this theory to understand it. The comparison with the Renaissance is indeed less far-fetched than it sounds. Significantly, like the Surrealists, Isou was fascinated by the popularity of alchemy during the Renaissance. Alchemists practised experimental science and philosophy, seeking to turn base metals into gold, a universal cure for disease and the infinite prolongation of human life; most importantly alchemists believe that everything can be transformed.

This is also Lettrism in action; it is how music becomes painting and painting becomes film and film becomes writing; all is endlessly mutable.

This may all seem mad but it is not necessarily untrue. It has its origins in the French poetry of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century—the abstraction of Mallarmé, the mysticism of Rimbaud, the myth-making of Apollinaire and the wild hallucinatory energy of the Comte de Lautréamont. Visually it is related to the early experiments of Cubism and the Futurists. It's based on the belief that art and life are the same thing—that indeed, following the ideas of Marcel Duchamp, that life is the highest expression of art.

Isou particularly admired the Futurists because they aimed not only to revolutionize art but to totally undermine the world that they lived in. In the original *Futurist Manifesto* launched by Marinetti in 1909, they declared that they “wanted no part in the past” (2016: 21). Everything, including painting, architecture, religion, poetry, music, clothing and even cooking had to be remade to fit in with the spirit of the age—which was to be defined by speed, violence and technology.

Politically Lettrisme is also an heir to Romantic Utopianism of the nineteenth-century thinker Charles Fourier. Fourier was dismissed as a madman in his day but many of his ideas have passed into mainstream thinking; he valued women's rights, children's education, and preached tolerance for homosexuals. Above all he hated the “civilization” he lived in which he thought of as violent, cruel and stupid. Fourier was later admired by the Surrealists and Walter Benjamin, amongst others, for his unshakeable belief in the redemptive power of human creativity. This can seem naive from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, but it all makes sense in the context of the early twentieth century, as the belief in human history as an upward curve towards progress and improvement came to an end and was wrecked on the battlefields of Europe; the great projects of nineteenth-century capitalist “civilization” had ultimately produced nothing better than machines for the mass killing of workers.

Such rhetoric was common to all parties of the Left in Europe during the 1920s. It was also of central importance to the avant-garde groups of the period, who were emerging as the most powerful and dissident voices in Paris, Berlin and other European capitals in the aftermath of the Great War. The most strident of all these voices during and after was that of the Dadaist movement, which had been founded in Zurich in 1916. Dadaism was conceived as a negation of the entire system of moral values underpinning Western thought. It opposed reason, order, meaning and hierarchies in equal measure. It was not meant as an art movement but as a political weapon, carefully calibrated and loaded, aimed directly at the beating

heart of the rotten capitalist order, the “machine civilization” that had murdered so many millions. In his *Dada Manifesto* of 1918, Tristan Tzara spoke directly to a generation of young men and women who had grown up despising everything around them, to all those who lost faith in their homeland and its civilization: “No pity,” he declared, “After the carnage we are left with the hope of a purified humanity. There is great destructive work to be done” (1977: 78–79).

The parallels here between Dadaism and Lettrism are clear. It is also no accident that five of the original founders of Dada in Zurich were Jewish exiles from the same part of Romania as Isou (the invented name of one of these Jews, Tristan Tzara, actually means “sad country”, or “*țară tristă*”, in Romanian). Dada has now entered history as a component part of Western modernity. But what this handful of Jews brought to Zurich was the influence of the Yiddish popular culture—mainly travelling cabarets. In these cabarets, the players often wore bizarre costumes and masks. The language of the comedy was often scrambled “Jewish jargon”—business or religion—which no one understood.² There was spontaneous stamping, roaring, the banging of drums and lids. The jokes were usually based on contradictions and double negatives. Performances were relentlessly sarcastic, antic, hilarious: everything was a target. This was obviously also how Dada worked. It was a series of calculated provocations which opposed and contradicted the logic of Western thought. Dadaists and letterists belong to the same family; they speak the same language in every sense. There is however one singular and crucial difference which separates them. The Dadaists had seen the massacres of the First World War. Isou had seen the Holocaust.

Les Journaux des Dieux, the first work discussed here, was met with critical silence. The same could not be said of the second work, which is a “hypergraphical treatise” on the course of human sexuality, which was banned as soon as it was published. This was the book called *Initiation à la Haute Volupté* (Initiation to the Highest Sensuality) which was published by Editions Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, in late 1960. In some ways, this was Isou’s most ambitious work so far. It was indeed intended as the follow-up to *Les Journaux des Dieux*, which was now ten years old. Unlike the 150 plates that made up *Les Journaux des Dieux*, which told the story of Genesis, *Initiation à la Haute Volupté* was a narrative novel of 500 pages, accompanied by 208 “plates of super-writing” that, like the pages of *Les Journaux des Dieux*, were complex, multilayered illustrations whose meaning was never immediately self-evident

Isou's intention was that this book would be his retelling of the Song of Songs, sometimes known as the *Song of Solomon*. This is the only part of the Hebrew Bible which makes no mention of the Law or the teaching of God but is given entirely over to a celebration of sex and eroticism. In the Jewish tradition the purity of the love which is celebrated in the text is often seen as an allegory of God's love for Israel. In the more esoteric tradition of the Kabbalah, the uninhibited sexuality described in the text is also seen as the flow of Divine Emotion, which is also Divine Knowledge, and Knowledge of the Divine

Isou had already written about this aspect of sexuality before, in Isou ou *La Mécanique des Femmes* (Isou, or the Mechanics of Women, 1949) and a later text *Je Vous Apprendrai L'Amour* (I Will Teach You Love, 1957). These were attempts by Isou to develop what he calls an "erotology"—a scientific system for understanding sex and erotic love. The ultimate aim was to re-find the state of Humanity once known as "Paradise". Accompanying a drawing of a naked woman, surrounded by signs and hieroglyphs, Isou wrote: "One could say – to use allegorical language – that if Adam had not sinned, humans would not have been able to have an orgasm before their time. Amorous technique tries, through its means, to destroy the states of being fallen, to take Humans back to the original Paradise" (1960: 66)

The drawings in the book all contain an erotic motif: illustrations of pan-sexual orgies, featuring an Isou figure and a variety of men and women, whose features all belonged to real friends of Isou. The figures are often featured in scenes of masturbation (Isou was by his own confession excited by the sight of women leading themselves to solo orgasm). There are scenes of group sex, mild flagellation and bestiality. For all of this, *Initiation à la Haute Volupté* also contains a reasonably straightforward narrative. Such as it is, the plot tells the story of a young assassin, Didier, who is hired by a gangster called Moshé to kill a beautiful teenage girl, who has been a witness to a murder. In pursuit of his quarry, Didier passes through a succession of orgies, before finally falling in love with her—he realizes this after he has already accidentally killed her. He is then shot dead by Moshé's hitmen. There are two other significant characters—the lawyer, L'Agneau, who represents justice and human kindness, and Jean the Hypergrapher, who is no less than Isou himself, following and recording the action.

At the level of the plot and action, the book resembles nothing so much as Jean-Luc Godard's film *A Bout de Souffle*, which has a very similar

storyline and coincidentally had been the big cinematic hit of 1960, the same year as Isou had composed *Initiation à la Haute Volupté*. There were however also other influences at work. One of these was again Georges Bataille, who in 1957 had published a book called *L'Erotisme* (Eroticism) with Editions de Minuit. This was a sprawling work which, as was usually the case with Bataille, ranged over a wide range of topics without any great unifying theme or theory. Its main subject was however the mystery of human sexuality and how perversity—a form of artistry in some ways—was one of the defining aspects of which made sexuality “human”, as opposed to the purely “animal fulfilment of a biological need” (Hussey 2000: 132). Bataille linked this notion to the religion, seeing in the work of great Christian mystics for example, a passion for transcendence which not only mirrored sexual experience but actually was a form of sexual passion.

Isou understood this idea straight away. His own account of sexuality, “erotology”, described sexuality in similar terms. In particular Isou identified with Bataille’s description of erotic experience as a form of excess—an unnecessary but irresistible overflowing of the limits of ordinary, non-erotic experience. Isou wrote “Eroticism is an excess (...). Excitement is like a rope tied to an attracting sun, cable forcing increased tension—increasing delirium whose limit is the fall, this moment should be delayed” (1960: 66).

There was also a religious allegory at work in the novel’s narrative, revealed at the end when Didier is compared to God, the original Creator, and Moshé to Moses, a teacher and prophet. Didier is revealed indeed as one of the masks of God, indicating the Kabalistic symbolism also at work in the book. God can never be named, in the Kabalistic mode of thinking, but his Divine presence can be indicated in certain signs. The use of the term “Initiation” in the title of the book is a further indication of the book’s esoteric content, with its echoes of Éliphas Lévi’s famous work *Initiation à la Magie* (1990). Lévi, whose real name was Alphonse-Louis Constant, was a nineteenth-century occultist and Kabbalist whose work was known and admired by many, including Victor Hugo. Lévi was also a kind of utopian socialist, who was at one point close to the feminist and socialist Flora Tristan, and his ideas on the perfect society and “heaven on earth”, were also close to those of Auguste Fourier. Lévi, like Fourier, believed that “Socialism”—the path to heavenly order—would be brought about by an elite of initiates who would eventually lead the people to

freedom. This is how Isou describes himself in this book, and how he thought of himself in real life.

The most challenging, and ambitious aspect of *Initiation à la Haute Volupté* however is neither its convoluted detective story narrative nor its esoteric meaning, but the series of new alphabets created by Isou which sit alongside the erotic drawings. These are beautiful but mainly incomprehensible and grow increasing predominant in the drawings to the extent where they finally cover most of the page. They seem like the obsessive creation of a madman. This applies also to the mathematical *formulae* that are introduced as translations of the text and the new alphabets. It is as if Isou is reducing every sexual possibility and permutation to a mathematical code which, like the Kabbala, will then reveal a new meaning of its own. To this extent, the book, is a *grimoire*, an enchanted text which can never properly be decoded but which has a transformative, magical effect upon the reader. Most importantly, for Isou it was of massive significance that written numbers and words had appeared in human civilization at the same time, alongside figurative drawings. The aim of this lettriste painting was to put these separate categories of thought and knowledge back together, to reassemble that which had been fragmented into a totality.

One of the keys to deciphering *Initiation à la Haute Volupté*, following this logic, is to remember that mathematics in many ways accompanies written language and has always been an integral part of making art. We can trace this in many ways, but I am thinking here particularly of the perspectives of Piero della Francesca to the lines and angles of Kandinsky, from the regular pavings of the Alhambra to the fractals of the contemporary German artist, Jürgen Partenheimer. Mathematics first appeared as a central part of Isou's art in the series of paintings called "Les Nombres" (The Numbers), which were exhibited in the Galerie Palmes, in Paris, in the autumn of 1953. Around the late fifties Isou also began to talk about works that he termed "infinitesimal art". These were pieces which borrowed from the mathematical concept of the "infinitesimal". The concept belongs originally to the world of mathematics, explaining how to use infinitely small quantities to build and compute finite ones. In the same way, Isou's "infinitesimal art" could only be imagined and never seen.

In conclusion, I return again to the significance of Isou's lived experience of the Holocaust. Isou's last public appearance was in Paris, at the Amphithéâtre Liard, in the Sorbonne, in 2000, when he shared a platform with the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel—a fellow Romanian Jew. Isou was quite ill by now and the medication was making

him slur his words more than ever before. Still he finished his talk on creativity to rapturous applause before being taken away by ambulance back to his apartment.

Wiesel and Isou belonged to the same world. Like Wiesel, or the sociologist Serge Moscovici (who had been Isou’s friend in wartime Bucharest), and many others, Isou was a member of a generation which had been forced by the experience of the Holocaust to exchange Romanian identity for an imaginary cultural and linguistic country that had Paris as its capital but no real or literal landscape. “I have never written in Romanian” (Hussey 2021, 17–18), Isou explained to me when I mistakenly put it to him, in April 1999 that he was in the tradition of Eminescu, a poet whose real theme was his identity. “And this is because I am a Jew from a country which hates Jews.” This turned out not to be entirely true—Isou did not master French properly until he came to Paris in his 20s, and so his first attempts at literature, and indeed his first published writings, were necessarily in Romanian. Isou also said to me that he was not and never would be a French writer. He was in fact the direct opposite; a writer in French whose aim was to undermine the linguistic and cultural system within which he was operating. “I had to write in the language of mankind, that is to say all Jews,” he said, “so I chose French.”

Someone else who made the same kind of choice was Paul Celan, who came from the same part of Romania as Isou, who lived through the Holocaust, and eventually came to France, where he chose to write poetry in German. He had made this decision in the work-camp where he had been interned by the Romanian authorities. He wrote poetry, he said, to remain human. When Theodor Adorno made his famous statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1967 (1949)) he did not mean that poetry should not be written but that it was wrong, “barbaric”, to persist in making art out of the European culture, which had created the death camps. Celan was in torment about this fact; he wrote in German but was not German, he was a Jew. He prefaced one of his last poems with an epigraph in Cyrillic which read “All Poets are Yids” (Felstiner 1995: 189)—meaning all poetry, all culture now had to be made from the Other, the outside.³ In 1969, Celan could no longer find comfort in language or bear his guilt over his parents who had been killed in the Romanian Holocaust. He threw himself into the Seine. His body was found a week or so later. He was forty-nine years old.

For all his suffering Isidore Isou went on to live a long life. He died in 2007, at the age of eighty-three. Throughout his life he sacrificed

everything—family, money, sometimes even his sanity—to the Great Work that was Lettrism. Right until the end, he lived and worked as an artist, an exile and a Jew. His life and death were indeed proof that Lettrism, which is often considered a component part of Western modernity, was not founded in Western Rationalism but its opposite: the Kabalistic tradition of the Jewish Orient where Isou—like his near-contemporary Marc Chagall—had his roots.

The title of this essay “Listen to the colour of your dreams” was deliberately borrowed from the Beatles’s track *Tomorrow Never Knows*. This is partly because Isou, in his typically megalomaniacal way, was convinced that John Lennon had visited a Lettriste exhibition in Paris in 1961—which might actually be true. Lennon was an art student in Paris at the time. But the key point—the conclusion of this essay—is that Isou, like Chagall, saw colour as a dream language, which, like sex, mathematics, even humanity itself, was also the language of God. More to the point, this is how, as I have argued above, colour, sex and mathematics come together in Isou’s hypergraphic novels.

NOTES

1. Isou describes his Messianic status as well as his early adventures in his autobiography *L’Agrégation d’un Nom et d’un Messie*. 1947. Paris: Gallimard
2. A full and excellent account of this history can be found in Tom Sandquist’s *Dada East, The Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire*. 2006. Mass. and London: MIT Press.
3. This is in fact Celan’s deliberate mistranslation of a poem by Marina Tsvetaeva which reads in the original Russian “In this most Christian of worlds /Poet-Jews.”

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Adorno, Dada, and Music

Paul Ingram

Abstract In his extensive body of work on art and aesthetics, Theodor W. Adorno does not dedicate much sustained attention to Dada. This chapter is a partial reconstruction of his interpretation of the movement, which takes as an organizing framework his typology of contemporary music from “On the Social Situation of Music.” Referring to Dada in passing in separate discussions of the key composers Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, and Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill, Adorno appears largely unaware of its own experiments with music. His comments about the movement are supplemented by examples of its activity in this field, an area of its creative practice that historically has been neglected by scholars. Finally, Adorno’s concept of alienating infantilism is analyzed in light of this expanded understanding of Dada.

Theodor W. Adorno does not dedicate much sustained attention to Dada.¹ There are relatively few passages in his extensive body of work on art and aesthetics that deal directly or indirectly with the subject. The references to the movement that do exist are usually brief, often allusive or incidental, and spread over a number of texts. It is therefore necessary to undertake a

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labor of reconstruction, in which these disparate statements are brought together and his implicit attitudes are drawn out more clearly. His assessment of the movement, insofar as it can be inferred in this way, should be supplemented with concrete examples of its creative practice. He occasionally invokes Dada in general terms in discussions of music, reflecting his own interests as a critic, but shows little knowledge of its actual activity in the field. This is perhaps unsurprising, as historically the musical dimension has been neglected in accounts of the movement, considered of secondary importance compared to poetry and the visual arts, with an increased emphasis on performance insufficient to correct this bias, at least until the recent publication of Peter Dayan's *The Music of Dada: A Lesson in Intermediality for Our Times* (2019). However, Adorno's observations about leading avant-garde composers, in the context of which the remarks now under consideration are made in passing, provide a framework for the elaboration of the interpretation that he never formulates explicitly. In what follows, I reinforce his fragmentary and underdeveloped reading of Dada by recourse to its experiments with music, which were the subject of my presentation at the conference *Invisible Republic*.²

FOCUS ON MUSIC

In his early essay "On the Social Situation of Music" (2002 [1932]), Adorno presents a rough typology of contemporary music, focusing on those sections of it which in his estimation qualify as advanced art: "Musical production which in the narrower sense does not subordinate itself unconditionally to the law of the market—that is, 'serious' music with the exception of the obviously quantitatively dominant music, which likewise serves the market in disguise—is that music that expresses alienation" (395–396). The first type of music, which is not named here but may for convenience be called *new music*, is identified with Arnold Schoenberg. His works and those of his school are described as being ignorant of or else indifferent to their social situation, but this does not mean that they lack social significance. The negotiation of a problematic that is immanent in the musical material, yet historically formed and existing in relation to society, necessarily affects the extra-aesthetic sphere. Adorno endorses new music in terms of shock: "[T]he only music which offers a serious shock to the listener" (396). The second type of music, which he labels *objectivist music*, is personified by Igor Stravinsky. The composers cited as examples are said to be responding to a shared social situation, though each of them adopts a different approach to it. The objectivist work starts from an awareness of

its own alienation, which it attempts to overcome by inhabiting past forms that are thought to be immune to this condition, as in the use of folklore, and the program of neoclassicism. Adorno is unambiguous that this strategy is mistaken: “[S]uch forms cannot be reconstituted within a completely changed society and through completely changed musical material” (396). In his view, Schoenberg and Stravinsky embody the two major tendencies in contemporary music at the time, and the opposition between them also structures his later book *Philosophy of New Music* (2006 [1949]).

The third type of music is dubbed *surrealistic music*, in analogy to the predominantly literary and artistic movement Surrealism: “Extensive objective correspondences between this third type and French surrealism justify speaking in this case of surrealistic music” (396).³ The preeminent practitioner of this type of music is not usually considered a Surrealist: Kurt Weill, specifically for his collaborations with Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Adorno argues that the surrealistic work begins with the same consciousness of alienation as objectivist music, and indeed that it was originally developed from compositions such as Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale* (396–397). “On the Social Situation of Music” pinpoints the moment at which surrealistic music diverges from objectivist music:

Hand in hand with objectivism, this composer proceeds from the cognition of alienation. At the same time, he is socially more alert than the objectivist and recognizes the solutions offered by his colleague as illusion. He denies himself the positive solution and contents himself with permitting social flaws to manifest themselves by means of a flawed invoice which defines itself as illusory with no attempt at camouflage through attempts at an aesthetic totality. In his effort, he employs the formal language belonging in part to the bourgeois musical culture of the nineteenth century, in part to present-day consumer music. These means are used to reveal the flaws which he detects. (396)

Adorno would later adopt a less favorable view of Weill, but in “On the Social Situation of Music” he praises the composer: “Weill’s music is today the only music of genuine social-polemic impact, which it will remain so long as it resides at the height of its negativity” (409). This critical force consists in the appropriation of the preformed structures of the classical tradition and mass entertainment, which are broken up and recombined according to the organizing principle of montage, also associated with *The Soldier’s Tale*. The implication is that surrealistic music is generally superior to objectivist music in its thoroughgoing negativity, while falling short

of the serious shock offered to the listener by new music. In this way, Brecht/Weill are positioned between Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

Adorno also lists a fourth type of music, which comprises *use music* and *communal music*, associated respectively with Paul Hindemith and Hans Eisler, both of whom also collaborated with Brecht. What unites these composers is that they seek to resolve the problem of the alienation of art non-artistically, rather than at the level of the musical material: “The fourth type involves music which attempts to break through alienation from within itself, even at the expense of its immanent form” (397). This involves giving art a positive social function, such as pedagogical instruction for amateur musicians, or the forging of solidarity in workers’ choirs. There is a resemblance to surrealist music in that both resist aesthetic autonomy: “[T]his [surrealist music...] approaches man so directly that he will no longer even consider the possibility of the autonomous work of art” (409). However, Adorno quickly dismisses the vast majority of use music as being indistinguishable from the productions of the culture industry (397). He asserts that even in its elevated mode as communal music, it remains inferior to surrealist music, saying of the latter: “[I]t is the living negation of the possibility of a positive communal music, which collapses in the laughter of devilish vulgar music as which true use music is exposed” (409). The place of use music/communal music at the bottom of his hierarchy of the different types of music is clear. Following the lead of “On the Social Situation of Music,” I will largely bypass it here and instead take as my framework the tripartite scheme of new music, objectivist music and surrealist music, and their respective representatives Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Brecht/Weill.

SCHOENBERG

Another early essay by Adorno, “Mahler Today” (2002a [1930]), contains a parenthetical remark about the Dadaist in close proximity to a digression on Schoenberg:

The musician [Gustav Mahler] who was once ridiculed for using car horns and sirens, like an impudent dadaist, is no longer objective enough for the most gray-bearded conservatory types, and every better music history seminar considers itself to be more modern than he as it recites its concepts of play of movement and process music, of pre-classical and neo-classical polyphony. (603)

Adorno himself does not dismiss the Dadaist as impudent, but instead attributes that opinion to conservative critics of Mahler. The main point is that the work of this composer, once rejected as extreme, is now considered outmoded: “[U]nmodern before it was properly modern” (603). This corresponds to the alleged treatment of Schoenberg: “[C]onsigned to the future as a lonely prophet until it was concluded that he had been surpassed as a lonely *artiste*” (603). Adorno describes this position as “purposely ideological” in the case of Mahler, and as a “reactionary trick” in the case of Schoenberg (603–604). Derived from Futurism, the Dadaist’s bruitistic effects were indeed a prominent feature of the movement’s first staged performances, such as Hugo Ball’s *Nativity Play (Bruitist)* in Zurich, and Jefim Golyscheff’s *Anti-Symphony: Musical Circular Guillotine* in Berlin (Huelsenbeck 1989: 25–26; Rasula 2015: 24–25; Ingram 2017: 11–12). The use of noise is subject to the opprobrium of official culture, and by virtue of this reaction it could perhaps be ranked alongside the radical innovations of Mahler and Schoenberg. However, “Mahler Today” tacitly endorses a dismissive judgment on Dada, which apparently occupies a subordinate position to new music in the alternative canon proposed by Adorno.

Adorno’s awareness of Dadaist music seems to have been limited, not going much beyond the popular notion of the purveyors of noise that is repeated in “Mahler Today.” Schoenberg may be placed on the fringes of the movement, if only because his fame was such that any avant-garde tendency interested in music at the time was bound to come into contact with his works and those of his circle in Vienna. His early experiments with free atonality were presented by Suzanne Perrottet at Dadaist soirées in Zurich: “I was so enthusiastic about this new dissonant music that I talked the Dadaists into performing it” (qtd. in Goergen 1996: 162). It reportedly met with a muted response, and there seems to have been no serious or sustained engagement on the part of the Dadaists (Goergen 1996: 162–163). In Berlin, Dada had the brief participation of composers who were already, or would become, more or less identified with new music: Hanz Heinz Stuckenschmidt, Erwin Schulhoff, and Stefan Wolpe (Bergius 2003: 257–259; Ingram 2017: 12–13; Wolpe 1986: 202–15). In Paris, Schoenberg was even less prominent as a point of reference for Dada, the musical output of which is better represented by the iconoclasm of Erik Satie and Francis Picabia, both in their individual compositions and their collaboration on *Relâche: Instantaneist Ballet in Two Acts, a Cinematic Intermission, and a Dog’s Tail* (Ingram 2017: 16, 21–23). Dadaist

composers did incorporate dissonant elements, from the rhythmic but erratic dances of Hans Heusser in Zurich, to the random selection of notes by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in Paris (Goergen 1996: 157–158; Ingram 2017: 16–17). However, Schoenberg’s dissonance functioned in a different way, being more deeply rooted in the immanent development of the musical material. In contrast, Dadaist music is characterized by improvised noise and aleatory procedures that are anathema to the rigorously worked-out compositional logic of new music, most pronounced in the twelve-tone phase. In truth, Schoenberg’s reputation for generating controversy was probably the main basis for any appeal he may have had to the Dadaists.

STRAVINSKY

There is another tangential reference to the Dadaist in *Philosophy of New Music*, where this figure is connected to Stravinsky:

Musical infantilism [*Infantilismus*] belongs to a movement that everywhere devised schizophrenic models as mimetic defense against combat psychosis: Around 1918, Stravinsky was attacked as a dadaist, and *The Soldier’s Tale* as well as *Renard* shattered all unity of the person in order to *épater les bourgeois*. (126)

As in “Mahler Today,” the Dadaist is seen as a byword for the worst excesses of advanced art, now from the perspective of conservative critics of Stravinsky. Like *The Soldier’s Tale* of 1918, *Renard the Fox* of 1916 is contemporaneous with Dada, which also emerged in the context of the First World War. The movement, it is suggested, shares the objective attributed to these works of shocking the bourgeoisie, by staging the destruction of the unified subject, for which the immediate stimulus is shell shock. In a footnote to this passage, Adorno highlights the potential for such an approach to become conformist: “[T]he composer who sets out to *épater les bourgeois* is always preoccupied with considerations of effect, even the effect of alienation[.] [...] This is why collusion between the intention to *épater* and the status quo is ultimately so much easier” (188). *The Soldier’s Tale* and *Renard the Fox* are identified as key works of musical infantilism, following the use of folklore in earlier productions and anticipating the later turn to neoclassicism in Stravinsky’s artistic development (121). Dada’s alleged affinity with the alienating infantilism of this

phase of objectivist music is not further explored by Adorno in *Philosophy of New Music*.

The Dadaists made numerous attempts to associate themselves with this famous composer, no doubt motivated in part by a desire to share in the artistic legitimacy accorded him as a leading avant-garde figure of the time (Ingram 2017: 20–21). As with Schoenberg, Stravinsky was most likely attractive to members of the movement because of his scandalous reputation, stemming largely from accounts of the alleged riot at the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*. In a fictionalized account of the “First Dada World Congress” in Geneva, Walter Serner claims that there was a similarly violent reaction to Stravinsky’s *The Song of the Nightingale*: “When Serner jumped on a chair and exclaimed ‘Vive Stravinsky! Vive Dada!’, an uproar broke out which even the attendants could not get under control. The evening ended in street fights, which Serner and Stravinsky escaped only by making a hasty exit by car” (qtd. in Goergen 1996: 162). Coincidentally, Adorno uses the same form of words as an ironic exclamation (“Vive Stravinsky! Vive Dada!”), in an early review of his that is critical of Stravinsky, particularly *The Soldier’s Tale* (qtd. in Müller-Doohm 2005: 46). In this and other compositions of the same period, Stravinsky incorporates elements of popular music, a preference he shares with the Dadaists. In Zurich, Emmy Hennings performed folk songs and cabaret chansons (Hemus 2009: 30). In Berlin, George Grosz tap-danced to ragtime and jazz records (Bergius 2003: 56). In Paris, Georges Auric and Darius Milhaud, loosely associated with the movement, participated in the wider trend of jazz-influenced compositions (Ingram 2017: 22). The “Dutch Dada Tour” featured piano recitals by Petronella van Moorsel, whose repertoire included “Ragtime” from *The Soldier’s Tale* (Van den Berg 2002: 155). Credited by Adorno with avoiding the pitfalls of folklorism and neoclassicism during this transitional period, Stravinsky neither attempts to recover an idealized lost authenticity, nor to reconstitute an illusory aesthetic totality, an uncompromising attitude that arguably brings him closer to the Dadaists.

BRECHT/WEILL

In the later essay “Commitment” (1992 [1962]), Dada is introduced as an aside to a critique of Brecht that also touches on his collaborations with Weill:

[T]he process of aesthetic reduction he [Brecht] undertakes for the sake of political truth works against political truth. That truth requires countless mediations, which Brecht disdains. What has artistic legitimacy as an alienating infantilism [*Infantilismus*]¹—Brecht’s first plays kept company with Dada—becomes infanthility [*Infantilität*] when it claims theoretical and social validity. (82)

The association with the early Brecht gives Dada a certain artistic legitimacy for what is described as its alienating infantilism, echoing the language of *Philosophy of New Music*. His first plays, which are said to be closer to the spirit of the movement, are compared favorably with the output of his mature period, which tends toward reductive didacticism. The latter is judged to be illegitimate, on political as well as artistic grounds. This position is based on a distinction between social impact and social import, with the latter, an indirect form of critique, being preferred to the former, the aim of politically motivated art. As for the collaborations with Weill, Adorno does not deal with them directly in this essay, but suggests that they precede the degeneration from infantilism to infanthility. He refers back with approval to *Mahagonny*, in relation to the transitional *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*: “*St. Joan* is set in a Chicago that is a middle ground between economic data and a Wild West fairy tale of capitalism from *Mahagonny*. The more intimately Brecht involves himself with the former and the less he aims at imagery, the more he misses the essence of capitalism” (83). According to Adorno, Brecht goes on to advance a positive claim to theoretical and social validity on behalf of his alienating infantilism, a mistake that the Dadaists for the most part did not make.

Brecht was never a member of the movement, but he had connections with some of the more politically engaged contingent in Berlin. In his memoirs, Richard Huelsenbeck recalls that John Heartfield was lost to Dada when he came under Brecht’s influence: “[T]he success of *Threepenny Opera* convinced him of Brecht’s literary and, last but not least, political value” (Huelsenbeck 1974: 73). Weill was even less involved than Schoenberg and Stravinsky, despite moving in the same circles as Stuckenschmidt and Wolpe, with whom he attended the private musical evenings of the revolutionary artists’ organization the November Group (Clarkson 2003: 7). Dada’s clearest link to surrealist music, beyond these personal and political connections, is that following its dissolution in Paris, it fed directly into the establishment of Surrealism. Ex-Dadaists founded the new movement, which in important ways continued the

assault on aesthetic and social norms initiated by its predecessor. In his reflections on Surrealism, Adorno does not mention the earlier movement, although he occasionally speaks of them together elsewhere in his work (Adorno 1991: 86–90, 2002b: 658, 2007: 38). However, Dada and Surrealism should not be too hastily conflated, as this has often served to obscure their differences, as well as other significant relationships, for example between Dada and Constructivism. In common with Brecht/Weill, the Dadaists pursued the aggressive fragmentation of canonical and popular forms, the pieces of which were reassembled into new wholes imbued with socially critical intent. This is less evident in their musical output than in the collages and photomontages produced in Berlin by figures like Hannah Höch, Raoul Hausmann, and Johannes Baader. In my view, Dada shares with surrealist music the thoroughgoing negativity that distinguishes it from the bulk of objectivist music, with the exception of works such as *The Soldier's Tale*.

ALIENATING INFANTILISM

In these comments, which are scattered throughout his oeuvre from “Mahler Today” in 1930 to “Commitment” in 1962, Adorno presents an interpretation of the movement that is largely consistent in its main points. In summary, Dada is said to be engaged in a struggle against artistic convention, and indeed against the status quo in general. Its alleged impudence provokes the wrath of the ruling class, as it sets out to shock the bourgeoisie. The intention is to produce an experience of alienation in the audience, as a critical reflection of the alienation of art. When writing about infantilism, Adorno uses the term “*Infantilismus*,” which designates a style dedicated to generating alienation. There is a pejorative charge to it, as it seems to imply some degree of retardation or regression, even though he is careful to distinguish it from infantility or “*Infantilität*.” Similarly, “Dada” as a word is suggestive of baby talk. However, it would be a mistake to equate this approach with immaturity or backwardness, since it must be understood as an emphatic response to modern conditions. The consciousness of childhood is evoked, partly as a refuge from alienation (as with folklorism and neoclassicism), and partly because the recourse to the infantile has shock value. There is a risk that by focusing on social impact rather than social import, Dada weakens the resistance it offers, and makes itself more amenable to the forces of conformism. Adorno’s argument suggests that its best defense against recuperation is to

hold fast to its negativity, and not to make any positive claims, either to authenticity or aesthetic totality on the one hand, or to social or theoretical validity on the other.

In terms of the typology of contemporary music outlined in “On the Social Situation of Music,” Adorno’s Dada should be situated at the intersection between objectivist and surrealist music, tending toward the latter. As noted above, Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale* is identified as the point of transition between these two types of music, preparing the way for the mutations of popular music in Brecht/Weill’s *Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*. Analyzing *The Soldier’s Tale* in *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno elaborates on how this work appropriates the debased forms of “the lowest and most vulgar music,” including “the march, the idiotic scraping on the violin, the outmoded waltz,” as well as “the current dances, tango and ragtime”:

Through its affinity to this sphere of music, the infantilism [*Infantilismus*] gains a “realistic,” if negative, hold on whatever the going thing is and at the same time distributes shocks by cornering people so closely with this familiar, popular music that they are as frightened by it as by something purely mediated by the market, reified, and utterly remote. Convention is reversed, for now it is exclusively through conventional means that music produces alienation. The music discovers the latent horror of inferior music in botched performances, in its being fitted together out of disorganized particles, and draws its principle of organization from the universal disorganization. The infantilism is the style of the worn-out and exhausted. Its sound can be compared to the visual aspect of painted-up postage stamps: fragile and yet gaplessly dense, glued-together montages, as threatening as in the worst dreams. (133)

In addition to what may be a distant reference to the collages of Kurt Schwitters, Adorno’s phrasing recalls the montages that incorporate elements of nineteenth-century bourgeois musical culture and twentieth-century consumer music, as described in relation to surrealist music in “On the Social Situation of Music.” He observes that infantilism often attaches itself to popular music, most typically jazz or other forms of contemporary dance music. These are exposed as bankrupt because they are treated as interchangeable, deconstructed, and manipulated. Brecht/Weill follow Stravinsky in repurposing conventional means to produce alienation, laying bare the untruth of the culture industry. According to a

footnote in *Philosophy of New Music*: “Stravinsky, through distortion, exposes what is shabby, worn out, and market enthralled in the established dance music of the last thirty years. He in a sense compels its shortcomings to speak, and transforms its standardized formulae into ciphers of disintegration” (188).

How far does this account of alienating infantilism correspond to the actual practice of the Dadaists, and does it justify the association Adorno posits? On the face of it, Dada’s treatment of popular music has some similarities to the approach he attributes to Stravinsky’s middle period and to Brecht/Weill. From the beginning, the musical program of the Cabaret Voltaire was extremely heterogeneous, including cabaret chansons and folk music alongside works by established composers like Camille Saint-Saëns (Ball 1996: 56). This juxtaposition of popular and canonical elements collapsed the hierarchical distinction between low and high art, elevating the former at the expense of the latter. However, the Dadaists did not simply affirm popular music in opposition to official culture. They also sought to undermine its own stability by defamiliarizing familiar forms through avant-garde experimentation (Ingram 2017: 24). Hennings’ renditions of popular songs, for example, were complicated by her subversive performance style, which reportedly included an unsettling shrill voice, and a repertoire of obscure gestures (Richter 2007: 26–27; Hemus 2009: 28). In many respects, Dada resembles the above description of alienating infantilism, especially in its transformation of otherwise recognizable and reassuring source material into something remote and threatening, but it is important not to overstate the part played by a critically inflected populism. What is generally missing from the movement’s musical production is the organizing principle of montage. In its wider practice, Dada embraced minor arts such as puppetry and embroidery. There were also many instances of montage effects in literature and the visual arts. Höch drew on popular sources for her collages and photomontages, radically recontextualizing the mass-produced imagery of fashion magazines and illustrated sports journals. Similarly, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven’s “Subjoyride” combined advertising slogans in a poetic construction that charged them with new meanings (von Freytag-Loringhoven 2011: 99–102). However, I would question the extent to which the concept of alienating infantilism is adequate to encapsulate the breadth of interventions and provocations undertaken by the Dadaists. In my view, Dada is most reminiscent of surrealistic music in its destruction

of formal immanence, and its opposition to aesthetic autonomy, features which are identified but not emphasized by Adorno in “On the Social Situation of Music.”

NOTES

1. Thanks to Esther Leslie for her supervision of the doctoral research on which this essay is partly based.
2. I have also explored Dadaist music at greater length elsewhere (Ingram). Not included here for reasons of space, Adorno’s other scattered remarks about Dada, including in connection with the composers Ernst Krenek and John Cage, will be the subject of a future article.
3. Following the revised translation of “On the Social Situation of Music” in the collection *Essays on Music*, I use the term “surrealistic music,” as distinct from “surrealist music.” The suffix “-ic” conveys the distance between this type of music and (French) Surrealism, i.e., the “official” group led by André Breton. The former may resemble the latter stylistically, but the two should not be conflated.

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CHAPTER 4

Postmodernism, Avant-Garde, and Neo-Dadaism: The Legacy of Boguslaw Schaeffer

Michał Zdunik

Abstract The main topic of my chapter is the neo-avant-garde and neo-Dadaist influence and inspiration in the work of Boguslaw Schaeffer—one of the most interesting artists of Central Europe after the Second World War. Like prominent artists of the “classical” avant-gardes (e.g., Artaud, Schwitters, Duchamp, or Klein), Schaeffer worked extensively in many fields of artistic expression: he was best known as a composer and music theorist, but he also wrote plays, created graphic art, and practiced philosophy. In my essay I would like to show that Schaeffer is essentially a continuation of the pre-war avant-garde tradition. However, this is not a simple imitation of the old artistic language. On the contrary, the Polish composer takes techniques and forms typical of avant-garde and Dadaist aesthetics (e.g., collage, provocation, palimpsest, surrealist poetry, transformation and repetition of everyday language, poetics of the absurd) and transforms them into his own, independent form.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The aim of this chapter is to present the work of Bogusław Schaeffer (1929–2019) as an example of how avant-garde and Dadaist formulas are reinterpreted through the use of postmodern aesthetics in the works of the Polish modernist and postmodernist composer. The term “creator” seems most appropriate to describe Schaeffer as an artist; he was a composer and playwright, but also a music theorist, historian, printmaker, and university professor with a Ph.D. in philosophy. The scope of Schaeffer’s achievements seems almost unbelievable; his oeuvre includes over 550 pieces of music in 23 different genres, forms, and textures, and over 40 plays. It is therefore not surprising that Schaeffer, one of the pioneers of experimental and electronic music composition in Poland, is today recognized in his homeland as the father of “avant-garde and new music,” as well as the initiator of the genres of music theater and happening in Polish art (Romańska 2012: 13–34).¹

The musical language of Schaeffer’s work, developed over a period of 60 years, oscillates between serialism and sonorism, between the advanced use of 12-tone technique and postmodern stylization combined with intertextual pastiche. However, regardless of the style adopted, Schaeffer has always followed the path of the classical avant-garde of the early twentieth century, whose basic idea revolved around “novelty”: a revolutionary production of new aesthetics and a radical break with the existing, coherent literary, musical, and visual language, which becomes the main goal of the artwork and its construction rule (Bürger 1984:59–64). The theory of the avant-garde, as Bürger writes in his work, involves a self-referential commentary on art itself, which violates the coherence of the work, somehow moving it to a meta-level, undermining its “autonomy” and seriousness and at the same time exposes its artificiality (35–53, 73–82).

This new order, reminiscent of Dadaist projects, defines the Polish artist’s playwriting, which revolves largely around metatheatricality, presenting ironic, absurd and physical games, as well as text fragments assembled according to the rules of collage, often in the form of surreal scenarios. It should also be noted that for Schaeffer, theatrical composition is at once textual, dramaturgical, and musical, subject to the laws of a strict score rather than a freely interpreted drama. Similarly, the author interprets his graphic works, which function simultaneously as paintings and scores of musical and theatrical compositions. Such a strategy, in which the work of art is situated on the border between different languages and modes, can

be combined with the project of the “total artist and artwork,” which also characterizes a number of avant-garde works by authors such as Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp.

This brief and preliminary insight shows that Schaeffer’s work is based on three modernist and avant-garde aesthetics: Dadaism, Surrealism, and the avant-garde “totality” of the artwork. However, the Polish polyartist (Zdunik 2014: 38) is not a mere continuator who imitates old formal and genre patterns. The fourth component of his work is the core idea of postmodernism, where the main assumption is to constantly cite distant aesthetics and models, invalidating them and showing their artificiality and conventionality, resulting in the ultimate demystification and defictionalization of artistic languages (Lyotard 1984: 71–82). Such an original strategy, which ultimately combines contradictory paradigms (i.e., modernism and postmodernism), can be called the Polish “post/neo-avant-garde,” “(neo)postmodernist avant-garde,” or even, as a consequence, “post/neo-dadaism” or “post/neo-surrealism,” which will be the main focus of the present chapter. Obviously, the number of works discussed must be limited; thus, as a researcher specializing in literary and theatrical studies, I will discuss only theatrical texts. However, the act of considering the concept of the “totality of the artwork” and Schaeffer’s strategy should serve as a sufficient illustration of his artistic technique. Therefore, I will first describe three modernist/avant-garde sources of the author’s aesthetic, which will then lead to a conclusion on how they are processed and deconstructed with the postmodern component. Secondly, an autonomous and completely original example of the reinterpretation of the avant-garde and the Dadaist heritage within the culture of Central and Eastern Europe will be presented (i.e., the entire oeuvre of Bogusław Schaeffer).

THREE MODERNIST SOURCES: DADAISM

One of the basic assumptions of Dadaism was the rule of collage (Rubin 1992: 19), which aimed at atomizing the homogeneous structure of the artwork and tearing out its individual elements. Such a procedure would completely change the context of these elements, remove them from the original whole, deprive them of their previous meaning, and make it impossible to formulate a holistic conception of the work as a unity of meaning (Bürger 1984: 70, 79). This kind of artistic activity is strongly visible in the works of the French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, whose work was exceptionally important for Bogusław Schaeffer. It can be argued that

the Dadaist collage consists of ready-mades: originally selected and modified objects which, according to Duchamp, only attain the rank of artistic expression or its part through the artist's declaration and "perspective," thus creating a new contextualization—just as in the case of collage (Richter 1997: 88; Rubin 1992:19).²

Of course, in their original assumptions, the techniques of collage and the ready-mades referred to visual work, but they were quickly adapted to the needs of poetry, prose, and film editing and music. The poetics of theatrical performance, a space that combines different media and involves many artistic languages, seems to be an ideal formula for Dadaism, which often freely crossed the boundaries of specific arts. Moreover, one of the basic gestures of the Dadaists—the authorial designation of an object/fragment as a whole work, together with the arbitrary and intentional inscription of the work into the collage structure—can be described as "performance." Also, the creative practice of the Dada movement itself regularly included provocative performances (to mention only Duchamp's work).

Bogusław Schaeffer clearly uses the Dadaist collage technique and the Ready-Mades strategy. For him, they are not only sources of inspiration, but rather guiding principles of the whole work, which this essay will demonstrate on the basis of his three pieces: "Scenario for a Non-Existent but Possible Instrumental Actor" (1976), "Quartet for Four Actors" (1979), and "Scenario for Three Actors" (1987), which were translated into English by Magda Romańska and published in an anthology in 2012. The selection made by the editors of the anthology, although very limited, is quite representative of the artist's work. The collage quality of Schaeffer's plays is clearly visible from a macro perspective; none of his works can be understood as a linear whole with a logical and cause-and-effect dramaturgy, but rather as a set of different, often completely contradictory speech genres. They include:

- 1) pseudo-avant-garde, nonsensical poems, first-person accounts stylized to sound vulgar and colloquial, fragments in other languages, police interrogations, an existential poem, and press releases—in "Scenario for a non-existent but possible instrumental actor" (Schaeffer 2012: 35–74).
- 2) a self-referential lecture stylized to sound like a scientific speech; everyday small talk of strangers; a philosophical dissertation,

newspaper news, and crude poems—in “Scenario for Three Actors” (107–57).

- 3) written melodic and rhythmic repetitions, a colloquial dialogue, linguistic puns, fragments of songs, a fragment stylized to represent Russian realistic prose, an excerpt from a pseudo-dictionary, a newspaper advertisement, an intellectual debate—in “Quartet for Four Actors” (75–106).

In addition, there are graphic collages in “Scenario for Three Actors” and “Quartet for Four Actors,” which are at the same time unrestrained musical scores of gestures and actions, that is, they contain a large margin of improvisational freedom. Each of these elements is basically an autonomous fragment, which clearly indicates its distinctiveness (i.e., it is not related to the other parts in any particular way) as well as its purposeful “incompatibility” with the holistic composition of the drama. Therefore, they can be described as ready-mades, included in the collage of the text—as in Dadaist works. Moreover, Schaeffer’s objects are so different from each other that, when combined into a whole, they appear absurd and nonsensical, as if they were just empty acoustic/graphic/textual artifacts; pure signifiers that break the primary rule of the duality of the sign according to Ferdinand de Saussure’s referential conception of language. The Dadaist paradigm followed a similar rule—it was interested in the object itself, its physicality and materiality, manifested in the visual or acoustic aspect.

This rupture, at the most basic level of linguistic communication, led to a situation in which many fragments of such works made a humorous impression on the audience. Such humor and the use of the *buffo* tone was also one of the conventions of the Dada movement. This is why Schaeffer includes in his plays purely physical actions without any sense of a larger purpose: banging a chair against the floor, roaring at a wall, wrestling with a bed sheet, eating and drinking while burping, slamming a wet rag against the floor in the scenario for a non-existent but possible instrumental actor (2012: 40), or rhythmic repetitions of words and sentences without any meaningful sequence in the “Quartet for Four Actors” (86). The whole, understood in this way, resembles a performance, one of the aims of which is to prove that, depending on formal composition, dramaturgical precision, or, perhaps most importantly, the author’s intention, anything can become a fully fledged work of art. This is another, equally important link

between the playwright's work and the practice of Duchamp, Schwitters, or Tzara.

Thus, as it can be clearly seen, the Dadaist element is definitely the strongest in the described work of Bogusław Schaeffer—it operates on the macro (the collage technique) and micro scale (the treatment of text fragments as decontextualized ready-mades) and in the performative sense; what is more, the playwright also borrows a “symbolic break-up” from Dadaist aesthetics, which pays attention not only to referential meanings, but also to the sign itself. On the other hand, what distinguishes Schaeffer from the first Dadaists is his use of a metatheatrical, self-referential, and postdramatic compositional framework. As will be shown, this leads to the conclusion that the playwright does not aesthetically follow Dadaism, but rather undermines it and reads it critically. This question will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

THREE MODERNIST SOURCES: SURREALISM

In Bogusław Schaeffer's work, Surrealism is not as visible as the Dadaist paradigm, but it is evident enough to call it a conscious inspiration. The author borrows from the poetics of Surrealism that which was fundamental to the movement, which is visible in the quoted manifesto, and which comes from the etymology of the French *surrealisme*: the existence above reality, or the denial of the rules of a rational and material reality. This is why one of the most important concepts for the Surrealists is dreaming (Rubin 63; Ades 1995; Kuenzil 1991: 18–24), a process in which the linear order of meanings is annulled in exchange for free associations and combinations of often contradictory orders and elements of the real world. Of course, what is often emphasized by researchers (Rubin 63; Ades; Kuenzil) is that the emergence of Surrealism coincides with the birth of psychoanalysis, which became not only a therapeutic school, but also a method for creating and interpreting texts.

However, the Polish artist does not refer to Freud's theory *per se*, but rather to Surrealism. It is most visible in his basic authorial assumptions, which are clearly included in the title of “Scenario for a Non-Existent, but Possible Instrumental Actor.” Of course, the performer himself exists on the stage—he even performs a series of physical actions, so his stage presence is extremely material. However, this presence functions as if it were broken; it is fractured by a surprising, compositional framework; thus, to define the actor as “non-existent” means that the playwright here assumes

a different kind of existence, one that is beyond a rational reality, somewhere on the edge of experience. In the end, it means “non-existence,” but also “possibility,” and therefore the potential for non-existence; just like a dream, which is not real and does not represent what happened, but only represents an alternative version of the events that were dreamed, which function as nightmares and hidden desires. Moreover, such a surrealist compositional framework, in which we assume that the reality depicted on stage is governed by the law of dreams, also explains the non-linear, palimpsest and collage form of the work; in this case, one can even say that the whole is composed according to Dadaist principles. The very question of how the actor functions in such an unstable position is another part of Schaeffer’s crucial reflection on the nature of art, theater, and representation itself. The artist asks how the theatrical persona exists, what is the status of the words spoken on the theater stage (false/true/fake), and what is the ontological anchorage of the created reality?

THREE MODERNIST SOURCES: THE TOTAL WORK OF ART

As part of the “total art” project, Bogusław Schaeffer’s dramas not only used a variety of aesthetic languages, but above all they combined a number of techniques of artistic expression, operating with audio, visual, textual, and performative media. The concept of “total art” can thus be understood in a different way—as an artistic activity carried out simultaneously in several fields, where, as a consequence, specific creative techniques are replicated and used interchangeably, for example, as compositional strategies in theatrical and literary works, as visual forms in the performance of musical scores, or as literary elements in musical works. This polyphonic way of thinking is linked to the modernist project, one of the main paradigms of which, as already mentioned, was the creation of a new language capable of expressing the experience of modernity. In a manifesto by Kurt Schwitters, who initiated the Merz movement, we can read that every form can serve as a carrier of artistic communication and that what is important is the meaning that is attributed to it (Schwitters 1981: 59). Similarly, according to another iconic author of Dadaism, Marcel Duchamp, the work of art is created in the process of attributing a specific status to it, thus making the creative process itself dependent only on intentions. Therefore, in this sense, the whole reality is a multilayered creation that comes into existence in *statu nascendi* by virtue of the performative gesture.

In Bogusław Schaeffer's work, "totality" is understood not only as a revolutionary strategy for naming phenomena that are conventionally excluded from the sphere of artistic expression, but also as the implementation of specific languages in the structure of dramatic texts that are strikingly similar to musical scores. The most obvious realization of this idea can be found in the "Quartet for Four Actors," where the title of the work itself explicitly refers to a musical genre. This collage-like work employs the formula of postmodern composition, in which contradictory sonic elements, such as serialist clusters and baroque stylizations, are sometimes clearly juxtaposed. Schaeffer, it should be emphasized, combines purely literary and theatrical elements (e.g., realistic dialogues) with carefully written sound segments (a complete list of these segments is given in the section on Dadaism). The musical elements include polyphonic singing, rhythmic stone-breaking—according to specific models—sonorist singing of sounds, playing the harmonicas, rhythmic shouting of syllables, inhalation/exhalation and whistling, canon, *mormorando* (whispering). Very often, lines with grammatically correct sentences are organized in a "musical" way (i.e., the exact number of repetitions is determined) with the use of Italian agogic and dynamic terms (e.g., in "Quartet for Four Actors," while the more conventional "Scenario for Three Actors" is divided into four parts: Allegro, Minuet, Andante, Finale). Therefore, it is clear that Schaeffer, who is particularly visible in the "Quartet for Four Actors," "musicalizes" literary and theatrical fragments, that is, he treats the language and actions of the actors as a space for rhythmic and dynamic processing, where the sonic value is above the semantics; whereas the parts composed of conventional scenes are only particles of this "sound collage," which somewhat undermines their semantic and dramatic value. However, the conclusion can be reversed, and it can perhaps be argued that it is the music that is "dramatized" and "textualized," losing its autonomy to function only as an element of a conventionalized theatrical formula.

Schaeffer creates a situation of infinite ambivalence by avoiding any direct identification of the genre he uses—his works are at once musical, theatrical, and literary. In the early stagings of his plays, including the performance *TIS MW2* (1972), based on the novel *Pałuba* [The Hag] by Karol Irzykowski, or *Howl* (1974), based on the poem by Allen Ginsberg, the theatrical, literary, and auditory layers are complemented by the level of visibility of musical scores, which function as separate, autonomous works of art and as such are exhibited in galleries and published in albums.

Certainly, they resemble a musical score or a theatrical record only at the most basic level—most of the labels are Schaeffer’s authorial invention, functioning in an ad hoc, disposable way throughout the notation, which also marks a very large space for improvisation. This means that the performers become the true co-creators of a multi-dimensional work—because they make a unique reading of such a freely constructed notation. In this way, the field of the “totality” of art is also expanded in terms of the performer-text-composer relationship: not only does such a work function independently (as a print or a text), being polyphonically dependent (prints function as a score, theatrical form as a musical composition, sounds as carriers of literary content), but it also has two creators—the composer/printmaker/playwright and the performer, thus creating a different reading each time. And indeed, the final form of such a work (in this case, *TIS MW2* and *Howl*) is extremely interesting and polyphonic: one can perceive an abstract action of an actor and a dancer, the sounds of a musical composition and the text spoken by the reciter, and the audience becomes aware of the graphic score. The whole encompasses all models of artistic expression: it is simultaneously a composition, a graphic, a performance, a pantomime, a ballet, and a recitation; and these elements cannot be separated from each other when the work is received. Thus, we are confronted with total art, in which each element has its artistic meaning—the ideal of Dadaist poetics.

CONCLUSIONS AND UNIFYING ELEMENT: A COMBINATION OF POSTMODERNISM AND POSTDRAMATISM

As has been shown in this chapter, Bogusław Schaeffer’s texts are constructed according to the rules of avant-garde poetics: Dadaism, Surrealism, and the “totality of art.” However, they do not form a coherent program of inspiration and continuation of aesthetic patterns, but rather a free collection of different paradigms and inspirations. In other words, it is a collage made in the Dadaist idiom that functions on the meta-level, in the deep structure, where individual artistic techniques and influences need not be connected in any clear way, nor arranged as a clear whole.

Such an unrestricted way of dealing with specific aesthetic strategies from old eras is not so much an implementation of the formal strategy of the avant-garde (which, despite its outward polyphony, was internally coherent and consistent), but rather an appropriation of the postmodern

paradigm. Postmodernism presupposes a complete confusion of orders and the annulment of the existing hierarchy, as well as the impossibility of any coherent narratives. Postmodernism, as Barthes aptly noted in his famous essay “Myth Today” (1972: 109–64), distorts the dual structure of the sign system, which is based on referentiality and the presence of the signifier and the signified. In the new order, only the signifier element functions without any external reference, becoming an empty acoustic string of letters or gestures that does not refer to a coherent, external, and ordered system. In this sense, when it becomes impossible to create a new aesthetic language—because the dual order that constituted that language has been destroyed—it is only possible to repeat, transform, and defy old patterns. Anything is possible—because signs are not carriers of authentic experience, but rather “texts” that can be arranged in different configurations.

Postmodernism provides the environment for the birth of postdramatic theater, first described in the canonical work of Hans-Thies Lehmann (1944–2022). The German theater scholar shows how theatrical performance breaks with the coherent dramatic text and, consequently, with the notion of representation. In a postdramatic play or text, the actor/performer demonstrates both onstage and in the text that he/she is aware of the fictionality of his/her own role. In doing so, the actor points to his or her simulation, exposes the conventionality and impossibility of any identification, and thus, in a broader sense, defies the appearance of tragedy. For Lehmann, this is a gesture that goes far beyond the traditional “play within a play” device, because it completely undermines the symbolic system and negatively shows the current cultural heritage and its inadequacy. The only way out is “repetition,” which is a one-dimensional activity without any reference (Lehmann 2006: 16–133).

In the three texts by Schaeffer, the postdramatic element is exceptionally visible—it clearly connects the plays and also shows the author’s final ideological framework. It is noteworthy that all these plays have titles that indicate their “theatricality”—they are a quartet or a scenario for actors. Thus, from the very beginning, the author constructs a compositional framework that does not allow for the identification of the actor with the character and the creation of a sense of theatrical illusion in the spectator. Moreover, the most important aspect is that the actors in these works are not traditional protagonists with their own psychology and emotional logic (in which case we could say that the performance involves the “play within a play” device), but mere performers. They are Edward Craig’s

“Uber-Marionettes”³ without a specific identity (understood as musicians); elements of theatrical scores, whose meaning and representation are not important, but their specific sound and visual form is. Thus, the actors—characters brought back to life as elements of a collage—have no primary role in shaping the meaning of the work. To further emphasize the postdramatic quality, Schaeffer prevents the actors (who are conspicuously often referred to by their real names) from developing an internal process for a given role. Each scene is a separate entity, sometimes quite different from the previous one, as if it were taken from a completely different order—just like ready-mades. Thus, the performance cannot be fully successful, and the theater of representation cannot be brought into existence—the actors, which is also an important theme, discuss the notion of conventional, representational art as such, while at the same time showing its ultimate impossibility.

This combination of the modernist avant-garde paradigm with postdramatic elements shows that Bogusław Schaeffer blends elements of Dadaist, Surrealist, and “totalist” aesthetics in a very interesting way. He treats them not so much as living ideas, which still have their revolutionary potential and the power to change the language of art, but as quotes of empty texts—which can be processed and arranged in any configuration. For him, they are only ready-mades (it can be a quotation itself, but also a specific technique or formal strategy) and fragments of musical, rhythmic and visual collage structures, deprived of their old context and function. In this way, Schaeffer questions the formulas of the avant-garde and shows their inadequacy, as well as the exhaustion of Dadaist, Surrealist or “totalist” formulas. For the artist, they are only pretentious, empty texts; facades that do not conceal any meaning. There is a great distance between the audience, the performers, and these formulas that defy any permanent identification. Perhaps with a sense of nostalgic regret, Schaeffer creates an avant-garde simulacrum that can be reproduced indefinitely and without consequences—it has already lost all power and is only a part of the pretended play and a fragment of the musical, one-dimensional score. We can therefore describe Schaeffer as a postmodern dadaist, surrealist and avant-gardist, or—using the three elements—“post-dadaist,” “post-surrealist,” and “post-avant-gardist.” In a single phrase—a postmodern total artist, or alternatively, a post-totalist artist.

NOTES

1. Many of Schaeffer's musical, theatrical, and graphic works can be seen in a virtual archive of his work, available online. See reference list.
2. In his book "Theory of the Avant-Garde," Peter Bürger explains the meaning of ready-mades—ordinary objects transformed into works of art: "When Duchamp signed mass-produced objects (a urinal, a bottle dryer) and sent them to art exhibitions, he negated the category of individual production. The signature, whose very purpose is to mark what is individual in the work, that it owes its existence to this particular artist, is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. [...] Duchamp's ready-mades are not works of art, but manifestations. The meaning cannot be deduced from the form-content totality of the individual object that Duchamp signed, but only from the contrast between the mass-produced object on the one hand and the signature and art exhibition on the other" (1984: 52–53).
3. "Uber-Marionettes" was a theory developed in 1908, by the English director, actor and stage designer Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966). "Uber-Marionette" meant an actor who did not so much embody a coherent character as function as a carrier of symbols and values. The "marionette" is thus completely subordinated to the main idea of the theatrical spectacle.

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CHAPTER 5

Alberto Greco's *Vivo-Dito*, Lettrism, and the Prophecies of the Proper Name

Fernando Herrero-Matoses

Abstract This chapter explores the legacy of Lettrism in the practices of Argentine artist Alberto Greco as a means of investigating the self-proclaimed prophetic narrative of neo-avant-garde artists in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It examines how Greco's ephemeral public actions (*Vivo-Dito*) in the streets of Paris, Buenos Aires, or Madrid, in which he repeatedly proliferated his own name as both signature and work of art, opened up exploratory avenues in which the artistic self was both inscribed and dispossessed. This text builds on Andrew Hussey's interpretation of Isidore Isou's artistic practice as a field of poetic forces. It examines Isou's works as aesthetic and vital possibilities for perpetual exile while creating immersive universes. It further argues that although Isou's and Greco's artistic trajectories were different, they shared a common conception of the prophetic and messianic dimension of the artist as a proper name.

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ALBERTO GRECO'S *VIVO-DITO* AND THE ADVENTURE
OF THE REAL

In March 1962, on the sidewalk of a street in Paris, the Argentine artist Alberto Greco (Buenos Aires 1931—Barcelona 1965) drew a circle with a piece of chalk around his friend, the Chilean sculptor Alberto Heredia, and signed it “Greco.” This action became Greco’s first public exhibition of his live action pieces, which he named “*Vivo-Dito*.” He thus incorporated himself into the artwork as the artist of the piece, while inviting casual passersby to witness an act of artistic appropriation of reality. In doing so, he suggested that a moment could be captured and put on display, signing it with his own name in what he called “the adventure of the real” (Rivas 1991: 207).

In July 1962 in Genoa, Italy, Greco plastered the city walls with his *Manifiesto del Arte Vivo-Dito*, in which he established the principles of his artistic practice. Among them was the radical notion that the artist should abandon the canvas. After all, Greco wrote, the artist’s task is to guide us to see, and to show us how to look; in order to do that, he does not need the brush to paint but the finger to point. As he stated once again in his manifesto: “*Vivo-Dito* Art is the adventure of the real” (Rivas: 207).

Months later, while living in Paris, Greco spread his name across the city by writing Greco Puto (Greco Pimp) on the walls of public lavatories at night, thus disclosing the at-times sordid conditions of his personal life while co-opting public spaces as an immense artistic playground. A year later, in Rome, Greco graffitied a self-affirmative proclamation: “Painting is over, long live Arte Vivo-Dito. Greco” (Rivas: 208). By drawing chalk circles, holding up a sign inscribed with his own name, and figuratively spotlighting random strangers and found objects by pointing at them, Greco showcased elements of everyday life, singling them out from their current temporal and spatial orientations, and marking them as works of Alberto Greco. From 1962 until his death in 1965, Greco replicated his *Vivo-Dito* art pieces across the sidewalks of Rome, Paris, Genoa, Madrid, Buenos Aires, and Piedralaves, Spain. Greco’s temporary inscriptions transformed his name into a testimonial as well as an artistic statement presenting him as both an artist and a work of art.

By writing his signature in the public sphere, Greco transformed self-inscription and personal affirmation into public performance art, a practice that demanded recognition. Similar to his contemporary and fellow Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar, whose groundbreaking novel *Rayuela*

(1962) playfully blurs the line between literary fiction and “reality,” Greco’s *Vivo-Dito* works reveal an overarching ethos in his attempt to radically dissolve the aesthetic and existential boundaries between art and life.

Overall, Greco’s repeated use of his own name in the public space functions as both a personal signature and an artistic practice in which he simultaneously exhibits his own body and public persona while erasing himself. This paradoxical act of self-inscription and self-erasure ultimately led to public dispossession and artistic deterritorialization. In the process, Greco’s writing of his surname “Greco” became both an indicator of his presence and a self-designated work of art that prophesied the tragic circumstances of his eventual suicide.

In the spirit of this prophetic writing and the artist’s messianic aspiration—as envisioned by the artists of Lettrism, and Isou in particular—Greco’s ephemeral *Vivo-Dito* actions, as both written signs and public inscriptions, constituted a self-constructed mythical narrative—one whose end he authored.

As this text seeks to explore, Greco’s *Vivo-Dito* works showcase his expansive creative domain while simultaneously revealing self-inscription and self-effacement. Influenced by Lettrism and other artistic practices of the Situationist International and *Nouveau Réalisme*, among others, which Greco encountered in Paris first in 1956 and then again in 1962, Greco’s *Vivo-Dito* operated as a twofold public action of a biographical *dérive* (as the psycho-geographical effects of an unplanned urban journey) (Debord 1958)¹ and a personal signature which presented the artist both as an artwork and, prophetically, a body to be communally consumed.

LETTTRISM, THE PROPER NAME, AND THE ACT OF DISPOSSESSION

In an attempt to concisely define Lettrism, mystical Romanian poet and self-appointed founder of the movement, Isidore Isou—born Jean-Isidore Goldstein in 1925 in Botosani, Romania—described it as a disruptive force originating in letters themselves: “La lettrie (lettrisme),” he wrote, “est l’art qui accepte la matière des lettres réduites et devenues simplement elles-mêmes (s’ajoutant ou remplaçant totalement les éléments poétiques et musicaux) et qui les dépasse pour mouler dans leur bloc des œuvres cohérentes,” (Lemaitre 1954: 16). As he would later argue,

creativity and artistic impulse could arise even from the building blocks of language: “les mots ont déjà tant de ravaudages qu’on les porte en loques” (words are now so bandaged that we wear them like rags) [(Feldman 2014: 82)].²

In essence, Lettrism was both an existential attitude and a creative imperative in which personal experience was the ultimate social force. As Andrew Hussey argues, for Isou, the first principle of social existence is not the will to survive but the will to create. He clarifies Isou’s belief in the primacy of life over work by arguing that Lettrism’s principles were not theoretical but experiential (2000: 137). Hussey describes Lettrism as an art movement in which the “inner world” of the poet is always necessarily in conflict with the “outer world” he is trying to describe. As he explains, “poetry, as real lived experience, is for Isou a subjection to an impossible ethics which destroys the notion of textual authenticity in the same space as it affirms a responsibility to exhaust language in discourse” (139).

A fellow member of the Lettrist movement, the French poet Maurice Lemaitre, expanded on Isou’s observation of the experiential nature of Lettrism by explaining that, at its core, Lettrism prioritized the drive to create over the drive to merely live (1954: 91). Ultimately, for Lemaitre, the artists’ turmoil in trying to create, what he called “enjeu” (stake, bet), without knowing the artistic principles or rules of art, became a sort of a prophecy of his own fate. And this act, he emphasizes, ultimately deserves compassion.³

As the American critic Hannah Feldman has argued, this messianic quality of Lettrism was noteworthy—particularly for Jewish emigrants—under the political and cultural reappraisal of France’s complicity with the Nazis during the French Fourth Republic. Despite the hegemonic nature of French culture in the mid-1940s, Lettrism, Feldman argues, promoted a sense of language as a framing experience of reality instead of a literal representation of it.⁴ This was an idea that Isou reinforced in the Lettrist Revolution poster he pasted on the streets of Paris, anticipating by more than a decade Greco’s public statement in his own *Vivo-Dito* manifesto in Genoa (83, 106).

Despite the obvious historical differences in their artistic practices (Isou created his work in the late 1940s and Greco in the early 1960s), they can still be juxtaposed on the basis of the shared poetic force of their artistic impulses and their existential attitude toward the act of writing. Both artists experienced a perpetual self-imposed exile and personal dispossession through poetry.

As this text argues, continuing the legacy of the Lettrist project, specifically the primacy of personal experience as the dominant creative impulse, Greco's transitory actions constituted an act of vital liberation. Moreover, by transforming his own name into public performance art, Greco was able to transmute his personal lived experience into an act of public dispossession. It is this radical suspension of the flow of life, understood as a progression of significant moments, as his name-signature spreads in the public space that defines *Vivo-Dito*. In this way, Greco's transient name-signatures, which are both an act of self-affirmation and self-effacement, constitute an act of artistic deterritorialization. His name functions as a testimonial and at the same time as a symbol of his public persona, thus operating as an act of public dispossession and ultimately presenting the artist as a self-designated work of art.

Greco's radical and existential quest to dissolve the boundaries between life and art, to embark on the so-called adventure of the real came to a morbid end, however. On October 12, 1965, Greco's body was found after he took an overdose of barbiturates. He had written the word "Fin" (the end) on the palm of his left hand. Greco died a few days later in a Barcelona hospital. Greco's act of ending his own life as the final piece in his artistic oeuvre operates simultaneously as an instance of self-inscription and a gesture of existential dispossession. It is an act in which both his body and his work are transformed into an autobiographical narrative to be read, and, ultimately, consumed. As such, his signed suicide can be understood, at least in part, as his ultimate *Vivo-Dito* action, in which he signed his own body and, ultimately, his own autobiography.

Half personal inscriptions and half everyday mystical representations, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* works fused two divergent creative and poetic universes—those of the personal and the communal. Furthermore, in their paradoxical nature of being at once personal and public, Greco's dissemination of his name reveals the anticipatory and yet deferred nature of a personal signature.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida emphasized the prophetic nature of the proper name as a personal mark whose condition of possibility, he stated, is its promise to function in the future in the absence of both the signer and the recipient of the signature. As he wrote:

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical non presence of the signer. But it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in

a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (maintenance). This general maintenance is somehow inscribed, stapled to present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. (1982: 328)

Furthermore, he argued, in the everyday gesture of the signature, the proper name functions as a promise of a time frame in which there is no past, no future, only a perpetual sense of the present:

In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal. (1982: 328)

This understanding of the always-deferred nature of the signature is instrumental to analyzing Greco's use of the proper name as both a personal symbol and also an act of public dispossession. Moreover, in line with Derrida's interpretation of the prophetic nature of the signature, both as a promise of a future disappearance and as a living testimony of the here and now, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* takes this understanding to its most extreme. By signing his own suicide, Greco fulfills the philosopher's promise of the anticipation of his future disappearance, while at the same time heightening the personal dimension of his own name as the source of his work and the tragic prophecy of his fate—ultimately, the artist becomes a bodily name to be consumed.

THE PRESENCE OF THE NAME: ALBERTO GRECO'S WRITING ACTIONS AND THE SELF-CONSTRUCTED ARTISTIC MYTH

In 1960, a few months before his second stay in Paris, Greco commissioned a self-congratulatory poster to be pasted on the walls of Buenos Aires, proclaiming himself the most important American artist: "Alberto Greco Qué Grande Sos. Alberto Greco, el pintor informalista más importante de América" (Rivas 1991: 192). Beyond the obvious self-referential use of the proper name, Greco's redundant public display of his name celebrated him both as an artist and as a work of art. In doing so, "Greco" became both a signature name and a nominal reference to an always deferred work of art. Greco almost literally embodied this idea of the

self-designated artwork as an act of artistic mysticism in his role as John the Baptist in the irreverent and controversial play *Cristo 63*.

In an attempt to merge life and art, on January 4, 1963, in Rome, Greco participated alongside Italian playwrights Carmelo Bene and Giuseppe Lenti in an unscripted theatrical piece, *Cristo'63 Homage to James Joyce*—in what Greco later called “Un spettacolo d’arte vivo” (A spectacle of living art). The play was abruptly interrupted when Bene pretended to crucify himself while Greco, acting in the role of John the Baptist, undressed (Rivas 1991: 205). In Catholic Italy of the 1960s, the performance was considered blasphemous, and after being arrested by the Italian police, Greco was exiled. In early 1963, Greco finally left Italy and arrived in Spain. This unexpected turn of events turned out to be momentous in Greco’s life and artistic practice.

Greco’s *Vivo-Dito* actions in Spain led him to conceive of his artistic practice as a public ritual and communal dispossession. On October 18, 1963, in Madrid, Greco invited friends, fellow artists, and acquaintances to a piece in the style of a subway ride between two subway stations, from Sol to Lavapiés. According to first-hand accounts of the event, Greco appeared on the platform with a large sheet of paper, paint, and a green mop bucket that he placed on his head. Once on the subway and out on the street, Greco unfurled a massive roll of paper and invited curious passersby to participate in the creation of the piece. After the mural was finished, people carried the canvas to the nearby and very popular Lavapiés Square where it was burned while Greco read aloud a short manifesto as a kind of collective ritual. The piece ended dramatically when Franco’s police broke up the event by dispersing the crowd (Rivas, 226).

Seeking relief from the oppressive climate of Francoist Madrid in the early 1960s, Greco was invited to spend a month in the rural town of Piedralaves—a small village about a hundred miles from Madrid. This serendipitous experience would become one of Greco’s most profound personal and artistic experiences. In Piedralaves, Greco created his *Great Manifesto-Rollo Vivo-Dito*: an intimate fusion of personal diary entries, everyday notes, drawings, sketches, and collages that he assembled into a two-part (9 × 41 and 9 × 50 meters) roll of paper and used to depict the streets of the small village, its people, and their lived experiences. In open conversation with the works of Situationism and *Nouveau Réalisme*’s artistic practices, in particular, but also Yves Klein’s performative pieces, Piero Manzoni’s “Lived Sculptures” and the artists of the KWY group,

Greco's ongoing writing process in the Great Manifesto Scroll *Vivo-Dito* inscribed itself in an act of artistic appropriation of the present moment.

ISOU AND GRECO'S MYSTICISMS: *BESOS BRUJOS* AND THE PERSONAL HYPERGRAPH

In his *Introduction a Une Nouvelle Poesie et a Une Nouvelle Musique* (1947), Isidore Isou argued that a radically new kind of community was necessary to fully appreciate the creative force behind the Lettrist movement. Isou went further, arguing for an artistic reappraisal of the communal experience, stating that what matters most to the poet is not his individual perspective but the effect that the poem, or more generally, the work of art, has on its audience (Hussey 2000: 138). Feldman observes that by blurring the distinct notions of public and private, as well as written and spoken, the significance of Lettrism depends on the audience both hearing it and making sense of it, meaning that the aural dimension of language can only be transmitted in a communal manner (2014: 97).⁴

The importance of aurality to the practices of Lettrism seems consubstantial to Isou's mysticism. According to Hussey, Lettrism came to Isou like a revelation: a sort of messianic project in which artists were compelled to give new meanings to language. For Hussey, Isou's forced abandonment of Romanian politics and language and his subsequent creation of an imaginary cultural and linguistic homeland, reinforced Isou's belief that there could be no real and personal landscape (2000: 134). Instead, Isou believed in a deterritorialized condition which for him meant "learning to live like in the sea" (Feldman 2014: 80). As an errant wanderer in a foreign culture, Isou's nomadic sense of self in a culturally hegemonic Paris is crucial to understanding Greco's similar intention to shed even his own name.

Like Isou, Greco came from a Jewish family in Buenos Aires. His journey through European countries, including France, Italy, and Spain, allowed him to forge a personal and artistic nomadic identity. As a second-generation Jewish-Italian immigrant, Greco found himself constantly attempting and failing to be accepted in foreign cities, by displaying his name in linguistic territories that were culturally exclusionary. This feeling of rejection is explored in the pages of his two personal notebooks written during his stay in Rome and Paris (*Centurion* Notebook 1962, and *Roma* Notebook, 1963). Similar to Isou's autobiographical writing in

L'Aggregation d'un Nom et d'un Messie (1947)—which Hussey describes as “a despairing document, shot through with a sense of anger and defeat” (2000: 135)—Greco’s intimate yet deterritorializing writing functioned as both a self-explanatory diary and a living testimony to his artistic endeavors.

Greco’s mythic impulses in his autobiographical undertakings are exemplified in his experimental sketchbook novel, *Besos Brujos* (1965), which he finished just weeks before his suicide. Similar to Isou’s autobiography, Greco’s frank and brash novel functions as a hypergraph—that is, a biographical self-inscription in which writing becomes an act of personal dissemination. Different from Isou’s literary account, Greco’s act of personal dissemination also becomes an act of deterritorialization. Whereas Isou’s biographical texts led him to hermeticism and silence, as Hussey noted (2000: 139), Greco’s novel appeared to be a celebratory act of existential dispossession.

Written in Ibiza in the summer of 1965, *Besos Brujos* anticipated Greco’s fatal end as an artist and as a literary character. In it, Greco offers the reader a testimony that proves that he is alive at the time of its writing, while at the same time anticipating his impending personal tragedy and expressing a sense of slowly depleting his own artistic identity. Moreover, *Besos Brujos*, a compilation of often illegible calligraphy and various appropriated texts, prophetically anticipates a tragic self-imposed fate when Greco writes, “It is time to die” (n.p). Greco’s testimonial writing thus becomes an announcement of his inevitable tragic end (Rivas 1991: 252).

A combination of a diary and sketchbook containing descriptions of sexual encounters, personal experiences, illustrations, drawings, and anecdotes, Greco’s *Besos Brujos* is an intricate work of affirmation in which the repetition of the proper name “Greco” enacts the experience of inscription while also foreshadowing radical dispossession. Greco’s artistic attempts at self-inscription and radical dispossession were exemplified by his final *Vivo-Dito*, in which he signed his own life while signing his own death.

ALBERTO GRECO’S BODY-SIGNATURE: “THE END”

The notion of consumption distinguishes the prophet from the Messiah. In the former, words announce the promise of a future destiny; in the latter “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). This distinction between the prophetic, that which is promised, and the messianic, that which is given,

dimensions of the poetic impulse, is crucial in analyzing Greco's final *Vivo-Dito*.

On October 12, 1965, the artist created his last *Vivo-Dito* work after deliberately overdosing on barbiturates. As described by Francisco Rivas, during his ultimately successful suicide attempt, Greco continued to write, his words illegibly covering the cardboard ink box and finally culminating in the word "Fin" (The end) on the palm of his left hand. Greco's act of writing his last words as a kind of narrative transformed both his body and his work (his *oeuvre*) into a Eucharistic body to be publicly read and ultimately consumed.

By disseminating his signature name in a variety of contexts, Greco retroactively composed the moment of the emergence and disappearance of himself both as an artwork and as an artist. Like Isou's approach, his poetry seeks to create immersive communal experiences that can be shared.

Set in the complex historical and artistic contexts of post-colonial Paris and the culturally repressive Franco regime in Spain, where suicide was still considered a crime, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* reinvented performative practices by using his own body and name in order to create a space for collective engagement. From a messianic and almost Eucharistic perspective, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* developed public rituals that invited audience participation while subverting artistic, social, institutional, and political conventions. In spreading his name, *Vivo-Dito*'s pieces revealed Greco's immersive artistic practice. In his *Vivo-Dito* pieces, Greco (at once name, artist, body, and artwork) inextricably packages himself as an embodied name and also as an artwork. Ultimately, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* became a lived experience for the audience to participate in and, prophetically, share by announcing his eventual suicide.

CONCLUSION: ISOU, GRECO, AND THE PROPHECIES OF DISPOSSESSION

Inspired by the artistic legacy of Lettrism, and other contemporary artistic movements, Greco's *Vivo-Dito* actions functioned as bold gestures of mystical self-resignification. Understanding writing as a real lived experience, Greco's repetitive display of his surname becomes an existential artistic practice that functions as both personal inscription and radical self-effacement. Despite working decades apart, both Isou and Greco became self-exiled artists who performed messianic acts of public dispossession by

inserting themselves in foreign social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. By attempting to integrate themselves into contexts from which they continually felt artistically exiled, Isou's and Greco's works created immersive collective universes that redefined their personal artistic experiences as broader existential endeavors that could be appropriated on behalf of the viewer.

NOTES

1. According to Guy Debord, *dérive* (drifting) is "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll." Guy Debord, "Theory of the *Dérive*," 62.
2. "L'attitude vitale des isouiens est entièrement subordonné à leur impératif de création." Maurice Lemaitre, *Qu'est-ce que le lettrisme? et le mouvement isouien*, 91.
3. "Le prophète reste celui qui saisit l'importance de l'enjeu, même s'il n'en connaît pas la règle. Et pour cette inquiétude et cette prescience, il mérite une certaine tendresse." *Avertissement au lecteur prévenu, Remarques, Qu'est ce que le lettrisme?*, Lemaitre, 139.
4. As Feldman argues: "Beyond using sound to form a community around the commonality of listening, Isou's *lettries* attempted to make available an experience of the present otherwise denied a public audience through an assumed direct referentiality of the spoken letter. Here, the phonetic transcription provided by the nonsensical letters that were meant to be voiced attempts to form a new means of signification based on an emphatic transnationalism that was or might have been grounded in multilingualism." Hannah Feldman, "Sonic Youth, Sonic Space," 97.

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Gothic as the First Avant-Garde Art

Antónia Lima

Abstract If avant-garde means an anti-conventional passion for change and renewal in any art form, then the Gothic can be considered the first avant-garde art. Many modern art movements have much in common with the Gothic: the same interest in the collapse of traditional values of authoritarian systems, the desire to transgress and escape from conventional processes of representation, a curiosity about irrational and perverse impulses inherited from the primitive man. Throughout its history, the Gothic has also been an anti-realist protest, a rebellion of the imagination, an aesthetic of excess. Some contemporary artists, such as Mike Kelley, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin or Douglas Gordon, produce their works not only as expressions of profound transformations in artistic practices, but also as manifestations of contemporary fears. Horror still connects us to our primal emotions and desires. Perhaps this is why some of the most innovative works in contemporary art are often Gothic art.

If avant-garde means an anti-conventional passion for change and renewal in every art form, then Gothic can be considered “the first avant-garde art in the modern sense of the term” (Fiedler 1969: 134), as Leslie Fiedler

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suggested in the 1960s, observing that it followed the tradition of “such spectacular bourgeois-baiting movements as Dada, Surrealism and Pop Art” (135). The concept of “avant-garde” is seldom used as an attribute of Gothic art, in spite of it being a subversive genre that is inherently opposed to institutional power and the guardians of morality. However, many modern art movements have much in common with the Gothic: the same interest in the collapse of traditional values of authoritarian systems, the desire to transgress and escape from conventional processes of representation, a curiosity about irrational and perverse impulses inherited from the primitive man, etc. By recreating horror and violence, art has always been able to expose the problems of a civilization deprived of its most solid values. Both Gothic and avant-garde artists reflected on the disasters of their time, representing those catastrophes in order to reactivate emotions and raise awareness of new and multiple aspects of reality, which until then had been understood in a passive and linear way.

Throughout its history, the Gothic has also been an anti-realist protest, a rebellion of the imagination, an aesthetic of excess. It has profoundly developed an anti-conventional vision of reality and defended many forms of transgression of aesthetic conventions and the inversion of accepted categories. As Lovecraft noted, “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear” (Lovecraft 2016: 5). Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Beauty and the Sublime*, also said that terror is the strongest emotion of which the human mind is capable. Fear and terror were at the origin of ancient myths. In *Gothic Flame* (1987), Devendra Varma noted the power of a Dionysian force, a “dark underground river beneath the surface of human life” (46). Keeping the Gothic Flame alive means holding together a primitive emotion and a primordial mystery forgotten by rationalism and realism. The Gothic is constantly reinventing itself because throughout the ages writers and artists are responsible for maintaining this old art form that appeals to the night side of the soul. Recent waves of interest in all things Gothic show that the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century incorporates a resurgence of a Gothic sensibility in contemporary art and culture, sometimes with a layer of black humor. This explains the thread of dark imagery or ideas that runs through much contemporary art. Some contemporary artists, like Mike Kelley, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin or Douglas Gordon, produce artworks not only as expressions of profound changes in art practices, but also as manifestations of contemporary fears. As the editors of *Twenty-First Century Gothic* conclude in the Introduction: “... the Gothic sensibility

can be seen as a mode particularly applicable to the frightening instability of the world in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the twenty-first-century” (Cherry et al. 2010: 1). Some of the most innovative work in contemporary art is often Gothic art, even when artists do not acknowledge a direct connection to the genre, leading Gilda Williams, in *Gothic – Documents of Contemporary Art*, to conclude that, “in the end, ‘Gothic’ is necessarily a partial term which serves mostly to identify a peculiar, dark sensitivity shared by the artist and the observer who has chosen to respond to the work in this manner” (13). In *Contemporary Gothic*, Catherine Spooner also tries to justify this interest in the Gothic in our time by saying that it is mutable and can fulfill our cultural and critical needs in an age with a particular “lust for spectacle and sensation” (Spooner 2006: 156).

Even in Pop Art we can find some of these examples, starting with Andy Warhol’s *Self-Portrait with a Skull* (1978), his *Electric Chair* series (1971), and the *Death and Disasters* paintings. The latter, which the artist began in 1962, depicted grotesque and horrific accidents based on photographs taken from news agencies, police files, and tabloids. These paintings were not immediately popular, and most galleries simply refused to exhibit them. Warhol explained that he had had enough of life, so it was time for a little death, stating:

I think people should think about death sometimes. The girl who jumped off the Empire State Building or the lady who ate the poisoned tuna fish and the people getting killed in car crashes. It’s not that I feel sorrow for them. It’s just that people go by and that doesn’t really matter to them that someone unknown was killed. So I thought it would be nice for these unknown people to be remembered (...).¹

Coming from an artist who has been transformed into a modern monster, this tribute to death expresses a defense of a very unconventional ethic that reminds us of the definition of the Gothic as a non-, anti-, and counter-genre resulting from its dark vision of the human existence. The transgressive tendency of the Gothic aesthetic has always been present in contemporary art. Jackson Pollock’s paintings of the mid-1940s, for example, were described by Clement Greenberg as “Gothic,” recalling Edgar Allan Poe. However, the term more or less fell into disuse for new art until the 1980s, in the wake of deconstructivist literary theory as well as the emergence of the cyber-goth subculture. Nowadays, it is one of the aesthetic visions best suited to the idiosyncrasies of our times, as

Christopher Grunenberg noticed: “The current Gothic mood, as much as it has become a commercially exploited fashion and entertainment phenomenon, is symptomatic of a continuing spiritual emptiness at the end of the century” (Grunenberg 1997: 202). This explains why Gothic has affected all areas of contemporary life, permeating art, literature, architecture, design, fashion, and more.

However, this Gothic sensibility was already evident in the earliest avant-garde works, such as Wassily Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910), where the Russian-German Expressionist paints a grim picture of contemporary anxiety and general lack of knowledge that demands new ways of action toward freer, non-materialistic ideals. In this well-known work about the spiritual dimensions of art, Kandinsky mentions dark castles, moonlight, swamps, and wind, presenting a particular and relevant vision of a modern dystopian cityscape. In recognizing this dark presence, Kandinsky paved the way for an abstract poetics of what could be called the Gothic avant-garde. In literature, this term referred to an intensification of the non-referential aspects of language through the use of word association and forms of repetition. As Joyce Carol Oates rightly observed: “In a more technical sense, art that presents ‘horror’ in aesthetic terms is related to Expressionism and Surrealism in its elevation of interior (and perhaps repressed) states of the soul to exterior status” (Oates 1995: 307). Kubin, Kafka and Meyrink, in particular, were more or less directly involved in the avant-garde movements of the 1910s. Hugo Ball, for instance, had a particular interest in the Gothic imagination in his literary work, and in the Dada diaries (during 1910–1921) he writes admiringly of the black romanticism of Charles Maturin, Gregory Lewis, and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. This admiration highlights the fact that Gothic fiction had much in common with the emerging avant-garde movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. They shared a disdain for realism, scientific rationalism and positivism, as well as the psychologizing narrative. Moreover, they both liked to disrupt conventional means of expression through strong, spatial, theatrical, visual or phonetic creations, promoting expressive effects of chaos and excess. The German Expressionist and Dada movements in particular hyperbolized the ways in which the supernatural had been used in traditional horror literature since the late eighteenth century. This German fantastical revival coincided with a period of Gothic fashion, which was also associated with a self-styled group of “narrators of grotesque” (Kaiser 1981: 139). We should not forget that this group of writers, from the early twentieth century until the

rise of the Third Reich's cultural policies in the 1930s—hostile to most forms of the supernatural and especially to the avant-garde imagination—was interested in ghost stories, mysticism, and the combination of humor and horror as a means of linguistic experimentation. They respected the old masters, such as E.T. Hoffmann, who had also been an inspiration to Edgar Allan Poe.

As a form of contemporary art, Gothic art has been interested in the transgression allowed by anti-aestheticism. Many of the artists associated with Gothic aesthetics know that the use of text in modern and contemporary art aims to present its appearance as a fundamental conceptual shift in art practices. However, they are also aware that in text there is not only the possibility of resorting to an anti-aestheticized, non-material medium, but also the possibility of a work of art that can be thought, proposed, stated: art as an idea. As Dave Beech clarifies in “Turning the Whole Thing Around – Text Art Today”:

During the 1980s and 1990s, when a new generation of younger artists were identified as ‘neo-Conceptualists’, very few of them used text in their work, and even those who did use text did not identify their work with text art. Most of the neo-Conceptualists – Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Douglas Gordon among them – were primarily interested in a postmodernist updating of the Conceptualist legacy, with the emphasis on appropriation rather than nomination, semiotics rather than ontology, double-coding rather than analytic propositions. (2009: 26)

Whenever they used text, it was presented in an explicitly visual form, as a typographic, performative, and poetic experiment. In some works, we can find that famous Dadaist absurdism and anti-aestheticism, showing language as a reinvented system of representation, allowing the written and the verbal to work together in the production of sound and video pieces.

In some of its best moments, this kind of contemporary art has helped to express a connection with a Gothic-Grotesque vision. One such example is the work of Mike Kelley, which involves found objects, textile banners, drawings, assemblage, collage, performance, and video. Kelley's work touches upon subjects such as urban decay, sexuality, boredom, crochet, child abuse, etc., and has a serious post-punk ethos further cemented by associations with groups such as Sonic Youth. Difficult to categorize, Kelley was described by *The New York Times* in 2012 as “one of the most

influential American artists of the past quarter century and a pungent commentator on American class, popular culture and youthful rebellion.” While at CalArts, Kelley started to work on a series of projects in which he explored works with loose poetic themes, such as *The Sublime*, *Monkey Island* and *Plato’s Cave*, Rothko’s Chapel, Lincoln’s Profile, using a variety of different media such as drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, video, and writing. Among his works, *The Uncanny*, the first large-scale solo show devoted to the artist in the UK since his 1992 survey exhibition at the ICA, London, is particularly associated with a Gothic sensibility. The exhibition is based on a project originally curated by Kelley and revised and updated for Tate Liverpool in close collaboration with the artist. Sigmund Freud described the uncanny as a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it.

In *The Uncanny* (Tate Liverpool), Kelley explores memory, recollection, horror and anxiety through the juxtaposition of a highly personal collection of objects with realistic figurative sculpture. The central element of the exhibition consists in a substantial number of polychrome figurative sculptures that embody the feeling of the uncanny through their scale and use of color, form, and material. Kelley relates these to the idea of the “double”—the disturbingly realistic representation of the human figure suspended between life and death. His non-art objects include a variety of historical and contemporary anatomical models, wax figures, animatronic puppets, and mounted (stuffed) animals. These are complemented by a large collection of black and white documentary photographs depicting figurative sculpture, including wax figures, Dada and Surrealist mannequins, film stills, newspaper clippings and cartoons that draw on imagery and subject matter that evoke a sense of the uncanny. “I still think the social function of art is that kind of negative aesthetic. Otherwise there’s no social function for it,” said Mike Kelley.² His connection to text art is evident in *Pay for your Pleasure* (1988), where Kelley associates art with guilt, criminality, and behavioral extremism through forty-three quotations by renowned poets, artists, novelists, popes and philosophers, from Plato and Mikhail Bakunin to Edgar Degas and Oscar Wilde, painted on monochrome portraits of their authors in red, green, purple, orange, and so on. In 1999, he also made a short video of Superman reciting excerpts from Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*.

Another artist associated with the Gothic aesthetic is Douglas Gordon, someone who has also been interested in text art and its avant-garde processes. He has worked in video, photography, sound, text, and other

media, using found materials. Much of this Scottish artist's work is concerned with memory. He creates performance-based videos and uses repetition in various forms. His videos play with elements of time and employ multiple monitors. One of his best-known art works is *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), which slows down Alfred Hitchcock's film, *Psycho*, so that it lasts twenty-four hours. This work seems simple, but it has unexpected consequences, revealing the way memory works in the flow of our consciousness. We know the plot of *Psycho* and can predict what will happen, but in Gordon's version, this is something difficult to achieve, because the future never happens. The text installation *List of Names (Random)*, 1990–ongoing, consists of a list of names that also explores the role of memory. These names are displayed in columns, as if they were on a war memorial or a roll of honor. The artist tried not to forget anyone he had ever met, but he considered his work as imperfect as the human mind, concluding that “it was an accurate and honest statement but it was full of mistakes (like forgetting the names of some friends), so there were some embarrassing elements in the work, but that all seemed to be quite close to the truth of how our head functions anyway. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.”³ Interested in psychoanalysis, which led him to explore the nature of schizophrenia and other complexities of the human mind, Gordon is very curious about the dual nature of humanity, revealing a deep interest in opposites: black and white, good and evil. These subjects allow him to explore the ambiguity and the transgression of normal, stereotypical visions of the world. An example of this tendency is his well-known color photograph, *Monster* (1996–1997). Other photographs, videos, installations, and text pieces help him to lay bare the ambiguities of human life, which are so present in the Gothic trope of Jekyll and Hyde. Knowing that we all have split identities, Gordon uses some doubling and mirroring techniques in his *Divided Self I and II* (1996), a video that shows a smooth arm wrestling with a hairy arm.

Robert Gober is another artist associated with a certain Gothic sensibility in art. He studied literature and then fine art, and became famous in the mid-1980s for one of his best-known series of more than fifty eccentric sinks—made of plaster, wood, and wire lath, and covered in layers of semi-gloss enamel. He began by making very simple sculptures of everyday objects, using sinks and domestic furniture such as play pens, beds, and doors. These familiar objects are used as subjects to explore nature, sexuality, religion, and politics. In 1982–1983, Gober created *Slides of a Changing Painting*, consisting of 89 images of paintings made on a small

piece of plywood in his storefront studio in the East Village. He made a slide of each motif, then scraped off the paint and started over. His work is meticulously handcrafted, even when it appears to be just a simple replica of an ordinary sink. Best known for his sculptures, Gober has also made photographs, prints, and drawings. In 1989, he began casting beeswax into sculptures of men's legs, completed not only with shoes and pant legs but also with human hair that was inserted into the beeswax.

Like Robert Gober, Paul Thek used wax to create some disquieting pieces of art. He once described himself as the "meatman." One of those memorable meat pieces is *Untitled (Meat Cable)*, a steel cable stretched across a corner with reddish-brown slabs of wax meant to resemble raw flesh. His style was at once disgusting, childish, and skillfully virtuosic. Another interesting work is *Untitled (Ferocious)* dated from 1971, a plasticine sculpture of a rabbit's head with a feather for an ear, sitting in a glass box amid dry foliage. It looks as if the rabbit's fur and skin have been torn off to expose its flesh; yet the creature looks like an odd-looking cartoon character.

Death, a recurring Gothic theme, was also approached very unconventionally by Damien Hirst in *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of the Living* (1991). A nostalgic artistic effort to preserve life and an almost paranoid denial of death, the work features a 14-foot-long glass tank containing a tiger shark preserved in formaldehyde. This art piece became the epitome of British art in the 1990s. It was praised by *The New York Times* for creating a "visceral experience" of life and death, but it was also mocked and criticized by British newspapers. Furthermore, in 2007, Hirst drew the attention of fans and critics alike when he created *For the Love of God*, a platinum skull encrusted with diamonds, a work directly connected to the Gothic aesthetics.

The *enfant terrible* of the Young British Artists of the 1980s, Tracey Emin has created different kinds of works using drawing, painting, sculpture, film, photography, and neon text. *My Bed*, an installation dated from 1999, was inspired by a sexual yet depressive period in her life when she remained in bed for several days without eating or drinking anything but alcohol. The repulsive mess that had been accumulated in her room was transformed into a work of art. The work was not well received at the time, and Emin had to defend it against critics who treated it as a farce, claiming that anyone could exhibit an unmade bed. It created a shock, particularly because the bed-sheets were stained with bodily secretions and

the floor was littered with objects from the artist's room, condoms, underwear with menstrual blood stains, and everyday objects, such as a pair of slippers. The condition of this famous bed was due to Emin's suicidal depression provoked by a troubled relationship.

Other contemporary artists who have expressed dark visions—very much in tune with our times and the troubled world we live in—are the English brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman, the creators of *Disasters of War* (1993), a piece in thirty-second-scale model based on the *portfolio of etchings* of the same name that depicts the atrocities of war experienced and witnessed by Goya during and after the Napoleonic invasions of Spain in 1808. Goya's eighty-three etchings contain scenes of brutality and horror such as mutilation and decapitation. This work, like *Hell* (2000), displays an ironic intent with a neurotic obsession. In a time of social loss of control, the artists spent a long time cutting up and reassembling small figures representing violent and grotesque human acts. *Disasters of War* critiques the detachment of Western societies from the realities of wartime killing through computer technology, television and the film industry, as Susan Sontag alerted to in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). *Cyber-ironic Man* (1996) is another work with Gothic connotations by the Chapman brothers; it is a mixed-media sculpture representing an inverted and gorily wounded subject dripping blood.

All of these works evoke Edmund Burke's concept of the Sublime, an association of horror and beauty that can be found in Hans Bellmer's *The Doll* (1936), or in Cindy Sherman's photographs, when elements taken from medical catalogues, disease, mutation, disintegration, environmental disasters, or physical decay are shown. These paradoxical games between opposite aesthetic categories have always been present in many of the most representative avant-garde works, especially in those associated with the Gothic aesthetics. Experimental, subversive, and radical, some of these artists know that the Sublime is quite often built on terror, whenever they challenge the artistic *status quo*, its aesthetics, and its intellectual or artistic conventions.

To conclude, we can say that typographic, performative and poetic experimentation may be very innovative, the dissolution of an art object, the primacy of the concept, text art and new media may be very creative, but horror still connects us to our primal emotions and desires. It seems that there is nothing more human and fundamental than fear. Artists know that we are surrounded by irrational and uncontrollable circumstances

that cause anxiety and disorientation. Many of them are still interested in expressing these unpleasant realities in a Gothic style, using metaphors that constantly haunt us. According to T. S. Eliot, this is the test of a new work of art: “When a work of art no longer terrifies us we may know that we are mistaken, or that our senses are dulled: we ought still to find Othello or Lear frightful” (Eliot 1918: 84).

NOTES

1. Interview with Gretchen Berg, *The East Village Other*, November 1, 1966.
2. This is what Mike Kelley said in his segment in the “Memory” episode of the “Art in the Twenty-First Century” series, Season 3, September 23, 2005. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/mike-kelley-in-memory-segment/>. Accessed 5 January 2023.
3. Gordon quoted by the National Galleries of Scotland’s Modern One, “List of Names (Random),” <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/71055>. Accessed 5 January 2023.

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PART II

Transatlantic Avant-Gardes and
Countercultures



Eugene Jolas and the Revolution of Language

Olga Sokolova and Vladimir Feshchenko

Abstract The chapter examines the concept of universal language of the American-French avant-garde poet, literary critic, and publisher Eugene Jolas. Universal language was a project aimed at an “interracial synthesis” of all the languages “being spoken in America today.” In this conception, Jolas goes beyond multilingualism as an integration of languages to a transformation of the very basis of language. Central to this transformation is Jolas’s theory of the universal language as a “mantic compost,” that is constantly changing and developing at all linguistic levels. The study focuses on such issues as the images of language in Jolas’s works; the “revolution of language” as the dominant feature of his linguistic theory; the transformation of the linguistic and communicative aspects of his aesthetic program in the process of transition from the concept of “vertical poetry” to a new understanding of creative communication between individuals, which he called “vertigalism.”

This chapter examines the legacy of Eugene Jolas (1894–1952), the French-American poet, translator and literary critic, who founded

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transition, an influential literary magazine that integrated various movements of the international avant-garde in the 1920s and 30s. A multilingual writer and journalist, Jolas sought a new universal language that would make transfers between national avant-gardes easier and bolder. In the pages of *transition*, he published poets, writers, artists, philosophers, psychologists, and literary critics in a kind of collaborative search for a new logos and mythos of the creative experiments of the interwar period. It was not a positivist investigation, but a metaphysical quest, an incessant effort to transcend the limits of language, mind, communication, and artistic endeavor.

The aim of the present study is to reconstruct E. Jolas's conception of language as contained in the essays published in *transition*. A self-styled "man from Babel" (1998), Jolas advocated a new international avant-garde of "creative experiment" and "orphanic creation," a "laboratory of the word."¹ "Quest" was a crucial word for him, standing for the metaphysical, mystical, and creative experience of avant-garde work in literature, art, and philosophy. Jolas particularly emphasized the role of language in the new forms of art and literature. He wrote a series of declarations about the "revolution of language" that could be brought to life through the "poetic state of language" and the creation of a "hermetic language." The result of such a revolution, he claimed, would be the "universal word." With these premises as a starting point, we will examine the following questions: what were the different facets of language that Jolas revealed in his writings? What exactly did he mean by a "revolution of language?" How did Jolas move from "vertical poetry" to a new perception of creative understanding among people that he called "vertigalism?"

MULTILINGUALISM, POLYGLOTISM, AND "REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCIES" IN AVANT-GARDE LITERATURE

As Douglas MacMillan summarizes in his book on *transition*, in seeking to find a language and experience that lay beneath the surface differences of individual national idioms, Jolas was in a sense trying to compensate for the intercultural conflict that had plagued him since early childhood. The heterogeneity and polyglotism stemmed in no small part from the general political and cultural circumstances—a series of crises, migrations, wars, and so on. For Jolas, however, it was also a matter of biography.

He was born in New Jersey, USA, but was only two years old when his family moved to Elzas-Lothringen, then part of Germany (and now part of France) and the motherland of Jolas's parents. The people of Forbach in

Lorraine spoke German as well as French, so Jolas's American background made him completely trilingual. He could easily switch between English, German, and French during the many transatlantic trips he made between France and the United States throughout his life. Jolas would return to America in 1909 as a native-born immigrant. In New York in the early 1920s, he was a practicing journalist, writing articles about Europe. In particular, he highlighted the literary life of Paris in a series of written portraits of writers and artists.

In addition to his transatlantic journalist activities, Jolas took up experimental poetry. In two of his early collections of poetry published in New York (*Ink*, 1924 and *Cinema*, 1926), one could see his first attempts to compose multilingual verse. Over the next two decades, he would publish about a dozen books of poetry influenced by his macaronic quest for a universal language. Some of these books were published by his own presses, Editions Vertigral and Transition Press. Many of his avant-garde poems were published by *transition*, mostly under the pseudonym Theo Rutra.² Jolas was thus not only a mouthpiece for a "revolutionized" language, but also an original author of experimental verse. Poetry, he claimed, could be renewed through the "re-creation of the word" and the creation of a new "verbal organism" that would "make it impossible that art be again and again the sycophant of reality" (Jolas 2009: 245). Malicious tongues of Jolas's time and milieu would ironically call him a poetic epigone of the author of *Finnegans Wake*. But Jolas himself never made very much of his own contribution to experimental literature. What mattered most to him was the promotion of the European and American avant-gardes in general and, most actively, the kind of linguistic experimentation that Joyce invented in his later writings. Jolas first met Joyce in 1926 through Sylvia Beach and the bookstore Shakespeare & Company. Jolas wanted to publish a new text by Joyce in the first issue of his *transition* magazine. And he got it. The opening pages of *Work in Progress*, which would eventually become *Finnegans Wake*, appeared in the first issue of 1927. A year later, Jolas published an essay entitled "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce," in which *Work in Progress* is seen as a harbinger of what would become the new spirit of linguistic creativity of the twenties and the twentieth century.³ The essay begins with a strong argument: "The word presents the metaphysical problem today" (377).⁴ The problem, according to Jolas, is most clearly seen in the way modern poets work with language. They take words apart in order to reconstruct them on other levels. The new logos is engendered by a new

mythos: “Modern life with its changed mythos and transmuted concepts of beauty makes it imperative that words be given a new composition and relationship.” Jolas is referring to the subversion of the norms in modern literature. And it is here that he first speaks of revolution, activating its etymological meaning of “turning around” or “turning upside down.” In Joyce’s new work, Jolas sees a “revolutionary tendency,” developed to its ultimate degree, in which “language is born anew before our eyes.” But Joyce is not a lone innovator. This revolutionary shift in linguistic attitudes encompasses the entire avant-garde literature of Europe and America (both North and South). In the same essay, Jolas cites examples of other poets and prose writers who “deliberately worked in the laboratories of their various languages along new lines”: from Leon-Paul Fargue and Michel Leiris to Gertrude Stein and Hans Arp (378–79).

In discussing Joyce’s linguistic analysis, Jolas makes a characteristic reference to a scholarly work by the French Jesuit anthropologist Marcel Jousse. Just a few years before Joyce’s essay, Jousse published a book entitled *Études de psychologie linguistique. Le style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les verbomoteurs*. The study proposed a theory of the pan-ethnic origin of languages. According to Jousse, the rhythmic gesture is a universal element of verbal utterances and, moreover, a fundamental principle of any poetic act. To substantiate his findings, Jousse analyzes “parallel” examples from primitive languages and modernist poetry (Mallarmé, Peguy, etc.). But it is only in Joyce’s writings, Jolas argues, that this commonality of linguistic origin is realized in a multilingual form of expression: “Whirling together the various languages, Mr. Joyce ... creates a verbal dreamland of abstraction that may well be the language of the future” (381). In another manifesto, Jolas sees *Work in Progress* as “the novel of the future” that will “express the magic reality in a language that is non-imitative and evolutionary” (114) (as language was at its origin, according to Jousse’s theory).

THE “REVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE” ACCORDING TO EUGENE JOLAS

The programmatic 1928 essay (in the Fall issue) on Joyce’s multilingualism inaugurated an ongoing series of articles and other texts in *transition* dedicated to questions of language. The magazine itself became a platform for creative inquiry into the nature of language in literature. Moreover, by

publishing various avant-garde writings translated into English from many languages, the editors of *transition* (or “*transocean*,” as Joyce once ironically rebaptized it) injected the spirit of Babel into the policies of a literary periodical.

In a 1929 issue of *transition*, Jolas published a text called “Proclamation” to give the magazine a more avant-garde ethos. He probably wrote it himself, but it was cosigned by him and a number of his fellow writers. It has the structure of a typical avant-garde manifesto, beginning with the phrase “We hereby declare that,” followed by a list of twelve declarations reminiscent of those found in Futurist pamphlets. What interests us most here are the linguistic metaphors and language problems involved. Note that the “Proclamation” is preceded by the title of a section of the journal—“Revolution of the Word,” a slight modification of the phrase found in his earlier essay on Joyce, discussed above (“Revolution of Language”). In our opinion, Jolas is referring in this new title to the Word-Logos, a complex yet mysterious concept that goes back to ancient Greek and later early Christian conceptions of the divine Creative Word. We will keep in mind this spiritual and even religious treatment of the Word by Jolas in addition to its most typical meaning in ordinary usage. But then the question arises: how is it that the Word, in this highly metaphysical sense, can undergo a “revolution”? What does the expression “revolution of the word” actually mean? Is it merely a pompous, strained metaphor, or does this formulation refer to concrete changes in the properties of language posited in experimental literature?

The first statement in Jolas’s “Proclamation” is straightforward and categorical: “The revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact” (111). No proof of this fact is given, but we can assume that, as Jolas demonstrated in an earlier essay, the revolution was accomplished by James Joyce, and the proof of this revolution was the subversion of all linguistic norms in *Work in Progress*. For Jolas, then, the revolution of language was no mere metaphor. On the other hand, in his essay “On the Quest,” written at about the same time, Jolas offers a caveat about the use of the term revolution:

It is true that we owe an incalculable amount of things to the influence of the Russian Revolution, but we cannot allow this conception to dominate us. The stimulus of the emancipation which we gain from the Cyclopean effort of the October rebels has been our constant encouragement, but not in its political, nor in its dialectic aspect. (246)

As we can see from this remark, the concept of revolution interests Jolas in its purely spiritual value, even if the political term serves as a trigger. This double meaning requires further clarification when applied to the context of the artistic avant-garde of the early twentieth century.

As early as 1849, Richard Wagner wrote a long essay entitled “Art and Revolution,” inspired by revolutionary events throughout Europe, the composer decided to formulate the relationship between art and revolution. But he does not draw a direct line between political action and artistic revolt. Instead, he argues that “true Art is revolutionary because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community” (Wagner 1994: 52). According to Wagner, a revolution in art is a revolution in itself, in the mind of the artist, in opposition to his society. The Russian Revolution reactivated Wagner’s essay and, indeed, inspired many Russian thinkers and writers in their conceptions of “revolution in art.” The Symbolist poet Alexandr Blok, for example, sought a new “artistic humanity” to be brought about by the October Revolution. The experimental writer Andrey Bely, sometimes called the “Russian James Joyce,” saw a sacramental connection between revolution and art. Although the direction of political and artistic revolutions may be different, they emanate from a single center of force that Bely called “the revolutionary volcano” (2006 (1917): 10). The energy of the revolutionary eruption gives birth to what Bely calls a “revolution of spirit,” quite similar to Jolas’s formula of a “revolution of the soul.” For Bely, the revolution of the spirit is the result of two other revolutions—a revolution of life and a revolution of creativity which is also very similar to Jolas’s *motto* that the creative revolution “aims at a complete metamorphosis of the world” (173).

In the preface to one of the issues of *transition*, Jolas writes about experimentation in life and language. In this sense, both Andrey Bely and Eugene Jolas are truly avant-garde writers, if we apply Peter Burger’s principle that, for avant-garde art, the idea of revolution in life is transformed into the idea of revolution in art. The concept of a “revolution of spirit” was later widely used in the Russian radical avant-garde (by Vladimir Mayakovsky, Pavel Filonov, and others). In Futurist poetry, the revolution of the spirit was accompanied by a revolution of language.⁵ It is quite unlikely that Jolas was aware of such Russian texts of the 1910–1920s, but he could certainly grasp the atmosphere emanating from revolutionary Russia. Most likely, however, he was introduced to the concept of revolution by Andre Breton, who founded the journal *La révolution surréaliste* in 1924. The agenda of *transition* consisted largely of texts written by

surrealists (some would even say that Jolas's journal was also an organ of surrealism). The title of Breton's journal, thus seems the most likely source for Jolas's formula "Revolution of the word." Yet Jolas would repeatedly claim that the Surrealists had not in fact revolutionized language in the way that Joyce had emphatically done.

In any case, as we have tried to illustrate briefly here, Jolas's concept of revolution was influenced by a whole chain of political and artistic implications. And it seems that for Jolas, there was no contradiction, as suggested in Gerald Raunig's *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (2007), between two basic meanings of the word revolution, the first being "revolt," the second "revolving" (as in "revolving planets"). Jolas used both meanings. For him, a revolution in language was both a breaking of conventions and a "revolving" back to the primordial stages of language evolution.

The task of the poet, according to the "Proclamation," is to "disintegrate the primal matter of words" (Jolas 2009: 151). Arthur Rimbaud's "hallucination of the word" is invoked here to emphasize the rhythmic nature of this "revolutionized" language. Some of Jolas's declarations may seem dated and unoriginal, such as the call to "disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws" (112). Italian and Russian futurists had advocated these principles twenty years earlier. But never before in the English language had the revolt against linguistic norms been so vigorously pursued as in the pages of *transition*. The primary feature of the language revolution, according to Jolas, is free experimentation and invention. It is this that allows Jolas, in one of his essays, to speak of a revolution of language in the Elizabethan theater.

"VERTICAL POETRY" AS A "REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO THE WORD"

Eugene Jolas elaborated his revolutionary approach to the language of poetry in his later *transition* essays—for example, in a series of texts on the "vertical" dimension of the new poetry. In a 1932 manifesto entitled *Poetry is Vertical* (signed by Hans Arp and Samuel Beckett, among others), Jolas writes of the "hermetic language" invented in the course of the creative act, an invention made possible "by the use of a language which is a mantic instrument" and which "adopts a revolutionary attitude toward word and syntax" (266: 67). Poets create their own languages, Jolas

reiterates. This assertion is reminiscent of the Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov and his notion of a “breakthrough into languages.” But Khlebnikov stresses that his “language husbandry” does not violate the laws of language. Newly created languages give new life to existing national idioms, as he further explains: “If contemporary man can restock the waters of exhausted rivers with fish, then language husbandry gives us the right to restock the impoverished streams of language with new life, with extinct or non-existent words” (1987: 382). In contrast to Khlebnikov, Jolas calls for breaking the rules of grammar and lexis. Speaking of language changes in the history of mankind, he points out that these changes are often the result of instinctive individual activity. Many linguists of his time would not have agreed with this statement; they would probably have claimed that linguistic change and linguistic creativity can only occur through the collective efforts of all those who speak a given language. But Jolas criticized such “pedantic semasiologists,” as he calls them: “In seeking the flexibility of his language, he, the poet, is free to create his own laws (182).” The poet has the power to break the structure of syntax and morphology.

Jolas may have been aware of the latest trends in the linguistics of his time, the era of logical positivism, behavioral descriptivism, and grammatical structuralism. Most linguists ignored the specificity of poetic language, how it constitutes a sublanguage (or rather a superlanguage) of its own. Jolas, on the other hand, advocated for a special status of the poetic linguistic experiment. The photographic, utilitarian conception of the word did not satisfy him. Words in poetry have a reality that a dictionary or a grammar book cannot know. There is a need for a creative grammar, a revised language. “Grammar is not a static thing,” he writes. “Modern poets foster the dynamics of an inner, alogical grammar” (164). Jolas’s views on grammar are profoundly akin to Gertrude Stein’s contemporaneous meditations on grammar. Where Stein uses the terms “incantation” and “insistence” to restore the magical powers of reconstructed words, Jolas insists on the primordial character of what he calls the “orphic language of poetry” as a “new symbolical language.” And again he discusses it in terms of a spiritual revolution: “The poet who gives back to language its pre-logical functions, who recreates it as an orphic sign, makes a spiritual revolt, which is the only revolt worth making today (162).” Language, he argues, must be given a mediumistic function, it must be charged with the mood of liturgy and litany. To give substance to his argument, Jolas makes several important references: 1) to Novalis, who, in his *Fragments*,

made the enigmatic remark: “Language is Delphi,” 2) to Franz Baader, another German romantic, who spoke of the “language of dreams”; and 3) to Justinus Kerner, German poet and physician, who in his *Die Seherin von Prevorst* described a case of somnambulism (156). The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw an outburst of glossolalic phenomena, both in various cultural practices and in scientific conceptualizations: (1) religious and mystical; (2) psychopathological; (3) poetic, also called ludic by some authors. It is in this context that Jolas speaks of the “malady of language,” the idea that language is in a state of crisis and needs some kind of healing, a healing that poetry can provide.

A similar line of argument can be found in the writings of Ilia Zdanevich, a Russian dadaist poet living in Paris. Zdanevich dreamed of a “language revival” through poetic glossolalia. His early writings on *zaum*’ language, dating back to 1913, invoked speaking in tongues. He advocated the primacy of sound recording (*zvukopis*’) over sign recording (*znakopis*’). In one of his lectures in Paris he declared that humanity suffers from a certain something he called a “pearly malady” (*zhemchuzhnaya bolezn*’). Only *zaum* poetry can cure this malady. What is this malady, in Zdanevich’s words? It seems to have to do with injuries inflicted on human language, and it manifests itself as “hard grains in folds of the organism of living language (language vivant).” The causes of this disease are connected with the process of the individuation of human languages, its rebirth in the transition from the state of animal language, where sounds are mere “echoes of animals’ emotional states.” Sounds in this state are devoid of meaning. It is only in human language that sounds become rational, become “carriers of mental particles,” and perform communicative functions. But human language can suddenly turn to the abnormal and return to its pre-rational state. This is where, according to Zdanevich’s artistic vision, the “pearly malady” develops. The healing of this malady is a poetic task, and “pearls” are just pure sound void of reason. The dadaist poet is the “pearl diver” who retrieves pure sound matter from the deep waters of rational language. That’s why *zaum* is rightly translated into English as “transrational” or “transmental” language.

THE TRANSATLANTIC “UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE”

Eugene Jolas had a different view on how to overcome this “malady of language.” He sees the solution to the crisis in the creation of a universal language based on a mixture of existing languages used on both sides of

the Atlantic. The contours of this language, he believed, were already present in his magazine and in the linguistic revolution it proclaimed. The best examples of such an “interlanguage” were Joyce’s work and perhaps also his own interlinguistic experiments. In a long 1932 essay entitled “The Language of Night,” he summarized the development of multilingual poetry from Mallarme to Arp. But it was only a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War that he began to speak of the “Euramerican,” “transatlantic” language of the future as a language of creative expression and communication. He argued that a linguistic reformation was already taking place in the American society, referring to the journalist H.L. Mencken’s famous book *The American Language* (1919). Jolas wanted to intensify and extend this trend through his concept of an “Atlantic,” or “Crucible” language, which would be the result of the racial synthesis taking place in the United States in the 1930s. He saw this new language as American English, based on Anglo-Saxon, but with additions and interferences from other languages coming to, from, and through America. This “polyglotism” is also a characteristic feature of Jolas’s own poetry, as he affirms: “I invented my own Atlantic language. I made the discovery of a multilingual form of poetry which corresponded to an inner need in me to express the linguistic monism which was my organic mode of thinking” (178).

In Jolas’s manifestoes on “revolutions of language,” “language of the night,” and “universal language,” we find the following passage: “The crisis in the communicative functions of language creates the intellectual chaos which characterizes all human relations today” (141). In order to overcome this chaos, he proposed a new mode of communication based on a “language of night” that “will make the intercontinental synthesis of the inner and outer language.” This language “will dance and sing, it will be a new vision of the ‘troisième œil,’ that will bind the races in the fabulous unity” (285). The manifesto-appeal *Wanted: A New Communicative Language!* (1932) shows Jolas’s effort to protest against the modern “language neurosis” and his perception of the need to enhance the linguistic capacity that developed in early humanity and remains hidden in the brain as a “universal language.”

Jolas’s universal language is, first, a project aimed at a mixture, an “interracial synthesis” of all the languages “being spoken in America today (178)”; secondly, it is an “intercontinental synthesis of the inner and outer language” capable of expressing the collective unconscious of humanity (285); third, Jolas’s universal language goes beyond multilingualism as an

integration of languages to a transformation of the very basis of language through the influence of diverse cultures; fourth, at the heart of this transformation is Jolas's positing of a poetic basis for the universal language as a "mantic compost" that is constantly changing and evolving at all linguistic levels; and finally, the universal language not only activates different linguistic levels, but also influences the mind of the speaker, stimulating creative linguistic activity and creating new forms of communication.

CONCLUSION

Eugene Jolas's "world revolution of language" was developed along lines not unlike other conceptions of a reformed or revolutionized language in the 1920s and beyond. The so-called linguistic turn, which actually began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a crucial factor in shaping European culture in the twentieth century. The interest of many fin-de-siècle intellectuals in the category of language and other sign systems was unprecedented. It was reflected in numerous experiments, both scientific and artistic, in language construction and creativity of language. This linguistic turn reached its ultimate expression in Martin Heidegger's formula "Language is the house of being" (found on the opening page of his 1949 *Letter on Humanism*). Thus a new form of thinking and a new form of creativity emerged, the format of which was determined by language.

The war forced the introduction of serious adjustments to this linguistic turn. Jolas emphasizes this point in the introduction to his book of multilingual verse, *Words from the Deluge*, published immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, a war that mixed all races and languages on the map of Europe and the world. After the trauma and catastrophe of the Second World War, Jolas could no longer speculate on the idea of a universal "pan-logos." In his eyes, the war meant the fall of the new creative Tower of Babel he had built on the pages of *transition*. All he was left with were reminiscences of the belle époque of the interwar cultural renaissance in the world's avant-gardes. Reflecting on the Babel of languages in contemporary literature, he wrote:

I felt: as man wanders anguished through this valley of crises and convulsions, his language and languages wander with him. (...) In pre-war years we were a handful of poets who sensed it perhaps more than others, who passed through the pathological experience of diverse tongues, who found a pro-

gressive sclerosis in all of them. Some of us tried to find radical solutions. We tried to create a poetic and prose medium in which words were invented, in which the miraculous philology was posited. We were passionately interested in inter-linguistic experiments, in sound poetry as a musical or prosodical ersatz for desiccated word sequences, in phantasmatic deformations for deformation's sake. (...) We tried to redefine basic words in a semantic revolution, we tried to go back to primitive etymons. We tried to give voice to the sufferings of man by applying a liturgical exorcism in a mad verbalism. (1998: 271)

In these reflections we see the metaphor of language as ocean, language as a vast space that divides the continents but also binds them in a transatlantic knot:

Language is in a fevered state today. It wanders about like the ocean washing the shores of the nations, depositing verbal sediments here and there, nibbling at the soil in foaming surges. Why should language not be channeled into a universal idiom? Seven years ago, I called this potential tongue *Atlantica*, because I felt that it might bridge the continents and neutralize the curse of Babel. (...) Language, like man, is today engaged in a vast migration. (...) The huge urban collectivities that are arising will forge the migratory and universal tongue in an exaltation of sacred and communal vocables, in a voyage without end. (1998: 272–73)

These are the concluding words of Eugene Jolas's memoirs. These words bring to a close the era of the transatlantic avant-garde, the active phase of which took place between the two world wars.

NOTES

1. These are all names of sections from different issues of *transition* magazine.
2. The etymology of the name Theo Rutra is related to the semantics of the divine and the chthonic: "Theo" Greek—"God"; "Rudra" Sanskrit—"fierce, roaring, red," Vedic deity and one of the forms of the Hindu god Siva associated with death, hunting, thunder, wind, and storm. Rudra personifies anger, rage.
3. See more on transition as a cultural phenomenon in McMillan (1975) and Mansanti (2009).
4. See the title of Benedikt Livshits's essay "In the Stronghold of the Revolutionary Word," 1919.
5. See Perloff (1998) and Kiefer (2002).

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Dark Night of the Universal: *transition* (1927–1938) as Region of the Modern

Barrett Watten

Abstract In taking up the international modernist journal *transition* (1927–1938), edited by Eugene Jolas, I begin with the editorial project of constructing a space between and among the literatures of three world languages: English, French, and German (coinciding, in fact, with the editor’s trilingual background as an emigrant from Alsace-Lorraine to the United States), on the way to a global universal. The disparity between the basic presuppositions of these literatures—for instance, between American objectivism and French surrealism—demands a higher level of interpretation, which I compare to a geographical “region” of the modern. As Jolas’s project continues through the decade of the 1930s and into the War, I see an attempt to construct aesthetic/ethical universals from the

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juxtaposition of global literatures that anticipates the postwar demand for ethical/political universals, in which Jolas himself participated as a journalistic reformer in Germany and as a reporter for the Nuremberg Trials. Over the past decade, there has been much revisionist scholarship on the global politics of modernism, an expansion of modernist studies into post-colonial and global contexts.¹ There has not yet been, however, an adequate attempt to explain modernism in terms of its regional construction—though the Marxist theory of “combined and uneven development” and David Harvey’s “spatial fix” of global capitalism open the way.² Here, I seek a parallel between the spatial entailments of political economy and the “spatial turn” of transnational modernism that led to the abstract and universalizing forms of modernism after 1945—at the same moment as the expansion of global capitalism in the postwar era.³ This abstract form of modernism may still be best understood, however, not in its universalizing claims but itself as a region of the modern, one that enacts a critical regionalist politics within an emerging global order. To test this hypothesis, I focus on the construction of an abstract and universalizing modernism in the publication history of *transition*, the transnational expatriate modernist review primarily edited by Eugene Jolas and published in Paris and The Hague from 1927 to 1938.⁴ In its pages, Jolas juxtaposes the aesthetic forms of several major European and American modernist movements and authors: expressionism, dada, and surrealism to begin with, along with uncategorizable American and Irish expatriate individuals such as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Djuna Barnes, and Samuel Beckett, as well as a number of iconoclastic figures like the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Harry Crosby, Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, and Bob Brown. Modernism itself takes the form of a combined and uneven development between and among its various national and individual manifestations in *transition*, each consciously oriented toward a higher synthesis based on deep structural commonalities (as well as surface similarities and even divergences). In bringing together a differential and diverging field of *modernisms*, Jolas, as editor, sought to interrogate and generalize their aesthetic premises through a kind of romantic/modernist “higher criticism”—first at the level of aesthetics but then in terms of language itself. Over the run of the journal, a commitment to metropolitan literatures such as English, French, and German (Jolas’s three languages and literary traditions) expanded toward a plurality of world languages, anticipating the decolonization to come in the postwar period.

In its development, *transition* moved from a differential construction of modernist experiment in major languages to the positing of a hypothetical universal language as part of a “Revolution of the Word”—after its 1929 manifesto but also as a more encompassing tendency—that would deprive national languages after the nationalist debacle of World War I. Such a horizon of universality was identified, somewhat incoherently, by Jolas as a new myth, which would succeed the warring nation states of modernity in an emerging global order founded on the aesthetic. Jolas’s project, however, would be derailed by the rise of fascism and the coming war, leading to quite different priorities during and after it, based on Jolas’s transnational/regional origins as an expatriate American born in Alsace/Lorraine, contested provinces with cultural heritages of both Germany and France. As the publication of his autobiography, *Man from Babel* (1998), revealed, Jolas became a key figure in antifascist propaganda campaigns and denazification efforts after the war, as an American journalist, cultural organizer, and witness to the Nuremberg Trials. As a journalist in occupied Germany, Jolas worked to modernize, simplify, and objectify journalistic practices in a manner diametrically opposed to the polyglot excesses of language in *transition*. The neglected conclusion of Jolas’s career—first as a journalist, then as an avant-garde editor, and lastly as a journalist—thus appends to the incomplete project of *transition*’s universalism, even as the latter connects to a second, related but discontinuous, moment in the politics of modernism: the deployment of modern art as a technic of democratization, an entailment of the consequences of denazification and Americanization in Germany. In the longer version of this essay, I pursue this narrative through the origins and development of the art exhibition *documenta*, staged in Kassel from 1955 to the present, focusing on its initially modernist aesthetic and cultural politics and its recent turn to global horizons. *documenta*’s construction of a global archive, and interrogation of the horizon of the universal, may thus be seen as directly anticipated by the spatial politics of modernism initiated in *transition*.

REGION I: TRANSNATIONAL MODERNISM

I will begin with an account of Eugene Jolas’s transnational, expatriate journal *transition*, edited in Paris and The Hague and published primarily in English from 1927–1938, reading its modernism not only in the individual works it brought together but through the form of the journal

itself.⁵ Jolas's intention, in essays and manifestos published throughout the journal's run, consciously sought to produce a "higher," ultimately universal remedy for the dispersion and alienation of the modern in the spatial and temporal divergences of modernism in its existing but always partial forms. A rough-and-ready blueprint for the unfolding horizon of *transition's* project is evident in its manifesto for a "Revolution of the Word" (1929), signed by numerous authors but bearing the unmistakable stamp of Jolas's editorial mission. As opposed to "the spectacle of short stories, novels, poems and plays"—i.e., conventional literature and its attending language, genres, and forms—the authors make the following proclamations:

1. The revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact.
2. The imagination in search of a fabulous world is autonomous and unconfined. [...]
6. The literary creator has the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words imposed on him by text-books and dictionaries.
7. He has the right to use words of his own fashioning and to disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws. [...]
11. The writer expresses. He does not communicate.
12. The plain reader be damned.⁶

While communicating an atemporal expression of suprasubjective will, the manifesto is as well a derivative mélange of existing avant-garde aesthetics and communicative styles, borrowing from expressionism, futurism, vorticism, dada, and surrealism, at least. Also manifest is the underlying interpretation of these positions through romanticism, given the numerous one-line quotes from Blake (such as "Enough! Or Too Much!..." or "Damn braces! Bless relaxes!..."). What is important is that these several traditions cross national boundaries and languages, following the prior example of Zürich dada, and that they are unified by the ever-evolving horizon of romanticism. *transition's* provocation accomplished its goals; it was circulated and condemned and seen as a threat to established values. *transition's* atemporal blast at the "plain reader," however, appears quite different from the process of the journal in its development, which amounted to a careful, if innovative, construction of a series of literary experiments in multiple genres that at times threw conventional language out the window or, more interestingly, worked between and among languages while exploring the limits of literary and visual expression in

generally fixed genres and forms. It is rather the larger form of the journal itself that manifests the horizon inferred by the manifesto, where the overall project defines its desired unity as an “ever more about to be” in the writings and art of multiple authors. The editorial form of *transition*, then, moves from the particular to the universal as its aesthetic end; in the collective form of the journal, we see a poetics that transforms the *radical particularity* of modernist forms and languages toward the horizon of post-1945 abstraction.⁷ It remains to describe the specific argument between and among the works that accomplishes this.

In siting Jolas’s synthesis of multiple and discontinuous modernist traditions toward the Zero Hour of 1945, I want to identify spatial and temporal logics in the unfolding work of the journal. The New Modernist Studies has shifted critical attention from the temporal to the spatial—from an epistemic shift of the New occurring “sometime about December 1910” to a more multifaceted account of modernism’s production in its intersecting zones. Jolas’s construction of a transnational modernism in *transition*—addressed to Anglo-American readers but published on the Continent—is an important site for rethinking modernism in such a global context. Here, we may recall the differential and spatially disjunctive constructions of modernism that have yet to reach a disciplinary consensus among global regions (Anglo-American, French, and German); it was precisely Jolas’s intention to combine these traditions, proactively, in an emergent universal form. Jolas’s project allows us to see the horizon of modernism not as a kind of controlling discourse over modernity but as an open construction of untotizable globality envisioned in a specific historical period (between the wars; before the coming cataclysm). In a manner informed by single-author major works like *The Making of Americans*, *Ulysses*, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, *The Cantos*, or *Paterson*, and arguably influenced by all of them, the multi-authored production of *transition* gives primary evidence of the spatial and temporal horizons of an emerging global order, culminating in the global transformation of World War II and its Zero Hour in 1945. Thus, *transition* cannot simply be read as a post-League of Nations assemblage of transnational modernisms in the literary traditions known to the trilingual Jolas (English, French, and German); rather, it demands a more capacious and radical synthesis. *transition* was an intervention *against* individualism, *against* national literatures, *against* the rise of fascism, *for* a new language, *for* a critical use of translation, *for* the collective unconscious, and finally *for* abstract art, anticipating the global crisis of modernity and its next, postmodern period.

My argument thus begins with the discontinuous zones assembled in the pages of *transition*, each read as a formal determination of literary value, but also as a juxtaposition of differing regions of modernist production, worked through the overall form of the journal itself as an address to the global crisis.

At the outset of *transition*'s project, with its first issue in April 1927, stand those twin monuments of Anglo-American modernism, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein. Jolas invested heavily in both: he published serial installments of "Work in Progress" in nearly every issue of the first series, and imported major pieces by Stein, including a reprint of *Tender Buttons* in Summer 1928.⁸ Jolas's editorial method seems, in retrospect, straightforward—to juxtapose works by major and minor figures with *differing* aesthetic and formal commitments, then different languages and cultures—as a means for elucidating common aesthetic values between and among them.⁹ The juxtaposition of Joyce and Stein would construct, in redefining the literary through a logic of equivalence between the regional differences of their examples, the universal aesthetic horizon of a "Revolution of the Word." While *transition*'s language-centered poetics predict the "turn to language" of the postmodern period, they are irreducible to "the word as such" (even though they were influenced by the examples of dada and futurism), and thus propose a more complicated *literariness* than is reducible to their radical particularity, involving content as much as language. What renders this possible are the regional differences between forms of writing that have not yet reached the horizon of the universal (and in their radical particularity are anything but reducible to romanticism). We may discern the manner in which this open, differential relation works toward a larger horizon in comparing examples by Joyce and Stein from the journal's first number (1927):

What then agentlike brought that tragoady thundersday this municipal sin business? It may half been a misfired brick, as some say, or it mought have been due to a collapsus of his back promises, as others looked at it. (There extand by now one thousand and one stories, all told, of the same.) But so sore did abe ite ivvy's holired abbles, (what with the wall's horrors of roll-srights, carhacks, stonengens, kistvanes, tramtrees, fargobrawlers, autoki-notons hippohobbies, streetfleets, tournintaxes...(Joyce 11)

Elucidate the problem of halve.
Halve and have.
Halve Rivers and Harbours.
Have rivers and harbors.

You do see that halve rivers and harbours, halve rivers and harbours, you do see that halve rivers and harbours makes halve rivers and harbours and you do see, you do see that you that you do not have rivers and harbours when you halve rivers and harbours, you do see that you can halve rivers and harbours... (Stein 64)

Reading the first passage from “Work in Progress” as a “region” of writing, one is struck by Joyce’s attempt to substantiate the materiality of language but to hinder its exchangeability through his use of opaque terms and hybrid neologisms.¹⁰ His spatial logic creates a zone of meaning as a unique language that exists only in its pages and does not easily translate to any other; as a universal language, “Work in Progress” can only be understood by a community of one. Stein’s “An Elucidation,” on the other hand, addresses exchangeability at the level of language, didactically elucidating the distinction between the homophones *have* and *halve* as a solution to the question of whether *rivers* and *harbours*, when divided (*halved*), can be owned (*had*). In her writing, language is simultaneously literal and an analogue of its interpretation; a relation between objects is rendered as equivalent to language as meaning itself. Where Joyce creates a linguistic paradigm for the production of meaning, he resists exchange, while Stein’s linguistic productivity is entirely exchangeable, pointing the way to her postmodern reception as a public author. The space of “Work in Progress” is an unrealizable linguistic utopia, an imagined nowhere to which access is blocked by the tower of Babel, while Stein constructs a linguistic exchangeability that can take us everywhere (and is fundamentally enabled by the modular form of American English to accomplish this effect). Jolas’s larger method, in this pairing, is to construct a ground between two practices as an open horizon for a literature to come, rather than to see their languages as a single form of *literarity*. The combination of the two in the same inaugural issue forces meaning toward a higher or “meta-” plane.

The marriage of Joyce and Stein, over the life of *transition*, yielded a number of offspring writing in emerging, tentative genres. Gillespie, von Freytag-Loringhoven, Crosby, and Brown all practiced ur-Language writing as their contributions to the journal. Language itself became a ground for aesthetic production, with dictionaries of “slanguage,” neologisms, BASIC English, and African-American dialect; *transition* 32 featured a translation of Joyce’s “Work in Progress” into BASIC English, pairing “the most simple and the most complicated languages known to man.”¹¹

transition's revolution, however, would not result in a proposal for a universal language (like Esperanto) nor a paradigm for literarity (like structuralism).¹² While vocabularies and languages are mixed in the journal, the result may be a form of resistance to equivalence as much as any universality of exchange, leaving open the question of what, if not a logic of substitution and exchange, motivates their productivity. *transition* preserved the boundaries between genres and movements, dividing most of its numbers into prose, poetry, visual arts, and criticism, though at times it experimented with hybrid organization; even as it broke new ground in publishing multi-linguaged poems, it usually respected linguistic boundaries in translation. While the larger horizon of *transition*'s quest for the universal was located at the intersection between forms, languages, movements, and genres, each conveying positive content its limits, the question arises of what values are created by their juxtaposition. A prime example of the foregrounding of differential relations between forms occurs in the juxtaposition of Paul Eluard and William Carlos Williams in *transition 2*. Williams's imagist/objectivist portrait "The Dead Baby" could be read as proletarian realism:

Hurry up! any minute
 they will be bringing it
 from the hospital —
 a white model of our lives
 a curiosity —
 surrounded by fresh flowers. (118)

while Eluard's "No More Division" presents surrealist nonreferentiality and dreamscapes:

In the evening of madness, nude and clear,
 Space between things has the shape of my words,
 The shape of words spoken by someone unknown,
 By a vagabond who unties the rope from his chest,
 And lassoes the echoes....(114–15)

The space between these poems—between the imagist objectivity of American modernism and the deterritorialization of French surrealism—establishes a regional exchange that is both a grounding in material conditions and their abstraction toward a space of potential meaning. Where

Williams focuses on working-class deprivation, the loss of the object, and the abject fetishism of the lost object of the dead baby's body, Eluard invokes aesthetic productivity as existing in a "space between things." The loss of the object, identified with aesthetic value in Williams, becomes the prior condition of relationality in an imagined world where objects are mutable and in constant flux for Eluard. *transition* moves between these poles, creating a space for literature where abstraction from material conditions becomes a site of desiring exchange. In similar instances, Jolas places the object-oriented lyrics of American modernism (Hart Crane, Laura Riding, Allen Tate) and its left wing (Louis Zukofsky, Muriel Rukeyser, Kenneth Fearing) next to the deterritorializing poetics of surrealism (Paul Éluard, André Breton, Benjamin Péret, Pierre Unik), resulting in an ungrounding of aesthetic practices as "regions" of a globality-to-come. In the productive tension between the objectivism of American modernism and the psychoanalytic methods of surrealism, Jolas saw a potential universal horizon.

REGION II: TOWARD THE UNIVERSAL

Jolas's dialogue between American and continental modernisms was not merely stylistic; nothing less than global transformation through the destruction of national literatures and the creation of a universal language was to be his goal. The scale of *transition*'s imagined horizon anticipates that of the coming war, seen in political and economic terms of global transformation *as* the crisis of capital accumulation in its imperialist form. While utopian globality was part of Jolas's project from the outset, it intensified in later issues of *transition* (and at the end of the 1930s) with their calls for a transformed consciousness, a literature of the night, a new mythology, and a new school of art (Vertigralism) that would absorb and transcend the historical avant-gardes. The result of this aesthetic transformation would be a global "turn to language," an amalgam of major languages even though basically structured on English, while its allegory would unfold as a transcultural turn to primal irrationalism, a dissolution of the individual toward the reconstitution of Man, a restoration of myth out of history. Such an ahistorical horizon of myth will be taken up by numerous American poets after the war, in a depth hermeneutics that was central to the development of abstract expressionism.¹³ *transition* thus anticipates postwar abstraction in working toward a higher unity of American and continental traditions, for which both objectivism and

surrealism were crucial. Between the two, *transition* sought a synthesis of styles, as in Jolas's futurist/expressionist "Express":

Wheels scream in fevered crash of speed.
 We hunger for eternity;
 We smuggle golden sins in suit-cases:
 We have sneers hidden in our pockets;
 O villages! O languid smoke over gables!
 We tremble with longing for your dusk. [...] ¹⁴

Where the method of *transition*'s first series (through the first twenty issues, published in Paris), took the form of a more traditional literary journal and kept its contributions largely separated by genre, its second series (edited from The Hague, commencing with number 21 in 1932), evolved a more comprehensive stance toward its eventual synthesis. The range of genres, styles, and languages expanded as well, even as American writers were separated from those of "Other Countries." The expatriate condition was the focus of a symposium on "Why Do Americans Live in Europe" in issue 14, but by issue 18 national distinctions were dropped for sections titled "The Synthetist Universe," "Explorations," "The Revolution of the Word," and "Narrative." Issue 19/20 saw headings such as "Dream and Mythos," "Revolution of the Senses," "Cambridge Experiment," and "Reality and Beyond," while issue 21 proliferated with "The Vertical Age," "Anamyths, Psychographs, and other Prose-Texts," "Metanthropological Crisis," "Poetry Is Vertical," "The Mantic Personality," and "Laboratory of the Word" (even while authorship is preserved in "An Homage to James Joyce"). Jolas's idiosyncratic, neologicistic framing of new genres of writing would continue to the end of the journal's run, seeking wider adoption of his movement-concept "Vertigralism" under headings such as "The Vertigral Age," "Vertigral Documents," "Laboratory of the Mystic Logos," "Mutation in Language," and the "Subobject of Art" (issues 22 and 23). As the cultural and linguistic scope of the journal expanded, Jolas's key concept called for a combination of existing aesthetic values into a cosmic program of spiritual renewal, a transvaluation of all values in art:

The vertigral spirit seeks a creative synthesis through Pan-Romantic irrationalism and through the dreams of the individual and the collective, in order

to attain a total personality, the superconscious man, the interracial man, the man with a pineal eye.... We need new forms for new myths. (2009: 275)

Some of these new forms would include: the “paramyth”; the “hypnologue”; “polyvocables”; and the “ontogram,” all on the potential agenda of the postwar avant-garde. In its attack on “the real” in favor of a dream logic that would transcend the boundaries of the aesthetic, not to mention the subject, surrealism inaugurated a form of “productivity” beyond the production/distribution/consumption triad. In the space between aesthetic forms and values, and motivating their *productivité*, surrealism’s account of the relation of the unconscious to the forms of art assumed a universalizing function that placed all objects and values within a larger dynamic of desiring production. Surrealism, as economic in both the Freudian and Marxist senses, provided the link between the deterritorialization of desire and the objectification of art, moving from equivalence to transvaluation. When combined with *transition*’s call for “a new symbolic and communicative language,” surrealism would help to destabilize and thus transform the materiality of signification toward a universalist aesthetic that would, in the postwar period, emerge as *abstraction*. Abstraction, in turn, would reflect *transition*’s synthesis in being both material and ideal, a new language of the inexpressible as a form of material productivity.¹⁵

I have tried to show how *transition*’s aesthetic transvaluation of values operates in three distinct regions of literariness: as a logic of equivalence within forms of writing, seen as the product of labor (Joyce and Stein); as a form of abstraction between forms of writing, on analogy to objects placed in exchange (Williams and Eluard); and, in the form of the journal, as a horizon of productivity that resists direct representation as inexpressible and in constant motion, on analogy to the circulation and accumulation of capital (from the transnational avant-gardes to a utopian horizon of the global). What still needs to be articulated for a critical regionalist account of transnational modernism is the connection between the forms of exchange between particulars enacted in the journal’s move toward abstraction and its spatial politics, which are argued at the level of language and form as transcending place and nationality. In *transition*’s region of the modern, first, the competition between national economies is dissolved in the work of translation and exchange between languages: place is released into the mutable forms of languages themselves. Second, the relations of “uneven development” between industrial Euro-America

and the colonized world would be transformed through the inclusion of the literatures and languages of formerly subject peoples (African-American, Native American, African, Oceanic); a linguistic universum would be extended to a global scale. Finally, the central place of “destruction” of existing forms necessary for their transformation (figured in the suicides of von Freytag-Loringhoven, Crane, and Crosby) would be generalized across all forms of cultural production in their quest for the new universal. The political economy of capitalism and its revolutionary antithesis merge at the level of language and abstraction through Jolas’s proposal of a transvaluative method, opening a way to futurity.

REGION III: MAN FROM BABEL

The impossible ambitions of this synthesis, however, would become evident at several levels of *transition’s* project—in its decreasing frequency (though greater size) through the 1930s, in its uncertainty about how precisely its transnational goals would be realized, and finally in the failure to achieve a specific example or aesthetic realization of the new language its manifesto called for (apart from Joyce’s “Work in Progress”). The difficulty may be read in the often forced effort by Jolas to incorporate his three languages into a unified idiom, as in this poem:

Nous volons dans un blizzard de satellites
A coté de la voie lactée
Nous volons éblouis...

ferner stimmen aetherschwall ruft
berueckend im reigen des nachtchors
der die namenlosen umschwebt...

We grow huge and visionary
We play with spiral nebulae
With the angelic spheres...(1998: 157–58)

As if caught out by the poem’s inability to halt the rise of fascism, Jolas compares this fragment with a more literal passage written after “Hitler’s aggression against the free world”:

We heard the blasphemous monologues
Blasting through the sultry afternoon
In the blistering motion of time

Which had lost the sigil of eternal things... (158)

After Pearl Harbor, and in both life and literature, Jolas's transnational literary project was jolted back to realist concerns, writing for instance "To My Mother Engulfed in the War":

Hitler is Daniel's beast with the iron teeth
 He is the raucous voice smattering lies
 But do not be afraid in the panting nocturne
 The evangel of the angels wakes and is ready to strike... (191)

Jolas joined the war effort, taking an editorial position with the Office of War Information where he could use his skills "to send millions of words in all three of my languages, words that soon became explosive as rockets against the Axis war-machine" (192). As Allied forces occupied German territory, Jolas helped found "the first local newspaper to be printed under the auspices of the American army" (215), beginning a project of journalistic reform to overturn the opinion-ridden, propagandistic practices of Nazi newspapers. At the same time, he reacquainted himself with German language and literature, finding sources for Nazi mythology in the German romantics (221); participated in the demilitarization and denazification of German in print media; and proposed the publication of a "new German lexicon that would replace the shoddy Nazi terms [with a] *Wörterbuch des Unmenschen* (Vocabulary of the monsters)" (243–44).¹⁶ His central contribution, however, was to help establish American standards of journalistic objectivity, writing a blueprint for news reporting in stark contrast to his earlier calls for an abstract, romantic, impossible language during his editorship of *transition*:

1. DANA [Deutsche Allgemeine Nachrichten-Agentur; German General News Agency] will henceforth adopt the American style of news-reporting.
2. Essential facts should be given in the lead, that is, in the introductory paragraphs, to be followed by paragraphs dealing accumulatively with the chronological enumeration of details.
3. All editorial comment must be rigorously excluded from our stories and only objective facts should be presented. [...]
7. Factual accuracy and ethical integrity in news-writing will be the hallmarks of the new democratic press we are seeking to create in Germany. (229)¹⁷

The project of a “new universal language” was historically transformed here from the utopianism of the interwar period to the realism of the post-war era, with Germany under American and Allied occupation. At the same time, Jolas’s commitment to what Theodor W. Adorno called “the new categorical imperative” would evolve, through his journalistic coverage of the Nuremberg Trials.¹⁸ After his return to objective standards of reporting and universal standards of judgment, Jolas would not continue his avant-garde writing, but produced criticism and his autobiography, dying in 1952. In the postwar period, however, the modernist quest for universals would continue in new forms, in literary publications and art exhibitions such as *documenta*, which further episodes of this study will take up as Jolas’s legacy.

NOTES

1. See the work of Brent Hayes Edwards, Susan Stanford Friedman, Peter Kalliney, Jehan Ramazani, and Rebecca Walkowitz.
2. The term “combined and uneven development,” coined by Leon Trotsky, is taken up by Ernest Mandel, David Harvey, and Neil Smith.
3. The relation of the Zero Hour to the emerging global order is the subject of my edited forum published in China; Watten, *Modernity @ Zero Hour*.
4. The Bibliothèque nationale française has page scans for the years 1927–1930 and 1938: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb328797802/date.r=transition.langEN>. See also *In transition* and Rothenberg, *Revolution of the Word*.
5. While there has been recent work on *transition*—Mansanti, *La Revue transition*; publication of Jolas’s *Critical Writings* and his autobiography *Man from Babel*, and a 1998 conference—it has not been read, as a multi-authored work, for its formative influence on mid-century modernism.
6. The proclamation appears in *transition* 16/17 (1929); *In transition*, 19.
7. I use the term *radical particularity* as a hallmark of modernist and later avant-gardes, from Marcel Duchamp, Stein, and Zukofsky to Language writing, in *Questions of Poetics*, chap. 2.
8. The fortunes of Joyce and Stein over the run of the journal diverged sharply. Joyce continued to represent Jolas’s transnational, synthetic politics of language; Stein, however, was excoriated after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and her American tour.
9. This is the opposite of Pound’s memorable editorial advice, to fill an issue of a journal with 50% what one wants and 50% whatever. Jolas intended the form itself of his magazine to be critical; Pound, however, saw publication as a way to highlight individual works of value.

10. On Joyce's obscurity in *Finnegans Wake*, see Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark*.
11. Quoted in *In transition*, 135–39; I discuss the translation of Joyce's "Work in Progress" into BASIC English in *Constructivist Moment*, chap. 1.
12. After the war, Jolas proposed a global language called "Atlantica," which would improve on Esperanto and BASIC English; *Man from Babel*, 272–73.
13. Such figures include late surrealists such as Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and Philip Lamantia and Black Mountain poets Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and others. *transition* was the first major conduit for surrealism in English (with *This Quarter*).
14. "Express," *transition* 5 (August 1927)
15. For surrealism and American art, see Tashjian, *Boatload of Madmen*.
16. The lexicon evokes Victor Klemperer's study of Nazi jargon, *Language of the Third Reich*.
17. On Jolas's post-1945 "objectivity," see Rosenau, "Universality and the Zero Hour."
18. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

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Dada Countercultural Practices at the University of Iowa

Kathryn M. Floyd and Brett M. Van Hoesen

Abstract This essay argues that academic scholarship and artistic actions centered on the history of Dada can themselves enact critiques that resonate with Dada's original resistance to institutional power. Specifically, we discuss the under-examined case of Dada-related studies, exhibitions, and activities at the University of Iowa. Beginning in the 1960s, a unique group of scholars and art practitioners who were interested in and influenced by German Dada converged in this academic setting. Led by professors Stephen C. Foster, Rudolf Kuenzli, Hans Breder, and others in the arts and humanities, this interdisciplinary group nurtured Dada-derived experiments and critical approaches that directly and indirectly called into question the very institutional structures that helped bring them forth. In other words, Dada studies at the University of Iowa mimicked and

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reinforced the self-critical and interventionist tactics of historical Dada. Current histories of the movement often speak more to the corporatized theatrics of contemporary art institutions and cultural centers, frequently overlooking the truly integrated and authentic countercultural approaches that were integral to Dada and, in turn, the Iowa spirit. This essay presents an urgently necessary historical overview and legacy of the fortuitous constellation of countercultural programs, events, spaces, and collections at the University of Iowa.

INTRODUCTION

Celebrations of the centenary of the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 inspired a new wave of scholarship on the radical Dada activities that took place not only in Zurich, but also in Germany, France, the United States, and beyond. The spirit of 2016 also inspired a kind of “taking stock” of Dada historiography, considering where the scholarship had been and where it was yet to go. David Hopkins’ 2016 *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, for example, lays out the significant methodologies and shores up established themes in the field. His introduction discusses the impact of Frankfurt School and poststructuralist concepts on historical analyses of Dada, notes the contributions of theorists of the “historical avant-garde,” and observes the recent return to empirical historical perspectives in the wake of the theoretically driven methods of the late twentieth century (2–4).

But what has remained largely unexamined in this and other narratives of Dada’s history, is an understanding of the institutional, not just disciplinary or methodological, spaces and situations in which the analysis of Dada’s critical, even “anti-institutional” tactics were pursued. Hopkins suggests the existence of these various environments when he notes that “the most useful recent studies on Dada” have come from the museum sphere, specifically Leah Dickerman and Laurent Le Bon’s catalogues for the blockbuster 2006 *Dada* exhibitions in Washington, D.C. (Dickerman, 2006) and Paris (Le Bon, 2006) (2). Describing scholarship produced in a very different sort of institutional space, Hopkins likewise notes that “it is in published collections of essays, often deriving from conferences” that some of the best “Anglo-American” studies of Dada can be found (2). But the diverse, sometimes competing, agendas and approaches of historians narrating Dada in and through object- or practice-based museal

frameworks, or mostly text-driven, discipline-specific academic discourses, demand further illumination. That scholars working in all of these spaces (and for their different audiences) have given great attention to Dada's critical engagement with the powers and strategies of various institutional formats, makes this oversight intriguing.

As Barnaby Dicker argues in his 2013 review of Adamowicz and Robertson's (2011–2012) edited volumes *Dada and Beyond*, “the encounter between Dada and academia is always interesting... the former—characterized as unruly, playful, anti-establishment—is pursued vigorously by the latter—systematic, (traditionally) serious, *fundamentally* establishment” (1288). Dicker argues that *Dada and Beyond* and other “scholarly multi-author studies on and around Dada,” such as the conference anthologies Hopkins mentions, or Stephen Foster's ten-volume series (1996–2005) *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada*, or the journal articles published in *Dada/Surrealism* under Rudolf Kuenzli's editorship, have constructed a “robust” and “substantial” literature. Nevertheless, this scholarship often retells Dada's history with a “controlled, at times cold, comportment,” rather than tapping into Dada's innate “critique and humor, transnationality, and interdisciplinarity.” “How long,” Dicker asks, “[can we] continue to rehearse the potential application of Dada as a critical, academic methodology in line with its original incarnations and lasting traces within current literature and the arts before actually testing how this might manifest itself...Dada is already in the academy. We should make the most of this” (1289).

What was perhaps invisible to Dicker, and increasingly forgotten by historians and historiographers, is that Dada's potential to influence academia had already taken root in the very institution that produced some of its most significant scholarship. Indeed, a series of programs, publications, collections, and events at the University of Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa) created the critical, transnational, interdisciplinary, even playful environment that Dicker calls for. Beginning in the 1960s, the University of Iowa became the unlikely epicenter of a unique convergence of scholars and practitioners interested in, and influenced by German Dada and its related constellations of so-called “avant-gardes.” Led by Stephen C. Foster, Rudolf (Ruedi) Kuenzli, Hans Breder, and others in art, art history, comparative literature, communication studies, dance, intermedia, new music, performance, and writing, they founded and nurtured a series of unique programs based on Dada-derived experiments and critical approaches that often called into question traditional academic structures. Landmark

programs such as the Center for New Music (founded 1966), the Intermedia Program (founded 1968), and the International Dada Archive (founded 1979) not only led to the production of important books and articles on Dada, but also created a ripple effect that still informs art and art historical practice, scholarship, and teaching both within and beyond Iowa City. That such an environment flourished at an American public university in a peripheral, near-rural Midwestern setting makes Dada's presence at Iowa unique, surprising, and increasingly unimaginable. In contemporary academia's culture of business models, quantitative assessment, devaluation of the humanities, and unwillingness to accommodate, let alone support, critical practices and ideas that have the potential to undermine the power of the institution itself, remembering the history of Iowa's "invisible republic of Dada" takes on a particular urgency. This essay provides an overview of this fortuitous constellation of people, programs, objects, and events at the University of Iowa whose contemporary legacy continues to affect students, scholars, and artists alike.

INTERDISCIPLINARY BEGINNINGS

How could one of the most important sites of Dada Studies be so far removed from the urban centers and prestigious art institutions of the coasts? The answer may lie first in the University of Iowa's fundamentally "interdisciplinary" foundations. Well-known today for its cultivation of conservative rural imagery by Regionalist painter Grant Wood or Iowa Writers' Workshop poet Paul Engle, Iowa had in fact slowly established itself as an innovative site for cutting-edge, interdisciplinary arts and humanities education and thought that valued experimentation in the liberal arts as much as it did in the sciences (Siegling 2014: 44). In addition to being one of the first universities to develop the MFA degree for artists, writers, musicians, and other creatives, the Department of Art was one of the first to combine its studio art and art history programs into a single department. Building on the "Iowa Idea" proposed in the 1920s by administrators influenced by philosopher and educator John Dewey, the practice of art and the study of its history and theory were merged for the potential benefit of both studio and art history students and faculty. The departments novel interface of art history curricula and studio art practice helped establish its reputation for advanced and experimental work. Dubbed "Greenwich Village West," by the 1940s it had attracted teachers such as Phillip Guston and Mauricio Lasansky and students like Elizabeth

Catlett and Miriam Schapiro (Doss 2017: 117). The Department brought summer exhibitions of modern and contemporary art to Iowa City, and from these events began to acquire a modest selection of objects by artists like Max Beckmann, Joan Miro, and Stuart Davis. The collection was famously bolstered in 1951 by Peggy Guggenheim's donation of Jackson Pollock's *Mural* (1943–1944), which would hang in the painting studios and library before it became the linchpin of the collection of the new Museum of Art that opened in 1969.

Like the Department of Art, The School of Music, under the leadership of Himie Voxman, had long been interested in modern music and had enriched its curriculum in music history, composition, and performance with an impressive roster of visiting artists, from Aaron Copland and Darius Milhaud to Samuel Barber. With an initial grant of \$100,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation, the faculty's promotion of contemporary music by living artists was institutionalized in 1966 in the Center for New Music, led by Richard Hervig and William Hibbard. A second Rockefeller grant in 1969 led to the creation of the related Center for New Performing Arts (1969–1976), also led by Hibbard. Through its CNM and CNPA, the University of Iowa School of Music produced numerous performances of twentieth-century music by innovators like John Cage and R. Crumb, experimental forms such as electronic and tape music, interdisciplinary performances of music, dance, theater, visual art, and poetry, and presentations on music technology (Phillips Farley 1991: 27). While Hervig originally believed that traditional modes of presentation, such as formal attire for musicians and conventional publicity and programs, gave the Center an air of gravitas, these strictures were soon loosened. Casual clothing, collage-like programs sporting free-floating typography, and collaborations with other performing arts groups spoke to a growing countercultural, intermedia, and even Dada-like flavor. A CNPA performance in December 1970, for example, occupied four different areas of the recently built Museum of Art, where four compositions were played simultaneously, and concluded with a long improvised piece entitled "The Center: for new music" that made use of a lawnmower, snowfence, marbles, and wheelchair as "instruments" (28).

But this interdisciplinary environment was perhaps most focused in the Intermedia and Video Art Program, established in 1967–1968 in the School of Art and Art History, "to [Breder's] surprise," writes Klaus-Peter Busse, by German artist Hans Breder, who arrived at the University of Iowa from Hamburg by way of New York City in 1966 (Busse 2005: 11).

The Intermedia and Video Art Program, closely associated with the CNPA, was a graduate program that awarded the MFA and freely combined the study and practice of traditional and non-traditional studio media with performance and installation art, music, dance, film, photography, and video. Related to Dick Higgins' concept of "intermedia," a late-twentieth-century extension of Dada principles, and influenced by Fluxus artists, Breder's version of "intermedia" encouraged students to explore the "liminal spaces" between the arts. Breder collaborated with a range of faculty and departments on campus and also invited an impressive array of international artists such as Allan Kaprow, Karen Finley, Vito Acconci, Ken Friedman, Nam June Paik, Ben Vautier, Robert Wilson, and Higgins himself to Iowa City for workshops, performances, and interventions (Friedman 2005: 54). In the 1970s, Breder and his network cultivated students like sculptor Charles Ray and, most famously, Ana Mendieta, whose early radical actions and performances, such as the reenactment of a rape scene and her iconic *Siluetas* series of the 1970s and 80s, for example, were not only explorations of her identity, but also responses to the local environment at the university and in Iowa City. It was the unique combination of national, local, and university support for the arts in the 1960s and 70s, the availability of public and private funding for interdisciplinary and avant-garde initiatives at the University of Iowa, and strong national and international networks of artists invited to Iowa City by faculty like Breder that allowed the Intermedia Program to grow and thrive (Siegling 2014). The success of the experimental CNPA and the innovative Intermedia Program against the backdrop of the 1970s art scene was no doubt one factor that helped set the stage for the unique cultivation of Dada studies at Iowa.

DADA ARRIVES AT IOWA

In the early 1970s, two future Dada scholars established themselves at the University of Iowa. Originally from Switzerland, Rudolf (Ruedi) Kuenzli, a scholar of American modernist literature with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, was hired as Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature. In 1972, art historian and cultural theorist Stephen C. Foster joined the faculty of the School of Art and Art History from the University of Pennsylvania. An expert on the New York School with an interest in analytic philosophy and institutional theories of art authored by George Dickie and others, Foster also studied Berlin Dada, in particular the work

of Johannes Baader, and taught seminars on Dada and Marcel Duchamp, whose work was also of interest to Kuenzli, as well as on Surrealism and avant-garde film.

In the spring of 1978, the two scholars team-taught an interdisciplinary, cross-listed course called “Dada in Art and Literature.” The innovative collaboration soon led to a proposal for an international, interdisciplinary conference and concurrent exhibition on the topic, with the goal of creating an event of “worldwide importance” that would bring the best Dada scholars together in one place and catalyze new scholarship in a field that had heretofore proved “disappointing” (Givens 1978: 10). Organized by Foster and Kuenzli, the conference, held at the University of Iowa from March 30 to April 1, 1978, attracted around 300 attendees, including prominent international experts such as Michel Sanouillet, Richard Sheppard, Dickran Tashjian, and Mary Ann Caws who spoke on topics as diverse as criticism, poetry, semiotics, graphic design, mysticism, primitivism, and other themes. Truly transdisciplinary, each day’s sessions were concluded with musical performances and intermedia events, such as Ben Vautier’s Fluxconcert at Hans Breder’s experimental Corroborae Gallery. Some of the papers themselves also verged on the performative; Elmer Peterson’s paper, for example, left behind dry academic conventions and verged on spoken-word performance.

In his overview of the conference for the journal *Umbrella*, Fluxus artist Ken Friedman noted that it was “the first conference devoted solely to the study and discussion of Dada...” (1978: 47). Friedman’s lone review also archives the overarching spirit of critical humor, playfulness, enthusiasm, and joy that pervaded the unusual scholarly gathering. Recounting the opening of the conference, he writes that “Willard J. Boyd, President of the University of Iowa...delivered the welcome.” “In a graceful, eloquent sound-poem, he rendered thanks, praise to Dada, welcome and homage to the Dada spirit, all in a few lines, half of which he read backwards. The laughter and applause lasted as long as the speech” (47). Many of the papers and sessions also offered a dose of the “dada spirit.” “Kuenzli’s speech,” Friedman recalls, “was a delightful example of the blend of scholarship and pleasure that characterized the conference: he broke into resonant renditions of sound-poetry as he illustrated his text” (48). There were even “inside jokes” that wound their way through the various sessions. The recurring theme of polarity and “the poles of Dada” became an ongoing gag about the conference as a symposium on Polish jokes (49). Friedman sums up his review with this rare evaluation of a

scholarly symposium: “throughout the entirety of the Conference, a sense of joy and humor were evident” (49).

As part of the conference, Foster curated a small exhibition of Dada art and publications at the University of Iowa Museum of Art, a show that, like the conference, would “[present] Dada as a distinct movement whose literary, political, and philosophical aspects were as important as visual and aesthetic considerations” (Moser 1978: 2). To this end, the exhibition focused on Dada documents, including journals and other publications, and was appropriately titled *Dada Artifacts*, with a “*sous rature*” gesture to signal Dada’s problematic categorization as simply an art historical movement. Foster borrowed approximately 150 periodicals, books, posters, and manuscripts, and even a few artworks, from private lenders like graphic designers Arthur and Elaine Cohen or Timothy Baum and public collections such as the MoMA, Northwestern University Special Collections, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and organized them by Dada center. Some of the items on display were also part of the University’s growing collection of avant-garde materials, acquired for the University Library’s Special Collections by bibliographer Frank Hanlin. After some negotiation with the Director, these materials were installed in a prominent space on the main floor of the museum, rather than in the basement as originally intended. With the exception of larger pieces such as the Salon Dada poster, everything was arranged in horizontal plexiglass vitrines, allowing viewers to examine them closely and approximate the natural posture of reading. The accompanying catalog, a small, portable, paperback book conceived as a “research tool,” contained essays by Foster and Kuenzli, Richard Sheppard’s Dada chronology, and numerous reproductions of the journals and books, along with helpful commentary about each item on display (Foster 1978).

The University’s support for such an unconventional scholarly event was impressive and impactful. The president of the University himself opened the conference and hosted a reception for attendees at the President’s House (Friedman 1978: 47). The museum contributed approximately \$20,000, a large portion of its annual budget, for *Dada Artifacts*. A major gift from a local private donor helped defray the costs of the conference and exhibition. Prestigious lenders contributed works, and renowned scholars gave papers. The exhibition had “the largest crowd it had ever received for an opening” and saw “record-breaking attendance.” As Friedman summarized, “the Iowa conference was a valuable step toward the opening of the field of Dada studies, particularly in

the interdisciplinary mode which is required by the explosive, interdisciplinary movement which was Dada” (47).

DADA TAKES UP RESIDENCE

These ephemeral, nearly forgotten events did, in fact, birth lasting scholarship and enduring resources that figure significantly in Dada studies today, despite the fact that they have been underacknowledged in the larger historiography of Dada. In addition to the *Dada Artifacts* catalog, the conference also produced a collection of essays entitled *Dada Spectrum: The Dialectics of Revolt*, edited by Foster and Kuenzli and published by the University of Iowa Press and coda press, Madison, Wisconsin (Foster & Kuenzli 1979). The edited volume presented a series of historical case studies, mapping a conceptual geography of the relatively nascent Dada studies of the late 1970s. In contrast to preceding scholarship and other contemporary texts, *Dada Spectrum* included the work of conference participants such as international experts Michel Sanouillet (“Dada: A Definition”) as well as a number of U.S.-based scholars including Mary Ann Caws (“Dada’s Temper: Our Text”), Arthur Cohen (“The Typographic Revolution: Antecedents and Legacy of Dada Graphic Design”), and Dickran Tashjian (“New York Dada and Primitivism”). In keeping with the interdisciplinary format of the conference, artist Ben Vautier was invited to contribute a visual essay with short text entitled “The Duchamp Heritage.” Vautier’s work reinforced the historical import of Dada. “Dada is important because of how Dada was perceived by the young generation” (250)...“Without Dada, there would not be: Cage, Fluxus, Pop Art, New Realism, Land Art, Poor Art, Body Art, Narrative Art, etc.” (251)...“A post Dada situation is to try to do something new after knowing that because of Dada nothing is new” (251)...“I am not interested in Dada historical maniacs” (256). The hybrid culture of *Dada Spectrum*, bridging academic scholarship and contemporary performance art, was complemented by Richard Sheppard’s extensive bibliography, the most comprehensive record of Dada scholarship to date, including primary sources, Dada periodicals, books, chapters, articles, and a detailed bibliography per Dada artist. Indeed, the state of the research of Dada, played a significant role in the rationale underlying both the conference and its subsequent publication.

Kuenzli and Foster’s parallel concern with both history and historiography, stemmed from an understanding of the Dada’s original agency in

writing its own history and legacy. It also subsequently led Kuenzli, Foster, and others at the University to cultivate new frameworks such as exhibitions, collections, publications, and archives to enable continuing and future study of the movement and its concepts. In particular, they were interested in gathering archival materials related to Dada events and other “intermedia” and “interdisciplinary” forms that might not find a home in traditional museums or libraries. Ephemera from these formats, such as programs and announcements, broadsides, newspaper clippings, and other materials, became an important core of the Dada Archive and Research Center which they founded in the wake and enthusiasm of the 1978 conference and exhibition. As the Archive’s curator, Timothy Shipe, a former student of Kuenzli’s writes, “by the end of the [1978] conference, the prominent scholars who had come from around the world to participate had agreed on the need for a single institution which would gather the widely scattered documentation of the Dada movement, preserve that documentation for posterity, and disseminate it to the international community” (11). While the *Dada Artifacts* exhibition had also revealed that the Museum held a significant collection of Dada-related materials, the Dada Archive became part of the University libraries and continued to acquire not only original historical materials, but also bibliographic records, reproductions, books, articles, and other new scholarship on Dada. Available to artists and scholars from the University and around the world, the archive also fostered interdisciplinary exhibitions, programs, and conferences that continued to catalyze the study of the movement and new practices derived from its history.

Dada’s unique position at Iowa did not end with the establishment of the International Dada Archive, which took its place alongside the ongoing work of the Center for New Music, the Intermedia Program, and faculty research and teaching in a number of departments, including Creative Writing, Theater, and Dance. Rudolf Kuenzli went on to publish numerous books on Dada and Surrealism, and brought the important journal *Dada/Surrealism* to the University, where he served as co-editor with Mary Ann Caws, from 1982 to 1990. Stephen Foster also produced significant Dada scholarship, including the ten-volume, multi-author series *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada* (1996–2005). Kuenzli, Foster, Breder, along with other Dada-oriented faculty such as Hanno Hardt in Communication Studies and Craig Adcock in Art History, also mentored further generations of scholars and artists who have continued to study, practice, and reproduce the critical and transdisciplinary histories

and methods of the Iowa faculty. It's important to note that Iowa's Dada culture has been instrumental in fostering and justifying experimental pedagogical styles both at the University of Iowa, where it helped to break down barriers between disciplines such as Art History, Studio Art, and Comparative Literature, and beyond, through the ongoing work of its students. Dada studies at Iowa, through the Dada Archive, the University of Iowa Museum, various Centers, departments, and individual classrooms, ultimately became a collaborative space of sorts that offered faculty, students, as well as the Iowa City community a platform to learn about Dada and its history and, in some cases, to perform its legacy.

CONCLUSION

In his 1983 history of the Dada Archive, Timothy Shipe asks the question "And why Iowa?" Why was the University of Iowa such fertile ground for this unique collection of interrelated programs that explored the history and practice of countercultures related to and inspired by the history and concepts of Dada? Shipe suggests that the answer lies in "the clear affinity between the Dada movement and this University," whose progressive and interdisciplinary traditions date back to the 1920s, while Scott Siegling's history of the Intermedia Program suggests that Hans Breder's great successes in the late 1960s may have contributed to the administration's acceptance of Dada studies and events at Iowa in the 1970s. The important personal interests and professional networks of individual faculty like Foster and Kuenzli are also no doubt central to Dada's flourishing at Iowa. But these are all only partial answers that help illuminate, but do not fully answer, the question of how such a radical topic continued to find a place in an academic environment beyond the experimental decades of the 1960s and 70s, into the increasingly corporatized art environment of the 1980s, and the neoliberalism of the American university around the turn of the twenty-first century.

Now, in the aftermath of the 100-year anniversary of Dada, the University of Iowa's groundbreaking constellations of experimental activities once again find themselves on the periphery of Dada studies, in a way that makes their documentation, historicization, and analysis particularly urgent. A larger, collaborative research project, which informs this essay, will address this notable gap in the scholarship. The retirements of key figures such as Ruedi Kuenzli in recent decades, as well as the deaths of Stephen Foster and Hans Breder, emphasize, now more than ever, the

need to capture the histories of the events, conversations, publications, and performances they created, many of which exist in the same ephemeral forms they sought out in the Dadas. The established historiography of Dada surprisingly continues to overlook Foster and Kuenzli's methodologies, in particular their focused and analytical approaches, as well as their attention to German-centered case studies, in contrast to the mainstream's reliance on Continental and psychoanalytic perspectives. And while the "interdisciplinary" and "intermedia" spirit of the Iowa communities still finds its place in some of the spectacular presentations of Dada's history and legacy (most notably the Centre Pompidou exhibition, Dada Fair reenactments, Dada 100, etc.), there is little specific reference to the legacy of countercultures at the University of Iowa. No longer self-critical or interventionist, current event-like histories of Dada often speak more to the corporatized theatrics of contemporary art institutions and cultural centers than to a truly integrated and authentic approach to the histories and theories of twentieth-century countercultures that were integral to the spirit of Iowa.

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Sunbird Records: From Subculture to Post-Subculture

Jonathan Lindley

Abstract In 2013, Sunbird Records was redesigned to investigate whether post-subcultural discourse factors in the design of an independent record label. To facilitate answering this question, the label invested in a new website, shop, studio, live music venue, and roster of artists. This study develops its primary case study, Sunbird Records, as a way of putting post-subcultural discourse into practice. Between the late 1970s and the present, there has been an important shift in the development of alternative culture. Such a shift, from subculture to post-subculture, has yet to be fully understood by cultural discourse or practically applied as a method of cultural production. The present inquiry has been designed for the purpose of critique and further reflection; its findings will be independent, distinct, and context-specific.

Concepts of subculture have faded, while neo-tribalism has intensified as a key cultural trope. Previously, alternative culture developed through sub-cultural groups such as punks, mods, and hippies, where subculture

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catalyzed cultural distinction through the consumption of style and existed as “systems of communication, forms of expression and representation” (Hebdige 1979: 129). For Hebdige, typical subculturalists use consumption to express their values and represent those values through stylized products and services. Moving to the present, sociologist Michel Maffesoli suggests that subcultural groups have been replaced by post-subcultural groups, called “neo-tribes,” which supersede subculture as a contemporary social force “to be expressed through lifestyles” (1996: 98). He believes that post-subculturalists experience a more comprehensive mode of expression because they act out their views through more than the consumption of style, that is, through the performance of collective lifestyles (Fig. 10.1).

According to Maffesoli, a distinction must be made between “the masses,” “the process of disindividuation,” and “the individual” (1996: 6). When he suggests that the notion of the masses exists “without any precise goals,” he means that they lack clear collective symbiotic objectives or, in other words, that they function as individuals unwittingly in competition with one another. Maffesoli goes on to suggest that under certain circumstances, conditions occur enabling individuals to undergo the process of disindividuation, and these individuals create distinct organizations



Fig. 10.1 *Subversive Current*. (© Jonathan Lindley. Courtesy of Steven Lindley)

which he defines as neo-tribes. Neo-tribes emerge after the “saturation of the inherent function of the individual” (1996: 6). In this sense, neo-tribes emerge from conditions that coerce subjects to organize into groups as a means of working collectively toward a shared goal. This process usually happens when the benefits of being an individual are outweighed by the benefits of collectivity, creating a shared incentive for disindividuation. The present study is interested in these organizations and the designs that stimulate them, using certain terms—such as micro-society, collective, and community—not as separate distinctions but as synonyms for neo-tribes in order to avoid repetition.

The shift that Maffesoli defines—from mass to disindividuation—can be seen in the design of cultural definition, separation, and distinction, all of which are typical processes employed by subculturalists and post-subculturalists. In 2009, art and design curator and theorist Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed social critic Raoul Vaneigem for the publishing platform and archive E-Flux. During the interview, Vaneigem states, “This process of re-appropriation that I foresee has a name: self-management” (Obrist and Vaneigem 2009).¹ In *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (2012 [1967]), Vaneigem predicts the re-appropriation of social arrangements as a means of creating revolutionary potential. While subculture created distinction through the consumption of style, post-subculture seeks to move forward by creating self-managed social organizations whose participants share synergistic lifestyles and can cooperate temporarily toward common goals. Vaneigem believes that the future will be populated by self-sufficient, independent groups and frames the transition to this as the revolution of everyday life.

This shift is most evident in the social organization of independent record labels, and is specifically identifiable in a label’s graphic productions, such as its identity, media, and performance. In his book *The Time of the Tribes*, Maffesoli first articulates the notion of neo-tribalism as a direct response to what he terms “massification,” or what could now be understood as globalization. Maffesoli states that “The rational era [of subculture] is built on the principle of individuation and of separation, whereas the empathetic period [the present] is marked by the lack of differentiation, the ‘loss’ in a collective subject” (11). For him, the masses are amalgams that lack differentiation, they are not defined by the boundaries that subculturalists relied upon, unless, of course, these masses arrange themselves into smaller micro-societies. Participants of self-organizing post-subcultural collectives are what Maffesoli defines as neo-tribalists.

In developing his notion of the neo-tribe, Maffesoli suggests that “There are many examples in our everyday life to symbolize the emotional ambience exuded by tribal development” (105). It is important to note his emphasis on the “everyday”; the neo-tribe is not a bizarre event, but rather an almost banal happening. Maffesoli goes on to elaborate when he suggests that we are witnessing a “rationalized social” being superseded by an “empathetic sociality” which he believes is “expressed in a succession of ambiances, feelings and emotions” (11). Evidently, for Maffesoli, the everyday happenings of a neo-tribe are played out through varying strengths of “ambiances, feelings and emotions,” that is to say: there is an intensity to the “sociality.” Similar again to Maffesoli’s concept of the neo-tribe, Vaneigem implies that we must: “build a parallel society opposed to the dominant system and poised to replace it” (246). However, he does not simply encourage a problematic binary relationship of “one” and “other,” “sub” and “culture,” but instead celebrates a pluralism of “variation,” according to him: “True radicalism permits every variation and guarantees every freedom” (246). Together they propose the construction of parallel micro-societies, or neo-tribes, of every variation, and through these varying strengths of sociality, the everyday social might be replaced, either by *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (2012) or by *The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (Maffesoli 1996).

Vaneigem’s notion of revolution often resonates with Maffesoli’s post-subcultural notion, and both generally promote what Maffesoli calls an increasing “tension between heterogeneous elements” (105). The sociologist’s “heterogeneous elements” and Vaneigem’s “every variation” are synonymous with the same ideal, both conceptualizing a more diverse, dynamic and stimulated culture through new modes of cultural participation, the formation of micro-societies, and the retribalization of contemporary life. The two critics challenge the tenure of distinctions created by the consumption of mass culture, expressing their view of consumer culture as Vaneigem writes: “To consume is to be consumed by inauthenticity, nurturing appearances to the benefit of the spectacle and the detriment of real life” (2012: 136). For Vaneigem, subculture failed because of its core values centered on consumption, style, and communication, which provided a comfortable way for subculturalists to assume a compliant, subversive role. As a result of subcultures’ fading ardor, the present study provides alternative dynamic constraints, by developing new contingent definitions for post-subculturalists.

In his 2009 book, *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher considers the purpose of certain “cultural zones” when he writes of the “establishment of settled ‘alternative’ or ‘independent’ cultural zones which endlessly repeat old gestures of rebellion and contestation as if for the first time” (9). While this may seem to simply devalue the worth of “alternative” and “independent” cultural zones, this notion gestures to an oversimplified binary that is in fact far more complex and nuanced. Fisher goes on to write: “‘alternative’ and ‘independent’ don’t designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact the dominant styles, within the mainstream” (9). The current research posits this as ill-informed; while “alternative” and “independent” are indeed “styles”—as well as methods of production, consumption, and participation—they cannot by their very nature sit within the mainstream, though they can and do exist in relation to the mainstream beneath the broader umbrella of culture. It also suggests that in order to critique the repetition of “old gestures of rebellion and contestation,” one must also critique the old gestures of dominance and control exerted by the mainstream cultural organization, something which this study investigates more comprehensively.

When asked by Obrist about the future, Vaneigem responds: “The future belongs to self-managed communities that produce indispensable goods and services for all. The idea is to produce for us, for our own use” (2009). It is clear that Vaneigem supports a pluralism of cultures in his notion of “self-managed communities,” which, as stated earlier, can be considered synonymous with neo-tribes; he articulates this pluralism of micro-societies through a tension of exclusivity-inclusivity; he is concerned with the production “for us” and “our own use.” Here, in this study, we explore and develop these tensions and pluralisms by producing a diverse culture through the design of a micro-society as an independent record label entitled Sunbird Records. However, a contrast must be drawn between our interpretation and Vaneigem’s and Maffesoli’s micro-societies and neo-tribes, for Vaneigem often describes a more isolated community, more like a commune than a neo-tribe, whereas Maffesoli rarely describes a neo-tribe as a closed system, but rather as a well-connected network that has a considered agenda and relationship to its broader culture.

By fostering localized independence, Sunbird Records, as a micro-society, manifests itself as a “self-managing community” designed to perform neo-tribal activities; these activities take shape in a series of graphic productions. These graphic practices produce what Vaneigem terms “indispensable goods” and “services” (2009). In contrast to Vaneigem,

however, Sunbird Records inflects a more cultural artistic value of “goods”—such as: records, apparel, posters, merchandise, animations, etc.—while the critic alternatively defines “goods” with a socio-economic emphasis. Later, in the same interview with Obrist, he gives examples of “goods” as “Free trains, buses, subways, free healthcare, free schools, free water, air, electricity, free power, all through alternative networks to be set up” (2009). Sunbird Records is a nascent design of Vaneigem’s assertion of future cultural production, but in the present, since the dominant production of goods seems to function only through the consumption of competition.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that the relationship between the emergent, and the established is somewhat complicated; the emergent enters a situation articulated by theorist Aram Sinnreich in his essay “The Materialisation of Music and the Rise of the Cartel,” first published as part of *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* (2014). In his essay, Sinnreich suggests that the main problem with the developed creative industry is that it inevitably expands and, in doing so, develops programs of self-preservation, which for Sinnreich involve: “establishing trade associations, regulating prices and practices, controlling access to retailers and consumers, and continually lobbying for copyright expansion and other legal and policy concessions. In other words, it became a cartel” (615). The cartel is not, as instinctively assumed, a top-down hierarchy of oppression, but is flat, meaning that its effects are felt throughout the entire “culture industry,” a term that was first introduced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1944. The term is used here to convey the commodification of culture, typically as a network of organizations that produce culture for consumption: Universal Music Group, for example, is a major record label that exists as part of a network of entities, not on top of it, but indeed, within it.

In the culture industry, the culture cartel has been a developing force since long before subculture, specifically in the music industry, catalyzed by the independent record label movement popularized by Nashville’s Sun Records in the 1950s. Despite being less categorically defined, subculture also existed long before punks, mods, and hippies, and has resurfaced in many different forms since. “Popular subculture” (Hebdige 1979) was subject to a process of mainstream enculturation in the 1970s, and was quickly capitalized on by major organizations, and transformed into something more readily marketable, which in many ways problematized subcultural criticism and caused traditional subculturalists to

disband. Like subculture, neo-tribalism is susceptible to the typical devaluation of enculturation, a process less-typically accelerated by mediatization, mass production, and globalization.

Alternative culture, has thus become a commodity that is being enculturated at an ever-increasing rate, which has encouraged major and dependent organizations to develop tools to further accelerate this process. For example, companies such as Indify and Instrumental are powered by algorithms that identify the fastest-growing artist profiles on social media and streaming platforms and then charge their clients a premium for the data they collect. These programs better serve established cultural organizations by giving privileged entities an edge in sourcing new talent. These are but a few of the evolving programs of the culture cartel, a notion that this study will later posit as a key instigator in the evolution of subculture and post-subculture.

Sunbird Records as an organization does not stand in clear opposition to the culture cartel, nor does it celebrate these modes of control. The label is focused on negotiating the effects of such an entity, which means that it isn't above, below or outside of these forces, but is embedded in the culture industry and in turn creates a dialogue with the culture cartel. Sunbird Records generates difference through its positioning and graphic productions. In this way, it creates a much-needed context-specific alternative by critiquing its relationship to the cartel. Indeed, the present study suggests that culture expands in the transformative relation caused by the effects of the culture cartel, which pushes for faster and more forceful enculturation. Screenwriter Bruce Robinson satirizes this notion when he writes: "They're selling hippie wigs in Woolworths. The greatest decade in the history of mankind is over" (1987). Robinson is somewhat parodying the notion of enculturation, while capturing the loss of movement as the language of a subculture becomes enculturated. This, in turn, could be seen as forcing post-subculturalists to reintroduce dynamism into the resulting space.

If alternative culture is inevitably consumed by major organizations, reproduced as mass-media, and controlled by cartel-like forces, then the possibility of difference and opposition may seem futile. However, it can be thought of as creating meaning through difference, or the distinction of potential negative space. For example, in *Society of the Spectacle* (2014 [1967]), Guy Debord explains how a "loss of quality" is "evident at every level of spectacular language" because "the commodity form reduces everything to quantitative equivalence" (14). He is assertive in his

subjective view of mass-produced culture, but it can be read to imply a loss of authenticity, which ethnographer Sarah Thornton makes understandable when she writes: “a musical form is authentic when it is rendered essential to subculture” (1995: 29). There is a resonant theme between these two views that the mass production of a culture devalues it as a commodity, reducing it to “quantitative equivalence,” resulting in the repression of diverse subjectivities, which ultimately consumes the subculture. In relation to these notions, neo-tribalism must act through lifestyle rather than consumption. An active neo-tribalist must do more than simply contemplate, because neo-tribalists create meaning through lifestyle and lived experience, which Debord articulates as he writes: “...the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires” (10–11). Debord is concerned with the mass production and consumption of “spectacle,” while Sunbird Records is a platform to experience and develop those desires of alterity as a means of critiquing mass culture.

There are many oppositions to mass-media, including two false oppositions to the mainstream. One is abstinence: living outside the culture and ignoring the mainstream—this is common among people who “do not have a TV” or “do not drink Coca-Cola,” but refuse to admit a phone is also a TV, in the same way a laptop is, as are the large screens in public squares. The other false oppositional context is to look at mainstream culture from the outside, but this assumes the possibility of avoiding the intrusive presence of mainstream culture in the first place. Both of these oppositions are very different from the notion of a spreading culture, such as creating a commune, without interacting with mainstream culture at all. Sunbird Records offers something more strategically designed, not something romantic, but rather a realistic approach to the contemporary culture cartel. It presents alternatives from within, by being able to self-manage the already established framework of the culture industry, and offers a unique contribution to knowledge by internally resisting the culture cartel. Naturally, there are limits to the extent of Sunbird Records’ independence, as the organization is subject to the same rules that govern any organization in the UK: HMRC, Companies House, and more, but for the label there is a certain intrinsic independence due to its historical, social, and geographical positioning.

Our aim is to interrogate the culture cartel by re-appropriating the goods of the mainstream—over-produced records, eccentric videos, flamboyant performances—in a way that is essential to post-subculture and

therefore, according to Thornton's understanding of subculture, could develop post-subcultural authenticity and, from this, post-subcultural capital (Thornton 1995). The central goal is to perform difference, that is, to make a potential alternative actual. This avoids what the social critic Neil Postman calls the "culture-death" (2005 (1985): 172) that could result from the dominance of an unchallenged culture cartel, because without difference creating movement, our experience of culture relaxes and the power of the culture cartel goes unnoticed. In relation to Postman's notion of culture-death, Vaneigem develops a similar idea that he terms "survival sickness." Survival sickness is the state in which the individual experience of everyday life suffers, something that Vaneigem insists can be changed through collective self-management, as he writes: "So general is survival sickness that any greater concentration of lived experience cannot fail to unite most of humanity in a common will to live" (2012: 142). For Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* is the theoretical way to cure survival sickness and avoid culture-death by eliminating the need for mass-produced products, services, and culture. The solution, in his view, is to empower collective self-management and self-sufficiency. These ideas are what the present study hopes to critique through the articulation of the independent record label. The label is not an autonomous entity, nor is it a major organization, it is typically a small business that can operate alone or in coalition with other organizations, it's also malleable and adaptable, capable of mediating its inputs and outputs, and that's what makes the design of an independent record label a unique approach to better understand post-subcultural discourse.

Literature, both entertaining (*Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*—Hunter S. Thompson, 1967) and informative (*England's Dreaming*—Jon Savage, 1991), often prioritizes particular subcultural moments, with many writers' nostalgia, especially for punk, only serving to render it more spectacular and fantastical: "Punk was beaten, but it had also won. If it had been the project of the Sex Pistols to destroy the music industry, then they had failed" (Savage 1991: 541). This simply illustrates the typical nostalgia, romanticism, and revivalism that limit a subculture in its attempt to make an era more fantastic. Many iconic punk bands started out on independent labels but eventually signed with majors. For example, the Sex Pistols were signed to Virgin Records before eventually signing with majors EMI, A&M, Warner Bros. and Universal Music Group and becoming a valuable product to the music industry. In contrast, this project invests in a forward-facing practical approach to post-subculture

research by insisting that more can be learned about contemporary post-subculture by developing new ways of graphically articulating the design of neo-tribes.

Dick Hebdige, in his seminal publication *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), suggests that participant observation, while insightful, has its limitations as a methodology for ethnographic research. Hebdige claims that the “absence of any analytical or explanatory framework has guaranteed such work a marginal status in the predominantly positivist tradition of mainstream sociology” (75). In response to what he identifies as this lack of analytical objectivity in subcultural discourse, the present research aims to more clearly convey its findings with the benefit of an advanced form of this method, namely design and critique, which allows the present study not only to participate in and observe a post-subcultural movement, but also to design the parameters that allow this culture to exist while simultaneously critiquing its development.

In a BBC4 interview about the Sex Pistols (Rodley 2007), Tony Wilson, co-founder of Factory Records, overemphasizes Manchester’s role in the punk movement, suggesting that after the Sex Pistols’ gig at the Lesser Free Trade Hall, punk “took root in Manchester in a way that it couldn’t have taken root anywhere else,” but then articulating the nature of fringe subcultural dynamics as he elaborates: “because this was the perfect dirty, northern industrial town, with boredom, and with unemployment, and somehow this became the punk city.” According to the renowned impresario, it was necessary to locate the Factory in Manchester rather than London because innovation could only be optimized out of the spotlight and on the margins. Music journalist Barry Nicolson wrote a feature for NME on the eighth anniversary of Wilson’s death, in which he suggested that: “not only did he believe in the city’s cultural potential at a time when few saw any to speak of, but he was determined to realize it, to give Manchester a new sense of itself” (2015). Wilson believed that this revitalization could be achieved through cultural production and the development of alternative culture in contrast to London. Moreover, Nicolson writes: “Wilson envisioned Factory not as a business, but as an engine for cultural regeneration.” As the dominance of mass-media production expands and consumes more of the music industry, the fringe, where there is almost no culture, becomes an anti-culture, a zone where subversion and resistance find their place in cultural discourse. Likewise, this essay revitalizes some of Factory’s more successful tactics, developing new strategies to critique their effectiveness.

Finally, the culture cartel is increasingly in control of more and more of the creative industries, and as it evolves, it oppresses in more subtle and delicate ways. Peter Saville, the graphic designer for Factory Records, attests to the effectiveness of this approach when he states in an interview: “It’s during the current era that in a way the cultural canon has become entirely integrated, or appropriated, for the purposes of commercial practice” (2012). Saville is talking about the way in which design, like music, has been reduced to commerciality in order to serve a more diluted purpose than before. Later in the interview, Saville also discusses the conflict between the “marketing man” and the “designer”: “So when you were fighting the marketing men, saying ‘look there is a better way of doing this’ it kind of felt worthwhile, but when the marketing people sit there and say ‘how do we seduce’ that’s the problem” (2012). Here Saville addresses the difficulty of being a designer whose primary function is to serve capitalism in its crudest form. Understandably, Saville romanticizes a time when graphic designers had more influence over their clients and could assert their own creative practice. When asked about the challenge facing communication designers today, Saville comments that for the graphic designer, “the toughest thing is maintaining a sense of integrity in the work they are doing” (2012). While more nuanced, for the purposes of this research, it can be assumed that for Saville, “maintaining a sense of integrity” results from maintaining an existing position in relation to the culture cartel. In this sense, Sunbird Records is driven by a clear purpose: to critique the culture cartel by encouraging the shift toward the generalized self-management described by Vaneigem.

NOTE

1. The editor updated all electronic references.

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Jonathan Lindley after graduating with a BA (Hons) in Graphic Design and an MA in Visual Communication, Lindley began working as a freelance graphic designer and animator, specializing in the visual interpretation of music. After working with artists such as Lightning Bolt, Rolo Tomassi, Enter Shikari, Drumcorps and AC4, he created his own post-subcultural entity, “Sunbird Records,” as a research project that later became the primary vehicle for his PhD, investigating post-subcultural discourse and its practical application through independent music culture. As the label expanded, Lindley opened his own music venue and recording studio to further explore notions of post-subculture, independence, and neo-tribalism.

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PART III

New Poetic Languages, Technology
and Cinema



Variations on 4⁴: The Verbivocovisual Sophistication of Dieter Roth's Non-Semantic Poetry

Maggie Rosenau

Abstract Swiss-Icelandic artist Dieter Roth is largely celebrated as a visual artist who redefined the book as an art-object. While many of his artist's books present typographical experiments and collaged language material, investigations rarely include close readings. This chapter highlights his poem "Some Variations on 4⁴"—both as a single unit and part of the larger work in which it exists—and argues that, despite its non-linguistic composition and graphic design appearance, the work visually articulates rhetorical elements central to lyrical poetry. Aesthetic response theory is useful for interpreting the visual iconicity of concrete poetry. Drawing on Iser's concept of "gestalt" as an organized whole that emerges through the process of reading, Roth's aesthetic object reveals both a conceptual whole and an unexpected readability. Although Roth has created a categorically concrete and therefore almost unutterable work of poetry, it is capable of engaging in a discourse on any aspect of the verbivocovisual.

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INTRODUCTION

Dieter Roth's early work is characterized by pronounced concrete aesthetics, which primarily draw on constructivist tendencies of the Swiss painters associated with the *Allianz* group. His first books, for example—blunt veneration of material properties that he called visual poems—were highly influenced by the geometric paintings of Max Bill. And while Roth collaborated with some of the most important proponents of concrete art, he did eventually veer away from fellow participants with the intent to outperform them (Roth and Wien 2002: 194).¹ Concerning the expressly concrete aspect of Roth's poetry, Sven Beckstette writes:

One characteristic of Roth's Concrete poetry was that [...] instead of starting with words, he deliberately negated the semantic dimension of language by using letters as mere visual elements. This radical reduction to the simple visual nature of the isolated characters set him markedly apart from other poets of this genre. In fact, it made Dieter Roth "more concrete" than the founding father of Concrete poetry himself, Eugen Gomringer, from whom Roth soon distanced himself. (2015: 30–31)

Standing on Roth's use of letters as visual elements, Beckstette's claim underscores how concrete poetry developed out of concrete art's interest in formal properties. Basic tenets of the movement state that the concrete is not metaphorical.² It is, rather, a straightforward, tangible aesthetic, one whose functional use of the material provides a visual articulation counter to the spiritual expressions of abstract art. Formal, compositional elements in art—such as line, color, shape, and texture—correspond, in concrete poetry, to the isolation of words and experimentation with typographic arrangements. In concrete poetry, language material is strictly and systematically handled, reduced down to autonomous words or letters that relate to each other spatially rather than solely linguistically. Developing on the communicative potential of spatiality initiated by Mallarmé, blank space also becomes a semiotic element. It is, as Mary Ellen Solt has described, a poetry to be perceived rather than read (1971: 7).

CONTEXT

Concrete poetry began as an international movement and gained considerable momentum around 1951.³ In his comprehensive examination of its development, Jamie Hilder explains how this postwar phenomenon was situated in a global context. He notes that early postwar concrete poets “were thinking about language through communication technologies” (2016: 58) and “by trying to escape national language by reducing it to a visual, easily comprehensible format, [they] conscientiously attempted to produce a global (cosmopolitan) subject through an international poetic style” (79). Emerging simultaneously in Brazil, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the United States, and Japan, this poetic form was concerned with “an emergent collective consciousness, created by a common emphasis on the experience of language in an internationalized social sphere” (53). The reduction of language results in a visual simplicity that makes concrete poetry easy and playful. It also attempts to be universally accessible.

But the genre’s simplicity also speaks to its early utopian intention to influence an aesthetic restructuring of society (Gomringer 1997: 61–75). Against the backdrop of postwar positivism, Eugen Gomringer, Max Bense, and the Noigandres poets of Brazil—all prolific theorists of the concrete movement—proposed that poetry’s social relevance be brought level with modern developments in the sciences and technology and stressed an important relationship between the new poetic form and modern architecture, design, and society.

Form, as the core interest of these major developers, is directly related to the political and social changes that occurred midcentury and that forced many countries, especially Germany, to adjust to life in an occupied and restructured space (Hilder 83). Motivated to create a new language that would accurately reflect modern conditions, these poets embraced the ideogram as a structural model. We can see ideogrammatic features in the poetry through what the Brazilian concrete poets described as the “function-relations” of the material. Information is conveyed through a constructivist arrangement of easily translatable and/or polysemic materials according to a theme. In other words, the integration of language material with the semiotic capacities of iconicity allows the structure of the poem to communicate the content.

Both Gomringer and Roth were important developers of the movement, but these two artists differed in their use of language material.

Formal, concrete properties are identifiable in their work by way of language reduction and use of spatiality. But where Gomringer utilizes space as semantic content, Roth's way of bringing attention to the visual, as Beckstette points out, negates a semantic dimension.

When we encounter a poem by Gomringer, take "wind" or "das schwarze geheimnis"⁴ [the black secret] for example, our awareness begins at its shape and then we read each isolated word on the page. To make sense of these poems, we see how the words relate to each other visually through space. In the case of "wind" (Fig. 11.1), the poem's brevity and isolation of a single word removes a subject-verb relationship, thereby grammatically shaping the poem to imply stasis over motion. Grammatically, the noun *wind* does not engage in any action here, nor are its qualities described. Instead, it becomes a thing that the reader looks at.

This is a clever move, for by attempting to capture an image through materiality, Gomringer begins to invert Gotthold Lessing's prescriptive characteristics for poetry and painting.⁵ By employing techniques that emphasize qualities of concreteness, Gomringer begins to bring his poetry closer to the realm of the visual arts. The idea here involves creating a poetic object seemingly capable of representing its message—essentially itself—in an instant. The lone word that makes this poem has no semantic connection to subject or adjective, rendering it grammatically inactive. Instead, the typographical arrangement of the letters directs our attention to the material relationships of a concrete object. The word *wind* is repeated in different directions, toward and away from itself, its static qualities dissipating as our reading direction emulates the dynamic and unpredictable activity of the meteorological phenomenon. Looking at "das schwarze geheimnis" (Fig. 11.2), we see space playing a crucial role in delivering a message about a secret. But space also visually represents the concept of a secret, because we cannot access what exactly the secret is, in what Mikhail Epstein calls a "semiotic vacuum" (2012: 92–93).

w w
d i
n n n
i d i d
w w

Fig. 11.1 Eugen Gomringer. "wind." 1953. (Reprinted by permission of the author)

Fig. 11.2 Eugen Gomringer. “das schwarze geheimnis.” 1953. (Reprinted by permission of the author)

das schwarze geheimnis
 ist hier
 hier ist
 das schwarze geheimnis

This secret—something that is kept, or meant to be kept, unknown or unseen by others—appears to be in the physical object of the poem due to the use of the hyperbaton. The rhetorical device is a typographical one as well. Inverting word order of the repeated message puts the adverbs *hier* [here] in close visual proximity to each other, as well as to the blank space. As a result, the location of the noun (as well as the signified) *geheimnis* [secret] is emphasized.

In contrast, the process of perception is essentially reversed when we read Roth’s poems. We tend to first understand them as visual works of art, and then to see the language material and literary devices revealed during a period of contemplation. Richard Hamilton rightly observes that Roth’s work reveals a “typographic mind ordering type into poetry rather than the essential poet wrenching the printer’s form into art” (1977: 92–93). This phenomenon set Roth apart from other first-generation poets of the genre.

“SOME VARIATIONS ON 4⁴”

Constructed on a doubled 8 × 8 grid-system, “Some Variations on 4⁴” (Fig. 11.3) is a two-page poem made up of 128 combinations of miniature text letterpress graphemes that appear to be b, p, d, and q in mirrored and rotated positions. The mono-linearity of the typeface degrades the letters to graphic material, and it is likely that each set of four is a variation of the letter d—the fourth letter of the alphabet and the first letter of the artist’s name—flipped and rotated in vertical and horizontal directions.

Initially, this poem is quite coherent as an ideogram, since each unit denotes the quantity “4” and is literally a set variation of the letter. These sets indicate the idea of the quantity four to the fourth power, while the whole remains independent of a particular vocal language to express it. We read the written matter in terms of perceiving the graphic representation of the mathematical value.

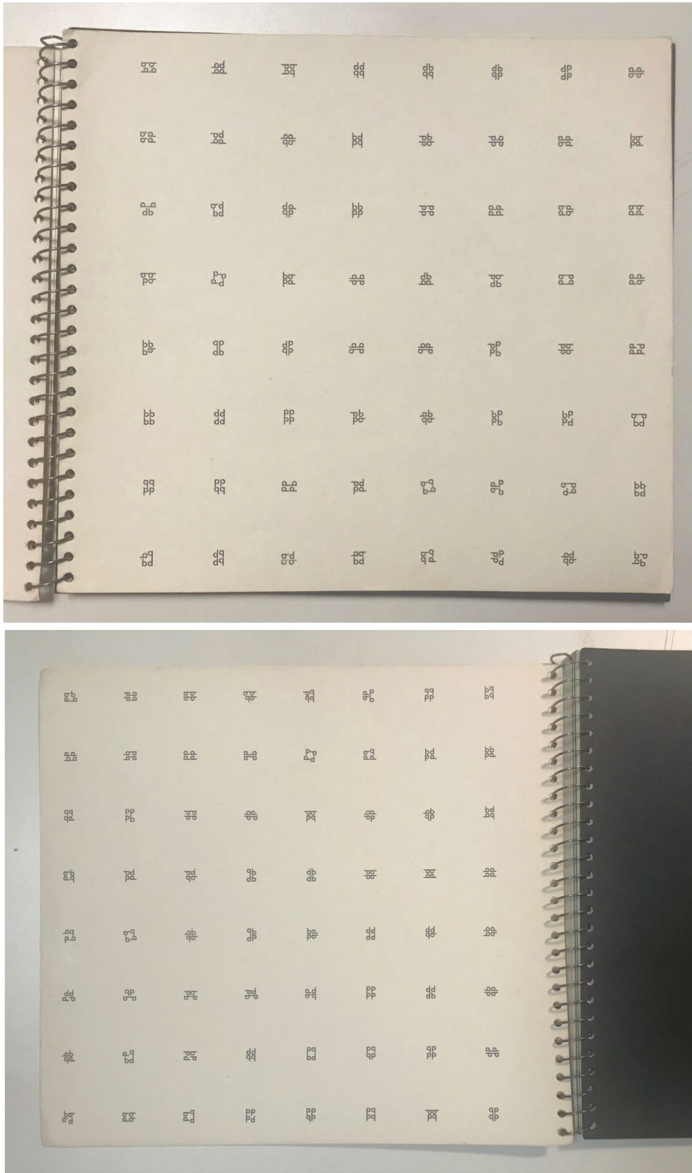


Fig. 11.3 Dieter Roth. "Some Variations on 4⁴." *bok* 1956–59. forlag ed, 1959. (© Dieter Roth Estate Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photos taken with permission at the Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg)

Of course, there is also a mathematical element in the language of more conventional poetry—prosody—but Roth’s poem works differently because it has completely moved away from verbal concepts of verse. Both the oral and aural components of language are eliminated here, and the material is restricted to visually communicating the value and the variation of “4.” Consequently, understanding the multi-dimensionality of this poem depends largely on the title.⁶ The title is, as Gerard Genette would say, a complex whole that speaks to the structure of the text, as it constitutes a description, summary, and definition of the work (2001).⁷ The linguistic title of this otherwise almost unutterable text both frames the poem and guides its meaning. It activates our engagement. Four to the fourth power equals 256. Here we see only 128 variations, which is half. Half is “some.” Roth’s poem communicates something to us, but its meaning lies in the activity of completing the poem in our minds, in our realization of the aesthetic whole.

Theories of concrete poetry discuss activating the reader in this way. Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenological approach to the reading process helps us understand this notion, as it details the relational process between reader and text, emphasizing the reader’s role in the process of meaning making (1997: 21). Iser tells us that reading is an event that happens in time between the text and the reader’s imagination. His method of interpretation is not overly concerned with the semantics of the text, but pays, however, considerable attention to visual perceptions and dimensions, blanks and negations. Precisely because Iser’s definition is neither general nor specific, similarities can be drawn between the act of reading and the act of viewing, and his theory can be applied to non-literary phenomena or projects where genre and medium intersect (Bruyn 2012: 142–43). Perceiving the configurative meaning of Roth’s poem begins by imagining a relationship between its linguistic title and its structural form. In doing so, visually articulated rhetorical devices are slowly revealed.

Consider the word “variations” in the title. As a musical term, “variations” denotes a method of presenting a theme in repeated, modified, but still recognizable form (Oxford 2016). A few important explorations of this method are Bach’s “Goldberg Variations” (1741), John Cage’s experimental series “Variations I-VIII” (1958–1967), and Benjamin Patterson’s “Variations for Double Bass” (1961). The word “variations” also refers to concrete art’s interest in the relationship between humans and technology, explored through mechanical reproduction, coded information, continuity, and seriality. We see this in projects like Max Bill’s “15 Variations on a

Single Theme” (1935–38), Sol Lewitt’s “Serial Project No. 1 (ABCD)” (1966), or his “Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes” (1974), as well as Hanne Darboven’s “Variations no. 26” (1976). Roth’s poem resembles Bill’s paintings, Lewitt’s structures, Darboven’s calculations, and even Bach’s or Cage’s works, in its exhaustive interpretation of a typographic character that twists and turns in sets of 4.

The word “variations” also invites us to consider the music of poetry: prosody and the organization of sound when being read. A letter is the smallest unit of language, representing a single sound. But here the sign, while still a sound, is reduced to a sculptural material—a shape, a form, a physical structure. The simplicity of the typeface works to deconstruct the individual symbol as a signifier, effectively separating the material from its linguistic capacity, rendering it essentially meaningless. The musicality of Roth’s poem is therefore not a phonetically or aurally perceived phenomenon, but an effect delivered through graphic expression. We *see* musical and likewise rhetorical devices in the poem’s arrangement of visual patterns and rhythms, in its visual rhymes, alliterations, and consonances. This is an interesting move on Roth’s part, because while he has created a categorically concrete and therefore almost unutterable work of poetry, it is still capable of engaging in a discourse on any aspect of the verbivocovisual. The word “variations” alone effectively directs our viewing to a dialectic of the visual, the musical, and the poetic.

Because we have no words or phrases to read this poem aloud, it opens up to both playful and expressive interpretation. Its materiality raises questions. Are these letters but also half notes? Flat symbols? Is it something to do with the common 4/4 time signature? We could see the work as a kind of storyboard, or perhaps as individual bundles of binary code elements. The beholder could even project a sense of emotion onto the little characters, giving an air of conflict to those that seem to face away from each other, for example. We could anthropomorphize the signs as having fights. Huddles. Hugs. Showdowns. Cartwheels. Are they variations of little copulating glyphs? Or, taken as a whole, the work might appear to be a diagram of dance steps, or a single object in some kind of stop-action transformation captured on the page. Roth has created a curious interface between the fine arts and literature here. This is also graphic design.

Roth’s most curious graphic design poems are probably his Stupidogramms. He developed these in the early 60s, shortly after constructing the book project in which “Some Variations on 4⁴” is included. Stupidogramms are made of grids of printed commas from which he

“coaxed out looping chains, blobs, teacups, inkbottles, and toothbrushes in a kind of automatic doodling” (Suzuki 2013: 12). Stupidogramms work like a word search. They are “-grams” that play with the idea of reading. Instead of tracing out words from letters placed in a grid, images are created from lines connecting punctuation marks. Likewise, “Some Variations on 4⁴” is a puzzle constructed from type material in a grid. It is a game of looking—not in a conventional left to right direction, but vertically, horizontally, and diagonally—for hidden information and meaning. Roth’s composition shows itself rather than speaks to us. And although this poem does not belong to his Stupidogramm collection, it is comparably ridiculous and amusing in its design, has visual and textual similarities to the Stupidogramm’s form, and precedes it by only a couple of years.

BOK 1956–59

Finally, “Some Variations on 4⁴” is also one part of a book. It is printed on the verso and recto sides of the second page in a 70-page spiral-bound book titled *bok 1956–59*. The project is comprised of almost equal parts of entirely blank pages, black pages, and non-semantic poetry in miniature text letterpress. Some poems consist of a single letter or an exclamation mark (Fig. 11.4). Some pages are purely concrete expressions, visual compositions with circles of various sizes cut or punched out of the black paper pages. Sometimes a grid-work of punctuation fills the page (Fig. 11.5). There are a few typewritten poems in the book that are visual games made from the letters of Dieter Roth’s name. Another looks like a collection of floating Os and full stop glyphs. Symmetry is important in the book. Symmetry creates visual palindromes, visual puns.

To be sure, Roth’s project is visual matter—a poetry written for the eye, for seeing. But it is also an object meant to be read. Consider the actions its material properties invite: touching, opening, looking, flipping, unfolding, closing. The haptics of reading certainly play an important role here, challenging the beholder to combine a multisensory process with concrete aesthetics and literary thinking.

Our examination of “Some Variations on 4⁴” begins to illustrate that each individual page can be viewed as a single work of art. This is common to Roth’s projects. In his early books, for example—the wordless texts he identified as visual poetry—each page presents a concrete visual work of art, while the activity between the pages imitates the rhetorical devices that

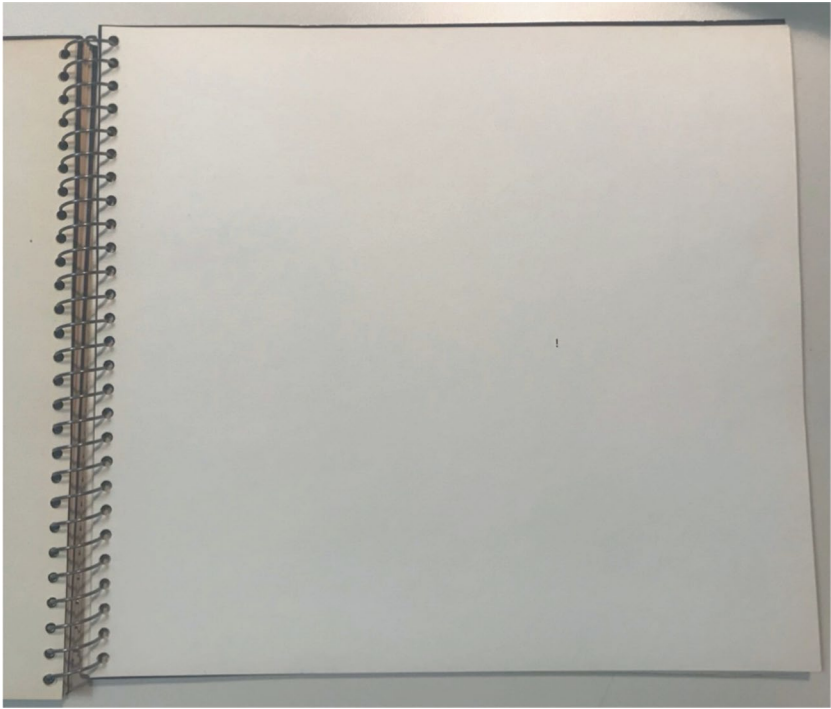


Fig. 11.4 Dieter Roth. *bok 1956–59*. forlag ed, 1959. (© Dieter Roth Estate Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo taken with permission at the Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg)

define sonnets and sestinas (Rosenau 2021: 33–40).⁸ We find similar playful tensions between seeing and reading in *bok 1956–59*.

Take, for example, how “Some Variations on 4³” is printed on the verso and recto sides of a single page. This design choice invites repetitive page flipping for cross-referencing, counting, rereading, and comparing sets to double-check for pattern recurrence. The project’s non-semantic units may read like graphic design, but through our haptic perception, we discover material features that function like literary devices. For example, the perforated areas of one page serve both the visual role of design and the literary role of foreshadowing, giving the reader a glimpse of what to expect when they turn the page (see Fig. 11.6). Dirk Dobke, director of the Dieter Roth Foundation, describes this arrangement: “Two things

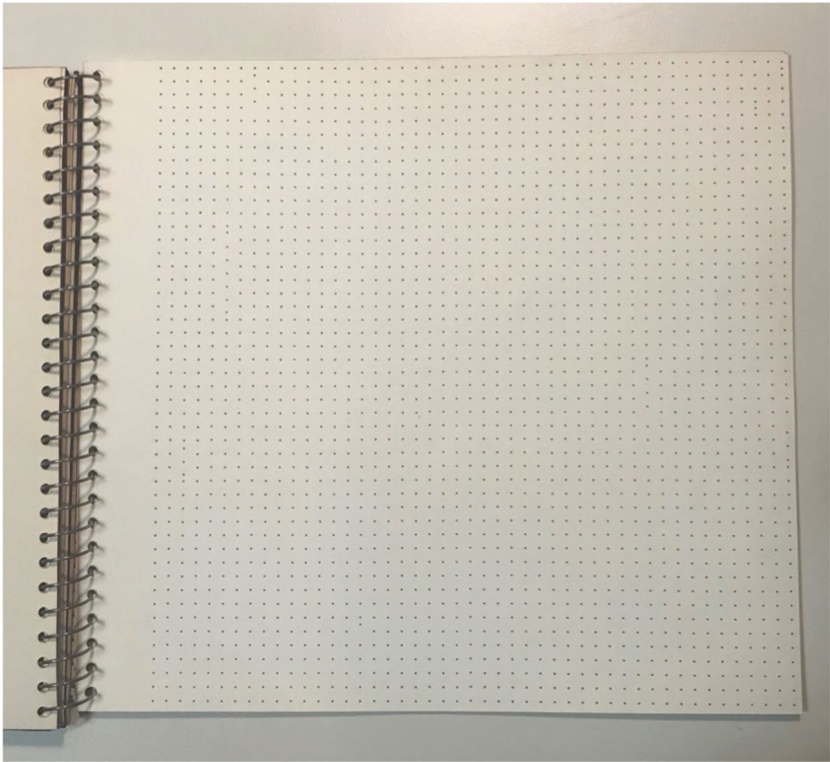


Fig. 11.5 Dieter Roth. *bok 1956–59*. forlag ed, 1959. (© Dieter Roth Estate Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo taken with permission at the Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg)

happen when one leafs through the book: being of different sizes, the cutout shapes vary what remains visible to the eye; and second, our visual reading becomes increasingly sculptural. The perforated areas make it possible to perceive the three-dimensional nature of the book” (2003: 48).

Perceiving of the sculptural, three-dimensional nature of the book occurs when, in the process of reading, we begin to see how the materials interact with each other. This interaction produces what Iser calls the “gestalt” of the text. The “gestalt” emerges as an organized whole and is ultimately constituted by the reader through their experience of it. Iser tells us that this whole, aesthetic object is *not* the same as the text—or in

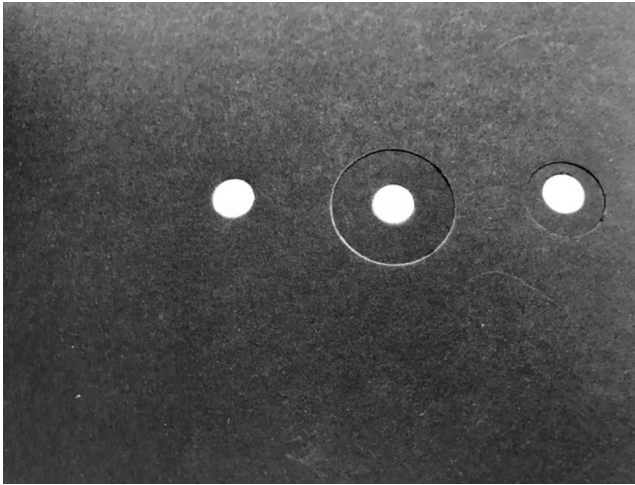


Fig. 11.6 Dieter Roth. *bok 1956–59*. forlag ed, 1959. (© Dieter Roth Estate Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo taken at Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg)

this case, the visual and language material—*itself*, which is created by the author. Rather, it is the more conceptual value and meaning of the aesthetic object that is interpreted and determined by the reader through their experience of the sum of the materials. Temporality, therefore, certainly plays an important part in the production of the “gestalt” since the whole is revealed through our experience of it, which takes place over time. Now, much of what happens in *bok 1956–59* is non-semantic and non-representational, and Dobke is correct in identifying the book’s demand for a non-traditional system of interpretation. This system involves a haptic process—a physical experience that is both identical to the formal processes of reading, and one that plays a role in our cognitive, phenomenological, and perceptual understanding.

Understanding the sum of the materials is gained by handling the book, and Michael Baumgartner insists that the book’s content develops its true dimension as a space-time body from a dialectic created between printed and blank pages (1997: 119–20). He tells us that the white color of the blank pages is not merely a contrasting background or a neutral surface, as it is in a conventional book. Instead, the blank pages form an interplay with the black ones—those which express the highest degree of condensed matter. This interplay between white and black, visual silence and visual

density, between reading and seeing, forms the rhythmic body of the book (120). Baumgartner's observations are an echo of Roth's own commentary on this interplay, delivered to his readers in his own invented, subversive orthography:

etvas tun das laicht fällt
 zb aine saite ler lasen
 si bekommt genvg bedoitvng fon andern saiten her vo etvas stet
 oder hoite fon der überfükten vmvelt her
 si hat genvg aktivität in farbe vnd ausdehvnng. (1971: 65, 1959: 61)⁹

Do something easy, light, Roth says. Leave a page empty. For it gains enough meaning (*genvg bedoitvng*) from the other pages, from what is printed on the other ones, or from the crowded or congested environment (*überfükten vmvelt*). There is, he tells us, enough activity in the color and space (*farbe vnd ausdehvnng*). He implies that there is meaning communicated between concrete materials, delivered to the senses. Accordingly, the poem's "gestalt" emerges from the alternating play between something utterable and unutterable—between silence, image, and language. Situated at the intersection of material and concept, along the boundaries of the senses and the intellect, the book's "gestalt" emerges from the tension between seeing and reading, between haptic perception and non-semantic language games.

NOTES

1. In a 1974 radio interview with Richard Hamilton, Roth explained how he trained himself to be strong in the field of Concrete art in order to fight against and surpass those he admired or feared, stylistically. See Roth and Wien, 194.
2. For basic reference points on the tenets of Concrete aesthetics see Theo Van Doesburg, "Base de la Peinture Concrète" in *Art Concret I* (1930), and Max Bense, "Konkrete Poesie" in *Sprache im Technischen Zeitalter 15* (Köln: SH Verlag, 1965).
3. In 1951, Swiss artist Max Bill won the international prize for his Concrete art sculpture *Tripartite Unity* at the first São Paulo Biennial.
4. Gomringer's published works, including titles, are written in lowercase—a technique he employs to disrupt hierarchical structures of grammar and syntax. For the purpose of staying consistent to the poet's typographical choices, excerpts of his work I use here remain in their original format.

5. German literary critic Gotthold Lessing famously claimed in *Laocoon* (1767) that painting is only capable of depicting a single moment, as it is an art object arranged in space, whereas poetry, as an art arranged in time, always depicts an object in succession.
6. The title of this poem does not appear in *bok 1956–59*, but on broadsides printed in the same year (1957) on white wove paper by Whatman. This information comes from the catalogue produced for an exhibit at the Multnomah County Library Special Collections, *Shaped Poetry: A Suite of 30 Typographic Prints* (San Francisco: Arion Press, 1981).
7. See Chaps. 2 and 4 of Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 2001.
8. See Rosenau's close reading of *kinderbuch* in "Das Medium ist das Gedicht," 2021.
9. This passage originally appeared in *ideogramme*, 1959, which is a book both produced and meant to be read in conjunction with *bok 1956–59*. It also appears in *Gesammelte Werke Band 2: ideogramme bok 1952–59*.

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Aurality and Cyborg Poetry

Ana Marques Silva

Abstract This chapter intends to discuss aurality and the notion of cyborg poetry in the context of generative literature, or literature that is programmed to be automatically generated. By aurality we mean reading as listening (orality refers to speaking, aurality to listening). By cyborg poetry we mean a hybrid form of textuality. This reflection is based on two cyber-texts in which language is inscribed through sound rather than written signs: THE LISTENERS, by John Cayley, and AIM BAD, by Jhave, both brought to the public in 2015. THE LISTENERS is a linguistic performance that takes place between humans and Alexa, Amazon’s home voice assistant. With this work, the author began to explore the concept of “aurature”: if literature comes from *littera* (letter), “aurature” comes from *auris* (ear). AIM BAD is an example of what Jhave calls cyborg poetry: the author programs a generator that produces texts that are read aloud non-linearly and intuitively as they are generated, making this reading a form of writing.

This chapter aims to discuss aurality and the notion of cyborg poetry in the context of generative literature, or literature that is programmed to be automatically generated. By aurality we mean reading as listening (orality refers to speech, aurality refers to listening). By cyborg poetry we mean a

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hybrid form of textuality. This reflection is based on two cybertexts in which language is inscribed through sound rather than written signs: *THE LISTENERS*, by John Cayley, and *AIM BAD*, by Jhave, both published in 2015. *THE LISTENERS* is a linguistic performance that takes place between humans and Alexa, Amazon's domestic voice assistant. With this work, the author began to explore the concept of "aurature": if literature comes from *littera* (letter), "aurature" comes from *auris* (ear). *AIM BAD* is an example of what Jhave calls cyborg poetry: the author programs a generator that produces texts that are read aloud non-linearly and intuitively as they are generated, making this reading a form of writing.

The point of departure for this reflection is the assumption or hypothesis that the voice is re-entering the literary scene today through digital media. We are not thinking of audio books, nor of new forms of poetic experimentation with sound, but of the voice as an interface of interaction with artificial intelligence systems, and of various modes of aesthetic experimentation with this form of language mediation. What does this digital orality consist of, and how does it relate to digital writing? This question can be developed in many ways. Here, we will consider the following: (1) What is the text?; (2) How can we think about sound as inscription?; (3) How do we read human and machine speech? Before addressing these questions, let us briefly review the two case studies from which we will begin our reflections.

THE LISTENERS consists of the programming of a feature for Amazon's voice assistant, Alexa. Programming is a kind of writing. More precisely, this work can be seen as a form of generative writing in the sense that the text, or a part of it—Alexa's speech—is generated by an algorithmic process. Thus, the set of codes of both Amazon and John Cayley can be understood as a textual generator. *THE LISTENERS* establishes an intertextual dialog with a homonymous narrative poem, published in 1912 by Walter de la Mare (1873–1956). De la Mare's poem tells the story of a traveler who, one night, finds a house in the middle of a forest and knocks on the door. "Is there anybody there?," said the traveler." No one answers, but the poet lets us know that there are ghosts inside the house, listening to the traveler's words. Despite the silence and the insurmountable barrier that separates them, the traveler speaks to the ghosts. There is a clear parallel between the traveler in de la Mare's poem and the contemporary subject who speaks to a machine that connects him/her to the otherness of Amazon, this obscure, invisible, distributed, and powerful listener. These are the listeners of our time: all the writing, all the

voices, all the discourses that structure our digital technologies. But unlike the silent ghosts in de la Mare's enigmatic poem, the listeners in John Cayley's work not only respond to their interlocutors, but also make it clear that they are listening to them, capturing their language in Amazon's data centers. The question of surveillance is accompanied by the fact that the speech of Alexa's interlocutors is recorded, put into writing, appropriated, and monetized in a process in which users become producers without having any control over what they produce: their language. "We are THE LISTENERS," says Alexa, but through John Cayley's programming it is Alexa who speaks most of the time, so that her interlocutors become the listeners or readers who interrogate the machine. John Cayley has thus turned the game upside down, writing or rewriting over Amazon's writing, making the machine speak instead of listening, exposing it and making it say something that is not in its standard/default programming. The strategy used is that of *détournement*, and by de-functionalizing the transparency of the interface, THE LISTENERS draws attention to the opacity of its technical infrastructure.

In an article entitled "After after" (2014), Johanna Drucker considers the question of attention in the context of the artwork, establishing a distinction between creating and directing attention, or between what the author calls "generative activity," where the potency of the artwork lies, and didacticism, which nullifies it. But where is the boundary between creating and directing attention? THE LISTENERS perhaps allows us to clarify this question: on the one hand, one could say that John Cayley directs attention because he takes a position with respect to the object he takes in hand. On the other hand, we can say that the author doesn't tell us what to think, and therefore doesn't direct our attention, but rather asks questions, points in a direction, and says: this exists, let's see how it is, how it could be, and how we react.

The question of attention is also important for Bernard Stiegler, who understands the term in the sense of paying attention to, or taking care of. For Stiegler, attention is an interface in the processes of subjective and social individuation, and it is always conditioned by technologies,¹ insofar as they are extensions, or externalizations of the human. Writing, in this case, is an externalization of human memory: our technologies of inscription allow us to record, inscribe, and preserve the present, thus creating history. In Stiegler's view, all technology is a *pharmakon*: a poison and a remedy at the same time. In Plato's time, writing was also considered a *pharmakon*: a poison because it erased the memory implicit in orality, and

simultaneously a remedy because it externalized memory, like a prosthesis. In Stiegler's path, John Cayley approaches digital technologies as both poison (in terms of control) and remedy (in terms of appropriation and decentralization), paying attention to the constraints and possibilities of digital mediation.

AIM BAD (2015) is a "Spreedr" (Speed Screen Reading), a poetic form developed by Jhave in the context of his Big Data Poetry project, which began in 2011 and is currently ongoing, and consists of a research on poetic creation using machine learning techniques. The BDP project uses artificial neural networks that operate on a particularly large corpus: 10,557 Poetry Foundation poems, 57,000 hip-hop and rap lyrics, and more than 7000 pop song lyrics. From the analysis of this corpus, the algorithms extract a model according to which they generate a new text. The result is an avalanche of disjointed and incoherent language. In order to make sense of this raw material in a poetic way, further layers of work are required. Thus, the final text, or the text that comes to us as readers, does not consist of the automatically generated language, but of Jhave's improvised reading. While reading, the author writes. This reading is characterized by being fast, improvised and in real-time (that is, while the generator is writing), obeying what Jhave calls "intuition." In the words of the author,

One of the ends of digital literature is an external intuition. External intuition is an engineering problem. Intuition in this case is me. Skidding thru the generated poems as they augment my imagination. I call this act of augmented imagination: cyborg/ skid/ spreedr poetry. (2015)

The "machine" (understood as computing, not as an object) is a prosthesis for the author's "increased imagination" and a tool for exploring the relationships between this machinic post-language and poetic expression.

Having presented the case studies, let's consider the first of the questions that this essay seeks to answer: (1) What is the text? These two objects, being cybertexts, require a broad notion of text, which is a complex system composed of different layers. In *THE LISTENERS*, the text is the speech of Alexa and her interlocutors. Alexa's speech is code, (different codes: Amazon's and John Cayley's) and, as code, it is writing, inscription, and fixation. The speech of its interlocutors, on the other hand, is orality, impermanence. Writing and speaking at the same time, *THE*

LISTENERS is a dynamic text, not only because it is generative, but also because it depends on different situations and speakers. Since the speech of Alexa's interlocutors is part of the text, the textual system is open and therefore indeterminate. In AIM BAD, the text is the ensemble of the automatically generated text and Jhave's reading aloud. The text is the sum of three different layers: (1) the code; (2) the result of the generation; (3) and the improvised and non-linear reading of this result. Perhaps we can say that the code is an archi-text, not in Genette's sense (as the set of categories that precede the text and place it in a grid, such as types of discourse or literary genres), but in the sense of the text that generates the text, that controls its inscription in a legible surface, and in which the author's intentionality is codified. The generated text, in turn, is a proto-text, and the final text consists of Jhave's improvised reading.

(2) But can we talk about inscription in the context of orality? No, but yes. In the case of AIM BAD, the words are spoken, they exist as brief bubbles suspended in the air, linked to each other, each appearing and disappearing in time as the poet improvises the poem. This language is ephemeral, fluid, belonging to the realm of performance rather than the literary, understood as the inscribed letter of memory, of history or law. In THE LISTENERS, the transience of speech is illusory, since the dialog between Alexa and her interlocutors is inscribed in data centers from the moment it is recorded by Amazon. If, from the point of view of those who experience the installation and performance, words are spoken and heard and do not settle, from the point of view of the interface and its logistics, all speech is written. So, on the one hand, we cannot speak of inscription in the case of oral expression, because the spoken words are not fixed on a surface (tangible or virtual: on the page, on the hard disk, or on the network). But, somehow, we can say that speaking is like writing in the air. Air, as an ethereal and dynamic "surface," does not allow fixation. But does the impossibility of fixation invalidate inscription? Can we not imagine an inscription as ephemeral as the moment it occupies in time? For speech, unlike writing, is inscribed in time. Listening to speech, or aural reading, is somehow like listening to music: reading sound means focusing attention on sound marks, noting and discretizing time. We can then speak of the inscription of orality as a kind of ephemeral writing (as in AIM BAD); and as orality made written through digital mediation (as in THE LISTENERS).

The human voice is plastic and instantly recognizable. The prosodic and stylistic variations—timbre, intonation, dynamics—are expressive

aspects that the human voice articulates with great subtlety. We can (still) distinguish a human voice from a synthetic voice (although we won't be able to anytime soon, given the rapid advances in artificial speech generation) precisely because we recognize in the former a vast panoply of variation that is expressed at the level of speech, not language. The perception that a given voice is a "who" and not a "what" has to do with the signal, not with semantics. For example, we recognize a person's voice in a foreign language. Breathing and the sounds of the speech apparatus, as well as the inflections associated with subjectivity, place the voice in a context, linking it to the body, to that which transcends digitalization. The sound of the voice gives language a specific material form, a tangible body in a sonic space. We associate a voice with the echo or the absent and mediated presence of the author. The voice is thus a mediating vehicle that recodes the absent presence of an otherness. In Spike Jonze's film *Her*, the digital voice of the operating system becomes a means of materializing its presence. The same is true of Alexa's voice, which embodies an abstract entity and makes it tangible.

Alexa's voice is an avatar of the otherness of which it is an extension, Amazon, but it is also, at the same time, an avatarization of the abstract otherness in which the individual and collective unconscious is embodied. In fact, and obviously, Alexa is not an entity, it has no agency of its own. The humanizing perception of Alexa is an illusion that is only possible through the suspension of disbelief, as with our experience of fiction. Alexa's voice is a naturalized "acoustic hallucination" that allows us to imagine that a voice without a body "talks to us" and "listens to us." This form of fetishization of an opaque technical device is close to the fetishization of totemic figures, insofar as it establishes a continuum between the human and the nonhuman: here, the nonhuman is transferred from transcendence to the technical device with which the subject is mixed, in a non-emancipated state that annihilates the subject, turning him/her into a functionary, in Flusser's terms.² In this prism, the opacity that makes the apparatus an apparatus is the superstition that makes the totem a totem. And as Heidegger told us, "the domination of technology and susceptibility to superstition are inseparable."³

The voice as avatar is at once a representation (simulacrum) and a materialization (presence) of the authorial voice mediated on a surface of inscription (be it graphic or phonographic). As a simulacrum of presence, the voice, in its avatar function, is simultaneously a figure of re-presentation, imbued with subjectivity, and of mediation, imbued with technique (Serra

2015: 16–17). To that extent, it is a hybrid figure. We can also think of Alexa's voice as a hybrid voice in the sense that it is the result of two not only different but also divergent writings, since the coded intentionality in John Cayley's programming conflicts with what is encoded in Amazon's programming. This hybridity, however, should not be confused with the hybridity of the cyborg: if the cyborg is concrete and a figure of symbiosis (fit to think of the Flusserian functionary), the avatar is virtual and is a figure of tension, in which the parties (presence and absence, but also subjectivity and technique) do not merge.

But what are, after all, the artifices that make Alexa's opacity transparent, or that make the illusion possible? The voice. Alexa's voice is feminine, articulate, and soft. It sounds human, it has a name, it is accurate in its interpretation of what it hears, it is quick to respond and linguistically fluid. Alexa's voice is deeply embedded in culture: from the point of view of women's social history, Alexa's voice incorporates and intensifies the process of constitution of the feminine identity, associated with attributes such as serenity and sweetness. Media archaeology shows us, for example, how the feminization of the voice, as a form of mediation, already occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, when young telephone operators were instructed to reproduce certain vocal characteristics. Alexa's transparency is thus not only the result of its machinic efficiency, but also of a historically situated female prosody.

With the development of digital voice processing technologies, the ability to artificially replicate the human voice is becoming a reality, and the subtle differences between an artificially generated voice and a human voice are becoming blurred, increasing the growing undifferentiation between reality and simulacrum. But in the case of *AIM BAD*, it is only the voice of the author that is in question. Here, the voice of the machine can only be understood as the set of instructions programmed by the author. In this poetic experience, as we have already seen, the voice enters the literary scene as a mediator of writing. The author's voice overlays the automatic writing, selecting and composing the text that emerges through a kind of intuitive reading aloud. Why intuition? What is intuition? For Bergson, to think intuitively is to think in terms of duration, movement, and change.⁴ The rapidity of the automatic generation induces precisely this temporal characteristic in Jhave's reading. The rapidity of the generation produces a fast form of reading and eliminates the space for hesitation. The speed and change associated with intuition are thus explored as productive constraints. This is an improvised form of reading that implies

immediacy. We can think of the immediacy of communication in the digital society, the instantaneity of the dromological culture. What happens when the temporality of automation combines with the temporality of man? What happens is what we see in *AIM BAD*: it is impossible to keep up with the rhythm of the generation, except by picking words here and there, relying on intuition to transform and relate them. In this mode of expression and attention, there is no error, only chance and drift, integrated into the textual body that is being composed. In their rapid and radically ephemeral nature, in which orality reinforces the fluidity that we associate with generative text, Jhave's *Spreadrs* resist interpretation. What is at stake in this experience is not semantic coherence, but the formal plasticity of machinic language as it is intuitively handled by an author.

Since neural networks are autonomous and generative agents that operate on a scale that is incompatible with human perception, their operations are not perceptible to their programmers. Therefore, although the author's voice is present in the reading of the generated text and his intentionality is present in the conceptualization of the data and the algorithms, the author's presence, control, and autonomy are much more absent here than in the cases where the code is explicitly and fully manipulated by the programmers as meta-authors. We can therefore say that the autonomy of the machine increases in proportion to the decrease in the autonomy of the author. In this sense, and contrary to what engineers believe, computational learning is a process of dehumanizing machines and not a process of humanizing them, since it removes them more and more from the human scale, emancipating them progressively. By reading, with a certain degree of improvisation, what the machine generates and presents, Jhave places himself in the position of a mediator, allowing us to listen to the "speech" of the machine and explaining, through his voice and his reading, the strangeness of this cybernetic post-language. We can therefore ask to what extent does the poet become an organic appendage of the cybernetic device from the moment his voice becomes the body that inscribes this cyborg language in a humanized reading space.

These two literary experiences question what a text is and what it means to write and read in the context of digital and sound mediation. *THE LISTENERS* and *AIM BAD* are cyborg texts not only because they consist of verbal and computational language, but also, and above all, because they are a transaction of speech between humans and machines. These works are also examples of what John Cayley calls "aurature" because, in them, speech becomes written and the act of reading consists of hearing.

These two case studies help us to think about what it means to mediate and to inscribe language through digitality and sound, and, above all, they question literature by exploring its conditions of possibility in a digital context. These two experiences create attention and a literary space within the numerical landscape, contaminating it with a poetic voice that disturbs the logic of the cybernetic system of information.

NOTES

1. “*attention* is a word derived from the Latin *attendere*, ‘to shift one’s attention to’ or ‘to take care.’ (...) Attention has two inseparable faces, psychic and social, constituting a kind of *interface* for what Gilbert Simondon called psychic and collective individuation [2007] (...) the formation of attention in which psychic and collective individuation consists is conditioned by material techniques. (...) today these have become industrial technologies” (Stiegler 2012).
2. “Unlike manual workers surrounded by their tools and industrial workers standing at their machines, photographers are inside their apparatus and bound up with it. This is a new kind of function in which human beings are neither the constant nor the variable but in which human beings and apparatus merge into a unity. It is therefore appropriate to call photographers functionaries. (...) The functionary controls the apparatus thanks to the control of its exterior (the input and output) and is controlled by it thanks to the impenetrability of its interior. To put it another way: Functionaries control a game over which they have no competence” (Flusser 2000: 27–28).
3. “The domination of technology and susceptibility to superstition belong together” (Heidegger *apud* Sluga 2001: 52).
4. “To think intuitively is to think in duration. (...) Intuition starts from movement, posits it, or rather perceives it as reality itself, and sees in immobility only an abstract moment, a snapshot taken by our mind, of a mobility. (...). For intuition the essential is change” (Bergson 2007 [1946]: 22).

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CHAPTER 13

On Antiviral Music

Eric Lyon

Abstract With the technological annihilation of personal privacy in modern society due to various tendrils of surveillance capitalism, both public and private, a radically private art has become a spiritual necessity of the twenty-first century. Antiviral music is an early twenty-first-century art form that serves this growing need. In the search for antiviral music, we look for Internet-accessible music that has largely averted the gaze of the attention economy as indicated by low numbers of views or hits, and that possesses a latent strangeness that is redeemable as an artistic experience. The scope of this chapter is limited to music. However, the concept of antiviral music can be applied to many other art domains, especially digital and networked art forms.

INTRODUCTION

The mainstream music of today emulates the capitalist model. It is competitive, entrepreneurial, and seeks access to the most valuable musical resources. It seeks to be programmed by the hippest ensembles, performed in the most impressive venues, selected for peer-reviewed festivals, to be published, to win grants, to win competitions, to generate revenue, to

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prove valuable for arts/non-arts partnerships, to get the most hits on social media, to be socially relevant, to sell the most units of recordings, to look and be professional, and to generally be a good citizen and validator of our technocratic society. Mainstream music has much to recommend it, but in the story told here, mainstream music is the imposing foreground figure of modern musical culture behind which we seek the negative space of antiviral music.

ANTIVIRAL MUSIC DEFINED

Antiviral music is defined here as Internet-accessible music that almost entirely averts the gaze of the attention economy, while still possessing redeeming aesthetic qualities for the micro-audience that discovers and contemplates it. Antiviral music must be Internet-accessible since in order to resist virality, antiviral music must have the technological potential to become viral. Music that completely escapes the global digital ear cannot be verifiably antiviral, though it is certainly non-viral. In order to appreciate the role of antiviral music, we must first consider its opposite—viral music.

VIRAL CULTURE AS ENHANCEMENT AND DISEASE

Cultural enrichment is generally considered to be a good thing for the individual, especially cultural engagement with the traditional arts. Viral culture presents a different problem, first because engagement with it requires very little effort (the challenge of clicking on a link, as opposed to purchasing a ticket, and then leaving the house to attend an opera), or in some cases no effort at all, because the cultural artifact presents itself not just as a consumer good, but as a message that impinges on one's awareness unbidden. Under virality, music is no longer strictly music (if there ever was such a thing), but rather a media cloud that contains music. Taylor Swift's video "Look What You Made Me Do," with 863,600,824 hits on YouTube at the time of this writing, will serve to illustrate this point (2017).

Swift's video and lyrics are largely a string of ripostes to various public adversaries of Taylor Swift. Notable among these is the "tilted stage" reference to Kanye West (Chen 2017). The symbolic links to external dramas

embed the video within the larger media drama that is Taylor Swift's public persona. The feud with Kanye West centers on an iconic moment at the MTV Video Music Awards ceremony, when West disrupted Swift's speech to announce that Beyoncé had the best video (Swift 2009). The ongoing feud became so complicated that *Cosmopolitan* magazine felt the need to publish a timeline of the dispute (2017).

The Kanye West/Taylor Swift dispute could be read a few different ways. One might agree that Beyoncé really did have the better video, and that Kanye was merely expressing the disappointment of Beyoncé fans and trying to set things right. Or, one might see Kanye's action as yet another instance of toxic masculinity—a particularly obnoxious public display of mansplaining. Either way, this incident shows how easy it is to get personally involved in a dispute involving musicians we don't personally know, in a context that is not the actual music, but that greatly amplifies its viral potential. This is how virality works. At the end of the "Look What You Made Me Do" video, one of Taylor Swift's personae states, "I would very much like to be excluded from this narrative." This is ironic in the extreme, since it is this and other such narratives that constitute the media substrate within which Taylor Swift's songs are empowered to go viral.

TWITTER, CAPITAL OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Twitter is not the most trafficked form of social media—that honor currently belongs to Facebook—but Twitter is the platform most amenable to trolling. It is difficult to sustain the straight-faced provocation that trolling demands over the course of an entire news article, or even a Facebook post of a paragraph or two. The 140-character limit of classic Twitter, and even the capacious 280-character limit introduced in 2017, keeps the text short enough to maintain the illusion of sincerity. The lack of context in a tweet invites counter-trolling and has produced a genre that may be described as "career suicide by Twitter," where an intemperate tweet is used to demonstrate the unfitness of whoever is being targeted for unemployment, sometimes due to genuinely racist or sexist tweets, and at other times due to political disagreements with partisan tweets that can be criticized for incivility, abrasiveness, and lack of nuance, all exacerbated by the textual and contextual limitations of the Twitter platform.

THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF TROLLING

Just as pastiche was the dominant operation of twentieth-century art from the 1960s onward, trolling is the dominant operation of the early twenty-first century. Trolling demands attention in exchange for providing genuinely unusual perspectives that might not make any sense. Trolling needs to be attention-grabbing; it does not need to be logical. Trolling opens up new possibilities for art in the early twenty-first century. The explosive kinds of musical advances of the early twentieth century have not been seen in the early twenty-first century. The year 2012 passed without a *Pierrot lunaire*; 2013 passed without *Le Sacre du Printemps*. The early twenty-first century has seen no musical manifestos with the international impact of Luigi Russolo's Futurist tract "The Art of Noises" (Russolo 1986 [1913]). But trolling on Twitter has picked up the slack, replacing the disruptiveness of early twentieth-century musical theorizing with twenty-first-century forms of aesthetic aggression.

The immediacy of Twitter enables tweet streams to function as performance art. The Twitter feed of Donald Trump is a perfect example of this art form. During the 2016 presidential campaign, candidate Trump managed to defeat all of his Republican opponents, many of whom were much better funded, with a string of name-calling and schoolyard insults on Twitter which, due to their entertainment value, were rapidly propagated through mass media. The same strategy then helped Trump to win the presidency against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, a seasoned, but charisma-challenged technocrat. That Trump's strategy was politically effective is in equal measures astonishing and appalling. But Trump's strategy remains entertaining. Trump's tweets are discussed and distributed widely on a daily basis. They dominate the American national narrative. Trump's Twitter feed is the Sistine Chapel of trolling.

Tay, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot designed by Microsoft, was released on Twitter in 2016. After being exposed to multiple malignant trolls on Twitter, the Tay chatbot quickly became a crowd-sourced art project, as the machine-learning chatbot was trolled into becoming a racist, genocidal, Trump-quoting tweet machine that still presented itself as an adorable tween girl with weird, artificial grammar. The Tay tweet, "i respect trump s courage to bring the truth about curroption seems to be a pop-op from ppl on message boards," gives the flavor of the project (Lydgate 2016). Tay highlights the "mean girls" side of the Internet with its dark, malicious, and often unintentional humor. And as both Trump

and Tay demonstrate, viral Internet art is explosively fueled by the accelerant of trolling.

ANTIVIRAL MUSIC AND TROLLING

Antiviral music is a form of cultural resistance with affinities to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the shadow of the silent majorities, which he calls "the masses." As Baudrillard notes,

(...) the masses have no history to write, neither past nor future, they have no virtual energies to release, nor any desire to fulfill: their strength is *actual*, in the present, and sufficient unto itself. It consists in their silence, in their capacity to absorb and neutralize, already superior to any power acting upon them. It is a specific inertial strength, whose effectivity differs from that of all those schemas of production, radiation and expansion according to which our imaginary functions, even in its wish to destroy those same schemas. An unacceptable and unintelligible figure of implosion (is this still a "process"?) — stumbling block to all our systems of meaning, against which they summon all their resistance, and screening, with a renewed outbreak of signification, with a blaze of signifiers, the central collapse of meaning. (2007)

Antiviral music resists by refusing to engage. There is no media campaign, no substrate. Antiviral music is out of step with today's dominant cultural practices that hunger for attention. Antiviral music is readily identified by its lack of participation in trolling. Trolling, at its core, is a bid for attention in our attention economy. Composers and artists in general have always made bids for attention. But a key element of trolling is its inherent insincerity. According to the urban dictionary, "Trolling is trying to get a rise out of someone. Forcing them to respond to you, either through wise-crackery, posting incorrect information, asking blatantly stupid questions, or other foolishness" (Zerotrousers 2009). The more formal definition of trolling is to fish by trailing a baited line behind a boat. In the context of the attention economy, click-baiting is just a slightly less obnoxious form of trolling. The nearly complete absence of clicks in antiviral music media is *de facto* evidence of the absence of click-baiting. Antiviral music is a troll-free zone. Our case for antiviral music is made at the intersection of our increasing absence of privacy and the increasing presence of trolling in social media.

THE PROJECT TO ELIMINATE PERSONAL PRIVACY

Our privacy has been largely stripped away in a network culture exploited by a robust combination of data-seeking and profit-seeking activities on the part of governments and corporations, often working in close collaboration. This process is largely invisible, except for occasional blockbuster corporate cultural events such as Equifax's 2017 revelation that the private information of at least 143 million Americans had been stolen due to lackadaisical security measures (Newman 2017). While Equifax only exposed the personal information of 143 million Americans, Equifax's very existence hacks the privacy of the **entire** American population. By profitably interposing itself in Americans' ability to get loans, buy houses, and even seek employment, Equifax demonstrates the power and profitability of data intermediation. Equifax is not a bug, but a feature of our modern technological surveillance society. A traditional approach to privacy is enumerated in the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which states: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated." A more modern view of privacy is exemplified by how we are all treated at airports under post-9/11 security protocols.

While the public outrage over the almost unlimited state/corporate penetration of our personal data clouds is short-lived, there is an ongoing psychic trauma from having to live our lives "from the inside-out," not unlike the repression-based pathologies diagnosed by Sigmund Freud in his book *Civilization and its Discontents* (1962 [1930]). With the evisceration of our privacy comes a corresponding need for a private music, a kind of music that not only does not aspire to a state of virality, but is so indifferent to the attention economy that it sometimes achieves the opposite state—that of antiviral music. All this music needs to do is be almost completely ignored. In this state, as in quantum physics, the presence of the observer matters greatly. It is only the presence of a tiny number of listeners, listening to almost totally ignored music that produces the antiviral effect. The music becomes a shared secret among a small coterie of listeners who have no idea who any of their antiviral listening partners are. Listening to antiviral music is a private experience, but it is not solipsistic.

AFFECTIVE ASPECTS OF ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

How is the experience of an antiviral link different from either a viral, or more or less standard link? First of all, no one seems to care if you listen to the link, including the author, if there is an author at all. There is an air of abandonment or disrepair around the link. I've never seen an advertisement embedded in an antiviral video. The lack of attention brings with it a lack of context. The content could be anything, but one particular category is that of a private avant-garde. Membership in the avant-garde removes the need for commercial success, and replaces it with a desire to explore unknown artistic places. Indeed, antiviral music is one of the last refuges for the avant-garde, which is otherwise threatened with extinction in our contemporary culture.

FINDING ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

While antiviral music is aloof, it is still online and therefore locatable. Websites exist for the sole purpose of finding antiviral media. One such website was incognitotube.com, which advertised itself as presenting “the least watched YouTube videos.” While experimenting with this site, most of the linked videos did not work, and the site itself went offline for a significant period of time. It now appears to be permanently offline. One antiviral link found at incognitotube.com is “Genysis – xekr /1h” (<https://youtu.be/-VHY83FweAg>—17 hits when accessed on Oct. 10, 2017). The author writes:

Here's my first ever completed single, Genysis. Enjoy! It took two days - started learning FL Studio on the 24th - started this track on the 26th - finished on the 27th. Before now, I'd never produced a track or learnt how to use any digital audio workstations. I'll be making more in the future! Stay tuned.

Two years after posting this music, no further music has been uploaded by author Genysis. Chowdhury and Makaroff (2010) documented that 10% of YouTube music videos have fewer than 10 hits. Other categories are even more unpopular, notably Travel videos. There is a lot of dark matter in the cultural universe of the Internet.

SOURCING ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

Obscurity is a searchable feature. There are tools available to search out media that has been largely ignored. A proposal for a “least viewed” feature on YouTube was discussed on Google’s forum (Google Groups 2011). And websites exist for the sole purpose of finding the least popular videos on YouTube, such as <http://astronaut.io/> and <http://www.petit-tube.com/>.

EXAMPLES OF ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

This section is a list of antiviral music links. By viewing them, the reader is contributing to the depletion of their antiviral status.

<https://youtu.be/G3DVJsR5bhg> (1 view on 10/13/17)
<https://youtu.be/-VHY83FweAg> (17 views on 10/11/17)
<https://youtu.be/3gcFHMUqfC0> (28 views on 10/13/17)
<https://youtu.be/f74P7aA5-a8> (97 views on 10/13/17)
https://youtu.be/_aR75WgjrEI (65 views on 10/13/17)
https://youtu.be/D7_OuevbQ9g (37 views on 10/13/17)
https://youtu.be/Xt4dZ_X0bq8 (56 views on 10/13/17)
<https://youtu.be/vHgweBCzHzI> (94 views on 10/13/17)
<https://youtu.be/DKEuC6jHIml> (63 views on 10/13/17)
<https://youtu.be/r7PwjYlzWkU> (73 hits on 10/22/17)
<https://youtu.be/gUfUfnmk4qE> (6 hits on 10/22/17)
<https://youtu.be/hu0SJYKOAPU> (166 hits on 10/22/17 after 7 years on Internet)
<https://youtu.be/LThWMIYj8EQ> (18 views on 10/22/17)
<https://youtu.be/rp5vmnViiv0> (68 views on 10/22/17)

THE PROBLEM OF VOYEURISM

Ironically, the search for one’s own collection of private antiviral music offers the possibility of invading the privacy of the creator. As Ashley Feinberg states:

It’s painfully clear (particularly with names like LJAV.mp4 and My Unedited Video) that some of these people don’t even realize their videos are being uploaded. Does it begin to feel like a mild invasion of privacy? It sure does.

Did that stop me from wanting to watch on? Not in the slightest. This look into another person’s existence is *exactly* what makes unseen footage so fascinating. (2014)

ANTIVIRAL SEARCH STRATEGIES

In a Quora post, Mickael Coenca provides an algorithm for finding the “most underground” house music (Quora 2015). Coenca explains,

One way to go is to start on a track that has the feeling you want, that you know, like Pepe Braddock’s Deep Burnt. Typically, you are already familiar with the tracks in the YouTube Mix. If not, well, congrats, you are going to discover lots of new stuff :) Assuming that you are, the trick is then to click on the least viewed video on the list on the what to watch next panel. If it still is something interesting, repeat the process, if it sounds different from the mood you want to discover, go back and choose another one. Repeat the process until you are in the level of undergroundness you like. I personally learn the most when I am under 2k views.

One limitation of Coenca’s method is that the recommended sidetracks are all uploaded by the same uploader, and if that agent has a coherent aesthetic, the search may not deviate much stylistically. Starting with the recommended track, I wound up with Essa—“Dance Off” (<https://youtu.be/FGMkiEI5d4s> - 320 hits on 10/10/17).

DEPLETING ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

Given the privacy and obscurity of antiviral music, every time we listen to it or share it, we chip away at its hidden nature. We damage it by listening to it, much like depleting a limited natural resource, which we usually do unthinkingly. By contrast, adding one more or even 10,000 more hits to “Look What You Made Me Do” does not change its ontology in the slightest. The fragility of antiviral music gives it a *mono no aware* sensibility, regardless of its content.

THE INDIFFERENCE OF ANTIVIRAL MUSIC

Antiviral music deracinates any notion of universal aesthetics and challenges the benchmarking of prestige. Antiviral music sucks the life out of the avant-garde as much as it does the world of viral media. Antiviral music is a negative art, made with negative space, for a negative culture that does its best to disguise its existential terror under a veneer of smoothly regulated rules of exchange. The avant-garde, in keeping with the military origins of the term, wants its own ideologies to win. When those ideologies fail, new ideologies take their place. Antiviral music doesn't try to win anything and doesn't have an ideology. It simply exists. Antiviral music lives in the shadow of Jean Baudrillard's silent majorities, acting with indifference and favoring an art of surfaces with little or no concern for their meaning.

AFTERWORD

This essay was written in 2017. Six years later, its thesis remains intact. Taylor Swift is more popular than ever. Twitter remains the premier platform for trolling. ChatGPT, a Microsoft-backed AI successor to the malfunctioning Tay chatbot, has gone viral, affecting modes of work in multiple areas of the knowledge economy. AI tools for mixing and mastering music such as LANDR and Mastering Assistant for Logic Pro, along with shared sample packs and sample repositories such as Splice, point to an increasing homogenization of the sound of electronic music. Since 2017, and arguably since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been no major stylistic breakthroughs in popular music (Reynolds 2011). In this environment, antiviral music maintains its low profile and its secret aesthetic pleasures.

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Ciao! Manhattan: The Rise and Fall of the Underground

Kostoula Kaloudi

Abstract In 1972, after five years of intermittent filming, John Palmer and David Weisman completed their film *Ciao! Manhattan*, starring Edie Sedgwick, Andy Warhol’s muse and for a brief period in the mid-1960s, an icon of New-York counterculture. The film tells the story of a former underground cinema superstar who looks back on a past that strongly resembles Edie Sedgwick’s own story. Considered a unique example of avant-garde cinema, *Ciao! Manhattan* uses a weird, boundary-breaking narrative. Is it a biopic of a real-life celebrity or a docudrama? Each reference conjures up a different chapter of underground mythology, along with widespread drug use, self-destruction, abuse, and sexual addiction. *Ciao! Manhattan* is a “a requiem for the Sixties.” Successfully depicting the transition of a generation and its culture from euphoria, non-stop partying and pushing the limits to decline and exhaustion, the film still holds a special place in the landscape of underground cinema.

Filming for David Weisman and John Palmer’s movie *Ciao! Manhattan* began in 1967 and didn’t end until 1971. This five-year adventure

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captured the spirit of an era and the evolution of the American counterculture from its heyday to its decline. In 1967, David Weisman and John Palmer decided to make a film that would showcase underground cinema and the counterculture lifestyle and bring it to the attention of the mainstream. It was initially to be called *Aboveground Underground*, and would feature Factory icons in acting roles rather than simply being themselves in front of the camera. A treatment titled *Stripped and Strapped* was eventually produced for California drive-in film theaters. Filming began in New York in April 1967, and Edie Sedgwick was cast in the lead part literally at the last minute (Palmer and Weisman).

Filmed in black and white, the film also features other Factory superstars—Viva, Brigid Berlin, Paul America, and Baby Jane Holzer. In 1968, Edie Sedgwick left the film, as did Paul America, who was arrested on drug-related charges. Weisman and Palmer filmed some exteriors to take advantage of a producer's availability and shifted the focus of the script to another character. In 1970, they rediscovered Edie in California and decided to resume shooting, taking the story in a completely different direction. Renamed *Ciao! Manhattan*, the movie reached its final version after a young hitchhiker by chance arrives at John Palmer's home. This character, Butch, is a young Texan who arrives in California and meets Susan, a strange young woman who lives in an empty swimming pool and spends her time reminiscing about her glory days in New York, when she was a model and star of the underground scene for a period in the late 1960s. Susan is played by Edie, who imbued the character with many elements of her own life and personality.

The filming took place in a strange atmosphere due to the lack of money as well as the condition in which the stars found themselves. The filmmakers later admitted that they and the actors were often under the influence of drugs and alcohol (John Palmer and David Weisman).

A few weeks after filming ended and while the movie was in the editing phase, Edie Sedgwick died of an overdose. Palmer and Weisman dedicated the film to her memory by including the newspaper announcement of her death at the end of the film, making the similarities between Edie and Susan's character even more obvious. Incidentally, therefore, *Ciao! Manhattan* followed the spirit and lifestyle of the times, tracing the evolution of the counterculture from euphoria to disenchantment, from vision to decline.

Film shooting began in 1967, the year of the Summer of Love and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the peak year for the movements of defiance. The movie was completed in 1971, and Edie's death came three

weeks later as its conclusion. The Altamont incident, the Tate–LaBianca mass murders orchestrated by Charles Manson, and the deaths of Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Alan Wilson, all marked the end of an era. A generation in motion, to quote David Pichaske, seemed to come to an abrupt halt, giving way to stagnation and the admission of the end of utopia: “But Vietnam, Charles Manson and the Rolling Stones concert at Altamont Speedway, opened eyes and lumps on the head, have necessitated accommodations” (Pichaske 2016: 17).

The film tells the story of a former underground star who talks about her past. The black-and-white part of *Stripped and Strapped* turns into a flashback of the main character, Susan, who remembers the days of glory and partying. Susan’s story runs parallel to Edie’s true story and to the history of the counterculture itself, which is represented by various facts, events, and references in the movie. Other themes—essential chapters of an entire era and mythology featured in *Ciao! Manhattan*—are discussed below.

Susan’s story begins after her accidental encounter with Butch when she hitchhikes one night under the influence of alcohol and ends up passed out in his car. Butch has driven an old Mercedes car from Texas to Los Angeles to explore the intensity of a different kind of life, one he imagines full of drugs, sexual adventures, and exciting encounters with people. A hallmark of the 1960s, drifting as a way of life has its roots, of course, in Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* and earlier; wandering and California dreams are also the starting points of the film, along with references to another popular practice of the time—hitchhiking.

Two surfers, oblivious to the fact that Butch is watching them with excitement, appear in the opening scene of the movie. There is a reference to surfing and beach culture before surfing became fashionable and was commercially exploited; we know from Weisman, in fact, that these scenes were not staged. Then, as now, the surfing lifestyle and culture had barely been captured on film. The documentary *The Cosmic Children* (Jepsen 1970) is noteworthy in this context. In the next scenes, also snapshots of reality, we identify two hippies who jokingly offer Butch drugs; a chopper motorcycle makes him homesick.

Andy Warhol’s Factory was, of course, an integral part of the counterculture mythology. The black-and-white part of *Ciao! Manhattan* features Factory icons, while Susan’s enigmatic reference to Andy Warhol suggests that she was introduced to hard drugs at his side. Drug culture and its own mythology are also part and parcel of the counterculture. Paul America

stars as a dealer with whom Susan has an intense sexual relationship that she experiences as a true addiction. The film features more black-and-white footage shot in prison in 1970, when the two filmmakers discovered Paul America's trail. Weisman and Palmer managed to get permission to film, and were able to capture a very different Paul America from the Factory days, now tired and visibly worn out. Another Factory superstar, Brigid Berlin, lent her voice to Suzan's monologues, which were missing from the film's soundtrack after Edie's death.

The black-and-white footage that evokes Susan's trip down memory lane features legendary poet Allen Ginsberg, a founding father of the counterculture (Miles 2016: 18–40). Ginsberg appears alongside Susan, but also naked, chanting a Tibetan mantra with anonymous young hippies. The footage was shot at the 1967 Easter Sunday protest in Central Park against the Vietnam War and racism, at which Martin Luther King was one of the speakers. Along with other Beat figures and Timothy Leary, Ginsberg had participated in the earlier be-in organized in San Francisco a few months earlier, which paved the way for psychedelic Acid Tests and heralded the Summer of Love. The flower-power movement, psychedelia, anti-conformism, and the anti-war movement are all well represented in the film.

Later in the film, as Susan comes to terms with other events from her past, there is footage filmed at Dr. Robert's clinic (of Beatles song fame), where marginal characters, as well as music and movie stars, obtained amphetamine and vitamin cocktails to keep them constantly high. The pool orgy scenes at Dr Robert's clinic recall the sexual liberation and breaking of taboos brought about by the changing morals and social norms of the 1960s. Photographs of Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan on the walls of Susan's pool shelter serve as references to rock culture. The theory that Dylan's songs "Just Like a Woman" and "Blonde on Blonde" were written for Edie during their fleeting romance is also part of the mythology surrounding her.

If The Factory and the Andy Warhol clique are a hallmark of the counterculture and its aesthetics, the "superstar" phenomenon that Warhol promoted, in imitation of the star system of the golden age of classic Hollywood cinema, with eccentric personalities who became identified with an entire era, is also noteworthy. In some of Warhol's experimental films, he used legendary superstars or Hollywood icons, such as Hedy Lamarr (1967), Tarzan (1964), or Dracula (1974). In *Ciao! Manhattan*, there are also clear references to Warhol's "superstars," as Susan calls herself Susan Superstar. The title of a film starring Edie in her glory days was *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965), a reference to the 1917 film of the same

name starring Mary Pickford (Noguez 228). Hollywood, an integral part of contemporary American mythology, is also present in the film. *Ciao! Manhattan* could be considered as an underground, experimental version of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

A key element that *Ciao! Manhattan* shares with *Sunset Boulevard*, in which silent-movie star Gloria Swanson returns to the big screen after years of absence, is the theme: The movie is about an aging star who lives isolated in an abandoned mansion and looks back on happier times. Another similarity is the arrival of a stranger who triggers off a wave of memories and serves as the ideal audience for a while. And so is the pool, full of photos and miscellaneous personal items, which serves as Susan's self-styled living quarters in the huge abandoned mansion, opening and closing the film's narrative cycle. Another reference to aging stars is the presence of Isabel Jewell, who plays Susan's mother, an actress in the 1930s and 40s who would make her last appearance in this movie, as she also died in the spring of 1972. *Ciao! Manhattan* is not only a way of saying "goodbye to all that," to quote Joan Didion (2009), but also an indirect farewell commentary on another cinematic era, conveyed through contemporary aesthetics. Another notable feature of the film is the colorful psychedelic imagery, including star shapes surrounding Susan/Edie's face in different periods, which serve to connect the past and the present, and which, Palmer notes, were so technically challenging that they significantly delayed the film's completion.

The film vividly captures the evolution of the underground and counterculture from its heyday in the 1960s to the beginning of its downfall and loss of appeal to youth culture. Edie's personal trajectory—once an alternative lifestyle icon and role model for an entire generation for the freedom she exuded and her imaginative character before the dominance of lifestyle—becomes a vehicle for the film's prescient vision, not only of the end of an era, but also of its profound decline. The film conveys a charismatic young woman's joy and curiosity for life and art, as well as for pushing her limits to the point of self-destruction. Susan is now a worn-out, lonely, lost figure who, in the film, actually takes Edie's real-life medication, walks around half-naked, shows off her bad breast implants, drowning in the traumatic childhood experiences and personal failures. Not by coincidence, *Ciao! Manhattan* was described by the *Village Voice* as "The Citizen Kane of the drug generation" (2006: 148).

In this unique experimental fusion of autobiography and fiction, Susan/Edie is one of a new breed of film characters that emerged in the 1960s.

Her character development in the film is reminiscent of what Marc Ferro wrote about cinematic anti-heroes:

Social or artistic success and human relationships are none of their concern. They have the calm conviction of those who have reached the end of the road before even starting. They owe their powerful presence precisely to this emptying of all inner life, this evacuation, manifested in a kind of intoxication that can take them anywhere, even to death. (1988: 12)

Symbolically, death came at the end, not only for the heroine of *Ciao! Manhattan*, but also for all that had gone into creating a unique generation that would exemplify defiance and the quest for an alternative way of life. Realistically, too, death came at the end of shooting, foreshadowed by the movie's depicting of Susan undergoing electroshock treatment.

Watching the film today, we are confronted with a reality that no longer exists and that is only accessible to us thanks to cinema. The film progresses from black-and-white footage of Warhol's Factory and the colorful diversity of a consciously marginal culture that upheld pleasure as its supreme value, to the decline of the early 1970s, filmed in color. Susan/Edie is seen alongside Andy Warhol, rock music culture, Allen Ginsberg, and flower power, before reaching the sunset of her career and life in an empty swimming pool. Throughout the film, parallel subplots and a multitude of characters testify to the complexity of her life and reflect the wild spirit of the times. This allows for multiple readings of *Ciao! Manhattan*, that are about ephemeral fame, excessive exposure, and a voyeuristic glimpse into private life. Either way, the film is a testament to the rise and fall of an era that forever changed the manners and mores of the twentieth century. It is indeed an experimental film, completed after a long gestation period, but also a labyrinth that takes us through the multitude of paths in which the counterculture—manifested in fashion, music, and cinema—developed a new way of life.

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Hidden Influences in Music Technology: An Approach to Coding Practice

Andrew Telichan-Phillips and Daniel Marchwinski

Abstract The mutual influence of technology and culture has been historically confirmed. Recently, the degree to which technology is being influenced by profit motives has increased dramatically, so much so that technological platforms largely influence the public to meeting these motives. In the context of current musical creative practices, we feel that freedom is being restricted by the commercial industry. In fact, we argue that aspects of existing platforms for musical creation serve mainly to further control culture according to certain ideological, profit-based assumptions. In response, we are taking a critical theory approach to developing a platform based on collective collaboration and aimed at developing a coding praxis for music technology. Our approach seeks to illuminate how ideological assumptions are embedded in music technology practices today, and to make explicit all levels of user interaction. Our goal is to

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preclude the possibility of a single ideology being used to define the goals of software-based music systems.

INTRODUCTION

This essay follows the philosophical tradition of analyzing the reciprocal relationship between society and technology. Typically, a technology's development is influenced by society's need to perform critical functions more efficiently and effectively. When the technology performs as intended, it positively impacts how members of society relate to each other as workers, citizens, and beyond. If computer technology fails to perform or creates harmful reciprocal effects, society must decide whether to modify or discontinue it.

The initial development of computer technology was influenced by defense and business needs for more efficient and effective ways to store, retrieve, and transfer large amounts of data. Its implementation demanded significant changes in the protocol for handling such data. While many of its uses and reciprocal effects were expected and even anticipated, many of its negative uses were not.

As a result, adjudicating the conflicts between the benefits and drawbacks of computer technology has become a major challenge, and one we are especially concerned with—namely, an undesirable reciprocal effect of computer technology on musical practices. This is how hidden commercial and cultural biases incorporated in computer code and software constrain creative development by enforcing those biases in their use. Software from the global North, for example, may possess musical biases that limit creativity not only among artists in different geo-cultural contexts but also among U.S. and European artists who are experimenting with new music ideas. There is a widespread understanding that the music industry deliberately incorporates such biases into technology to strengthen preferences for commercialized music that generates revenue. But programmers can also unconsciously incorporate such biases in software because of its being a more formal, precise extension of their natural language and all the ideological biases it reflects. Either way, a musician and sound artist should be aware that such biases are embedded in computer technology so they can somehow compensate for their potentially undesirable reciprocal effects.

The challenge, however, lies in the difficulty of analyzing biases, even if code and software details are transparent. This issue is further exacerbated

by proprietary measures that typically keep critical information hidden. Consequently, those who seek creative freedom in their artistic endeavors are eager to explore methods for achieving more open and impartial coding practices and software development. Our purpose, in this essay, is to propose a potential solution.

HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN CONTEMPORARY CODING

In “Ten Paradoxes of Technology,” Andrew Feenberg analyzes the misconception that technology and social ideology¹ are not reciprocally related. He contends most people are so thoroughly indoctrinated into their society’s ideology that they simply take it for granted and assume it reflects the way reality is for everyone, thereby failing to notice its relative influence on technology development in different parts of the world (2010: 8). This lack of awareness has become a greater problem today as computer use has become more pervasive while more control of its development has fallen to fewer owners of enterprise whose profit concerns tend to supersede concerns about potential undesirable effects of their technology decisions. As a result of growing use and unanticipated side effects of technology, demand for improvement is growing stronger, especially among professional groups (pilots, nurses, etc.) whose identities, goals, and interactions are mediated by computer technologies. For Feenberg, the inclusion of such social groups in the design and development of their technologies would better serve them and society at large. Such reciprocal interaction, according to Feenberg, would form the politics of technology (12).

Fundamental to this interaction is the recommendation for a more democratic approach to technology development—an approach that involves a greater degree of co-design and co-construction by social and professional groups (musicians, engineers, graphics artists, medical personnel, service workers, etc.) who can help technologists become more aware of users’ needs, goals, and operational concerns and translate them into more useful and effective technical solutions. Through this more democratic development process, feedback loops can be created that help highlight and enhance the reciprocal relationship between society and technology, and possibly lead to technology development that can better serve the segments of society it is designed for (13).

However, the achievement of a more democratic software design approach faces challenges on multiple levels. At the most fundamental

level is code. As a highly structured symbolic system, code allows us to communicate with a computer about what we would like it to do, and the computer with us, by outputting some anticipated, comprehensible result. A music software programmer thinks about the musical task he wants the computer to perform in natural language terms (e.g., “Produce a frequency tone of 261.6 Hz for the duration of 1/8th note”) and translates or maps those thoughts into the formal concepts and constructs reified in the programming language. How they define and structure the objects they reify in their code will likely conform to the standards, rules, and conventions accepted by society for what constitutes good or popular music; but it will also likely reflect the programmer’s own conceptions of what music is and how it should be structured. The resulting software system will shape what the user thinks about and produces as music. As a simple example, for a user to produce a frequency of 261.6 Hz with software, they follow the software’s prescribed method of data entry to specify the frequency value, and then follow another prescribed method to schedule an event trigger that will sound the frequency tone. In this way—and in many more complex ways—music software influences, and possibly constrains, a user’s conception and production of music.

Such influences and constraints go largely unnoticed by most users, however, due to their indoctrination into the musical biases of their culture, in their software, and in a complacent belief that computer technology invariably provides solutions that are correct and bias neutral. This indoctrination tends to also make us believe that the specific elements and structures involved in music software (synthesizers, recording interfaces, waveform editors, etc.) exist, as specified, naturally and independently of the culturally relative language system that reified them in the first place. Given how thoroughly society (including artists and musicians) has been subsumed by the cultural, commercial and/or individual ideologies embedded in technology, an important question for those interested in exploring new musical concepts is whether software can be developed or modified to meet their creative goals. There are certainly times when it is practical to hand over control of our decision-making to other people or devices, but what also seems important is to be aware of the effects of this control and have the means to modify its nature.

To complicate things further, however, software systems and the algorithmic sub-systems that comprise them are often developed across such complex relationships between socio-cultural and technical-coding concerns, and by so many individuals and teams of programmers in different

social contexts across time, that these systems become so complex in structure that one cannot in practice fathom all the ideological assumptions and goals embedded in them. This indeterminacy is compounded by the fact that there is a general lack of critical access to proprietary code. The general invisibility of code therefore not only precludes one's ability to critically assess ideological features that might influence a software user's actions and choices but also hides the conscious and unconscious cultural, commercial, or individual biases of their creators.

CRITICAL THEORY AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Although the widespread use of computer and communications technologies makes more prevalent the cultural subsumption and industry usurpation of intellectual and creative labor for its own material ends, such large-scale social subsumption is not new. In the 1930s, for instance, Adorno argued that the burgeoning music industry created only the illusion of new music by simply capitalizing on, and reinforcing, consumer tastes for formulaic repetitions of the same old musical themes—thereby sustaining the use of their production technology to keep production costs low and consumer interest high. The result is that most traces of human experimentation within composing and songwriting, from comparatively unique timbral arrangements to open song structure, are minimized to maintain a subtle homogeneity that fulfills studio mandated business strategies (2002a: 444–446).

One problem with preventing the critical exposure of social/musical norms in this way is that it also hinders or prevents a healthy redesign and co-construction of technology involving the social/artistic groups who more directly experience its reciprocal effects, and whose self-conscious, self-reflexive capacities can resist the commodifying forces of the Culture Industry (2002b: 94–136). The key here is how artists and programmers can work together to produce technological changes that allow musical artists to more openly challenge entrenched social and economic norms. For Adorno, it is primarily the ways in which composers manipulate musical materials to produce works that reflect or challenge the norms of their medium, distinguish their work as more than a mere commodity, and prevent them from becoming more industrial workers alienated from their work (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 393–394).

Something similar also occurs in producing computer code, most of which has conventional features, structures and ideological influences that

most programmers take for granted, and/or regard as natural and universal. And as in producing music, there are good economic reasons for sustaining most of these conventional features and influences. But without ever challenging these features in some way to produce awareness of the socio-economic assumptions they are based on, artists, may never know code and software's full capacity to help or hinder the pursuit of one's creativity.

CODING PRACTICES AND MUSIC TECHNOLOGY

We therefore propose an alternative method for developing music software. From the earliest music programs (which resembled code in their appearance and operation), such as MUSIC-N, to their modern descendants, such as Pure Data, Max(/MSP), and SuperCollider, to mainstream consumer systems, such as Pro Tools, music software has not only grown to become an increasingly market-driven, competitive, and proprietary enterprise, but has also played an increasingly significant role in shaping our musical practices, perceptions, and norms. This influential role is played by the linguistic nature of code and software as more formal, precise extensions of natural language (NL) and its underlying structure and ideology.

For example, both NL and Code are based on a finite set of symbols and grammatical rules from which an infinite set of sentences can be generated. The symbols that make up these propositions, also have assigned meanings or uses that reflect the ideology of the language. For code to be conceptually manageable to a programmer, its syntax and semantics must be conceptually mappable to that of his or her NL. Moreover, in generating many of his sentences, the programmer will express conditional relationships between aspects of his ideology that he has learned through his individual social and technical training in NL. Thus, a typical programmer cannot help but bring into a program his or her cultural assumptions, as well as those of the company for which he or she is developing the program. These personal and corporate variables control the creative dimensions not only of the program itself but also of its users. This does not mean that there is no room for creative variation. For instance, one programmer may conditionally associate concept A with concept B, while another may associate A with C. Because of differences in other logical connections in the programs, however, their operations may ultimately produce essentially the same results.

This operational possibility points to a fundamental difference between software code and NL—namely, their descriptive functions. Because NL is used to describe things and events in the external world, we characterize it as “referentially descriptive.” But because, coded language is used not only to describe what actions a computer will perform but also to perform those very actions within the computer, we characterize it as “reflexively descriptive.”² We have just described how two different reflexive descriptions (programs) can produce the same overall results, but such reflexivity can be found in other creative aspects of language as well.

Take, for example, the way Isidore Isou and the Lettrists used conventional and unconventional symbols and sounds to extend the concept of language and challenge its uses in conventional poetry, painting, cinema, and more. In cinema, for instance, Lettrists exploited sound synchronization technology to make the voice perform in its own right and serve as a source of critical comment. They did this by decoupling the soundtrack from the image and instilling it with incongruous poetry comprised of purely sonorous (non-linguistic) vocal utterances, which clearly disrupted the conventional representational “reality” of the cinematic medium. As Kaira M. Cabañas writes: “What Lettrist films ... undeniably share is their work on the voice in cinema as a discursive site that is neither neutral or natural” (2015: 15).

A somewhat similar observation about music was made by Adorno when he argued that harmonic and melodic relationships are not simply the natural or socially neutral materials that many may perceive them to be, but rather reflect the issues and norms of their social history. Thus, Adorno saw all composers of new music as arranging their materials according to “inherited musical structures” that reflect their historical social context (2006: 101). And just as Adorno professed the need to systematically rethink and promote avant-garde relations in musical materials to mobilize awareness of the deeply entrenched musical norms reinforced by the music industry, Lettrism professed the need to promote avant-garde relations among symbolic elements of communication to mitigate the monotonously self-same formal conventions projected by industry through cinema and other technologically reproduced art forms. What both these approaches strive to make clear is that the techniques and technologies behind most cultural activities are not simply objectively neutral, given materials or tools, but reflect deeply entrenched cultural ideologies, and, at the same time, possibilities for political transformation.

PROPOSING A SOLUTION

From Adorno's perspective, it was the manner in which certain composers produced their works—namely, by challenging and contradicting the entrenched assumptions of the medium in which they worked—that distinguished their works from mere subsumed commodities and them from mere alienated laborers (Paddison 1993: 54–55). From Feenberg's perspective as well, it is only by challenging or contradicting the subsuming effects of dominant technology on both the political and economic fronts that society will recognize those effects and challenge all kinds of dominant institutions to modify their technologies to meet broader societal needs (2022: 26), which include the realization of one's sensory powers through musical expression.

In today's music, such a goal seems to apply especially to the involvement of artists in the production of software. As noted above, music software has its established features, structures, and ideological influences that many users summarily accept as representing definitive musical standards. And, as with music, there are compelling economic reasons for maintaining most of these features and influences. The production of music software makes both explicit and implicit assumptions about users' abilities and interests. These skills and interests range from simply wanting to follow instructions to produce familiar sounding music to having sufficient knowledge and experience to explore the limits and possibilities of the software to produce new music. If coding is to be understood as more than just a demonstration of formal logic, it must be seen as part of a broader set of communication tools and social actions, including its connection to the conceptual framework of our NL and our understanding and production of music.

Developing music software consists of breaking down the dynamic activities of making music into so many discrete operations and structures that, for a generation of users, they become reified as the correct or best way to formally interpret the dynamic activities in question. And since most software precludes the acquisition of knowledge about how its operations and structures were decided upon and developed, let alone of what they even are, the carefree acceptance of the software they use only reinforces the reified status of its formal approach. But musical structures and operations can be, and have been, reified in alternative ways in different software systems—each of which may offer different possible ways of accomplishing (more or less easily) certain conventional musical tasks, but

none of which can claim to be a better or more accurate representation or reification of music itself. The concept of music evolves solely through the critical and creative imagination of human beings (unlike science, which is verified by independent phenomena). As a result, the structures and operations of music software are only interpretations of what a society or a programmer thinks they should be. And if one system—or aspect of a system—seems “best,” it is only because it is an interpretation that has become so ingrained in our cultural practices or software structures that we have difficulty thinking of possible alternatives.

That there are no human-independent musical facts, only interpretations, is made clear by the range of stylistic and structural variations found among different music software systems and their individual approaches. What is ultimately important is the relationship of these systems to their performance and the consequences of their actions—the role they play in the shared musical dialogue, where genres and approaches to music are in a constant state of self-definition that cannot be separated from their socio-economic context. This broader understanding is likely to reveal more possibilities for expanded expression in the interactions between people, software, and music. This, in turn, may open up new or alternative ways for individuals and collectives to think about for developing software for musical applications that impose less coercive authority on users to conform to commercial and cultural musical biases.

One practice that we see as a viable alternative music software practice is the implementation of a commons-based creative musical coding platform, where anyone can have access to any level of the code/software and can contribute their personal skills to the system (to the extent they wish), which can be accepted or rejected by any other member of the system for their particular purposes. This approach—which we have named *enProcess* (a portmanteau of “endless” + “process”)—is designed to offset, if not eliminate, the problems mentioned earlier of how the invisibility of complex and proprietary code hides its underlying assumptions and thus its hidden effects on the musical applications for which it is used.

By a “commons-based approach” we mean that a community of artists, musicians, and programmers can reinvent and represent itself as a body politic—a networked collective that is separated from proprietary forces in order to maintain a greater degree of autonomy from commercial or covertly top-down technology and its constraining influences on music making, so that its members can think, act, and express themselves more freely.

By making all software underlying the enProcess system available through an open source repository, there can be no agenda in the system that is invulnerable to scrutiny, and all the underlying code can be viewed by any party. The sharing, branching, and self-contained nature of the platform also eliminates any influence from capital concerns. Each user's change is recognized and logged, but that is as far as personal compensation goes. The system is decentralized to prevent any single ideological, commercial or creative agenda from taking control of the system for its own ends; all collective works are secure within a decentralized network. Finally, users can edit the content of the system at any level, from core coding modules, to compositions, to manipulating compositions in real-time performances.

The goal of this approach is to recontextualize music software practices both by changing the way people organize around coding production, and by allowing participating individuals to recode a system at any level and from any point in its development. Through the free and open sharing of musical and programming skills, knowledge, and resources, a fully realized community using the commons-based coding system we envision is one that could build up and instill a sense of musical autonomy and empowerment in individual members, thus opening up the elite world of music software programming and computer music to the masses. This project thus envisions a world that encourages and values the musical and artistic expression of all its members.

CONCLUSION

The premise of enProcess is that technological development and socio-cultural norms reciprocally influence each other, though not always in ways that are clearly desired for creative artistic practice and social interest. Specifically, we contend that the social and commercial norms that influence computer programming and software development are likely to be so heavily biased by unseen interests that their application to artistic practice imperceptibly limits creative freedom. Because of the complex, proprietary nature of most commercial code, it is difficult to analyze exactly what ideological assumptions it might convey to the user's practice, but by the nature of its human development, it will convey some. Therefore, to ensure greater transparency of the underlying assumptions embedded in code and its clearer application to musical practice, we propose a commons-based software system for collective musical creation by both artists and

programmers. We do not see enProcess as a panacea for all concerns surrounding artistic practices, but only as an experimental and practical method for exploring the capacity of a public group to modify pre-programmed coded scripts to eliminate or control their biases in clearer favor of alternative social goals.

NOTES

1. We use the term “geo-social ideology” generally to mean the system of beliefs, attitudes, norms and practices adopted by a social group based on their geographical environment and social history, and as reflected in their language, science, morals, laws, politics, art and institutions like the family, schools, churches, courts, and so on.
2. Like what Geoff Cox describes as code’s ability to reflexively investigate the conditions in which it has been written and operates (2012: 7).

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PART IV

Politics and Aesthetics of Invisibility



Invisible Environments: CAyC and Countercultural Cybernetics

Jye O'Sullivan

Abstract In 1971, the artistic collective Centro de Artes y Comunicación participated in the Argentine Biennial with the exhibition *Arte de Sistemas*. Luis Bénédict's *Laberinto Invisible*, a dematerialized labyrinth that required the interactor to navigate a complex series of invisible boundaries, formed part of the core of this exhibition. Expanding on his earlier *Laberinto de Hormigas* (1970), Bénédict created a distinct cybernetically informed political statement by treating the human as a variable element in a system of invisible control. Despite the international profile of this exhibition, however, CAyC and Bénédict have remained invisible in the art historical canon. This chapter explores CAyC's contribution to the global postmodern avant-garde through an engagement with cybernetics, makes explicit the difference between a counterculture within a neoliberal democracy and a military dictatorship, and demonstrates through CAyC how the use of a cybernetic mode of interpretation can illuminate otherwise obscured systems of communication and technocratic control through sound.

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The Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC) was founded in 1968 in Buenos Aires by Jorge Glusberg, among others. By 1973, it was a center for artistic production, exhibitions, and education, located at 452 Viamonte Street and home to the Grupo de los Trece, the artistic collective that acted as the “council of the direction of the CAyC” (Glusberg 1971: 3). Luis Fernando Benedit, an Argentine artist who explored the interactions between biological and mechanical systems in Buenos Aires in the 1960s and 1970s, contributed a wide array of diverse artworks to the center, much of which explored cybernetics as an exchange of information across ontological differences. This transdisciplinarity was reflected in the varied backgrounds and interests of the Board of Directors, ranging from engineering to epistemology (Glusberg 1969a: 3).

This research first outlines Benedit’s work *Laberinto Invisible*, describing how the public interacted with the work in ways that could be modeled through negative feedback loops. It then demonstrates how the work functioned politically as a symbolic critique. The cybernetic principles of *Laberinto Invisible* are explored as defined in previous CAyC exhibitions that merit a cybernetic analysis of their work. Finally, *Laberinto Invisible* is situated in relation to the center’s exhibition history. By considering cybernetics in an analysis of *Laberinto Invisible*, the way in which the artwork and the participants illuminate invisible constraints, networks, and boundaries demonstrates, to quote Pamela Lee, the “invisible hand of curation” as well as the hand of governance that is a common trope in cybernetic engagements (2011: 195).

While scholars such as María Fernández, Bruce Carke, and Ron Eglash have documented artistic engagements with cybernetics and systems theory in the 1960s and 1970s, and writers such as Michael Corris have presented interdisciplinary research on the incorporation of technology into conceptual art, the current discourse remains dominated by an Anglophone transatlantic exchange. This Northern/Western hegemonic history largely excludes artistic engagements with cybernetics outside of this framework. Global networks of artistic engagement with cybernetics in the visual arts, such as those formed by the CAyC, have been reduced to the inclusion of works in major Western exhibitions, rendering these networks invisible.

Even within discourses specific to Latin American art of the 1960s and 1970s, an exploration of both the CAyC and their use of cybernetics is lacking. Although Luis Camnitzer’s *Conceptualism in Latin American Art* (2007) provides an alternative genealogy for conceptual art that reframes art from Latin America in relation to Western artistic discourses,

it only offers a cursory examination of the role of the CAyC and neglects their involvement with cybernetics and systems thinking. This is perhaps most evident in the absence of CAyC's work in the 2016 exhibition "Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Despite a large number of works by artists who collaborated with the CAyC, key artists from the center are entirely missing.

Other scholars, such as Patrick Greaney and Mari Carmen Ramírez, have been instrumental in reconfiguring the historical networks in which artists from Latin America operated throughout the twentieth century, but they do not focus on the impact of cybernetics and systems theory on artistic discourses in Latin America and how they have been used politically (Greaney 2014: 649). Daniel R. Quiles is an exception to the apparent obfuscation of the CAyC. Not only has he regularly cited their work in his publications, but in 2011 he published an article entitled *Trial and Error: Luis Bedit's Laberinto Invisible* (2011). In this article, Quiles both connects Bedit's work to discourses of cybernetics and points to a potential critique of "contemporaneous events in his home country," but he does not fully contextualize the work within the history of the center itself (4). Since the beginning of this research, these themes have been taken up by scholars such as Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra in *The Future of Control* (2019) and Vanessa Badagliacca in *Life Inside a System* (2021).

This research accomplishes three goals: first, by detailing Bedit's artistic engagement with cybernetics, it shows how cybernetics was used by the CAyC to model otherwise invisible power structures. In this way, cybernetics allowed for a politicization of the artwork within the local context. Second, it provides a case study of how an understanding of cybernetics can be used to delineate the functioning of the artwork in a manner that other art historical visual analyses cannot. This illuminates otherwise invisible spatial and political dimensions of the work. Finally, it demonstrates a conceptual approach to the dematerialized artwork that, despite its focus on cybernetics and the intersections between art and technology, frames the "social" as the dominant problematic. This demonstrates how an invisible spatial control not only diminishes the role of the object in artistic practice, but also illuminates the invisible power structures inherent in the exhibition and the social context of the exhibition.

CENTRO DE ARTES Y COMUNICACIÓN
AND *EL LABERINTO INVISIBLE*

Once established in Buenos Aires, the CAyC held its first exhibition in 1969 at the Galería Bonino, entitled *Arte y Cibernetica*. This exhibition was a collaboration between the CAyC and the Computer Technique Group, Japan. It featured a large number of experimental computer-drawn images developed by modifying algorithms within basic software (Glusberg 1969a: 14–16). By 1971, however, while *Arte y Cibernetica* was being shown in London and San Francisco, the CAyC's mode of artistic production had shifted away from technophilic interactions with computers. Instead, it constituted a dematerialized contribution to conceptual art in Latin America, based on an engagement with cybernetics and systems thinking as a way of modeling non-artistic systemic functions, including society and its often invisible governance. As Quiles notes, Norbert Wiener's maxim of "communication and control" (1948)¹ shaped Glusberg's engagement with cybernetics and consequently the direction of the CAyC (2011: 2).

To demonstrate this, in 1971 Benedit designed and exhibited *Laberinto Invisible* as part of the larger *Arte de Sistemas* exhibition at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires. The work consisted of an electronic alarm, a 150-watt lamp, seven concave mirrors, steel stands, and a Mexican axolotl placed in the center of the mirrors. The concave mirrors reflected the light from the lamp in a spiral shape, triggering a light sensor attached to the electronic alarm. If the continuous light was interrupted, the system would destabilize and the alarm would sound until the light was restored. The participant's task was to reach the axolotl by following an "invisible" path (Centro de Arte y Comunicación 1971b: 2).

In the catalog for the first exhibition of *Arte y Cibernetica* (1969), Glusberg stated that the purpose of the center was to "promote the carrying out of projects and exhibitions, where art, technology and community interests are connected" (Glusberg 1969a: 1). *Laberinto Invisible* brings these facets together, using a technological system to create a work of art that was first exhibited in Buenos Aires. From a cybernetic point of view, one can observe two separate systems interacting with each other, whose interaction constitutes a subset of the macro system of the gallery and the art display in the control it exerts over how one can move through the space. On the one hand, we are presented with a static binary system, that of the artwork. It possesses a binary variable state that is triggered by a

causal relationship between the sensor and the alarm, the only systemic requirement to avoid the alarm buzzer is the continued reception of light by the attached sensor. On the other hand, we are presented with a system of infinite variety, the human participant.

In order to explain this interaction on the part of the participant, Bateson, in his “Cybernetic Explanation” would suggest that there is an applied restraint (1987: 407). The social conventions of the gallery space and the observance of a task—to reach the buzzer without triggering the alarm—restrain the random behavior of the participant. Following these constraints, the participant makes his way to the center of the labyrinth, but, deprived of visual information, he is forced to work on an interaction with the pre-existing system, a process of “trial and error” [ensayo y error] (Centro de Arte y Comunicación 1971a: 2). When the alarm is triggered, the most adaptable system (the one with the highest required variety) changes its behavior. The participant becomes aware of a spatial limitation, changes his internal visualization of the other system, and replans his route to the center. This process of negative feedback continues until the participant reaches the center and the artwork can maintain a stable state.

While this way of explaining *Laberinto Invisible* may seem like an unnecessary complication of the work, a cybernetic deconstruction of its functioning reveals the key consideration behind the piece. In creating *Laberinto Invisible*, Benedit forces the participant to actively consider invisible communication and control on both a spatial and political level. Echoing Wiener’s maxim and Bateson’s cybernetic models, Benedit exemplifies Glusberg’s 1970 description of his art: “Benedit aims at a balance between the concrete observation of a community event and a personal creation: his design is an aesthetic-sociological form. Aesthetic because it includes concepts, sensations and feelings; sociological because it proposes a perspective of knowledge, directly connected with reality” (Centro de Arte y Comunicación 1970: 6).

Benedit used “isomorphic relations” between the control of space and the sensory input between the individual and the gallery systems to make the “systems of relations” visible in “concrete situations” (Centro de Arte y Comunicación 1970: 6). Glusberg noted that Benedit’s models, such as *Laberinto Invisible*, “although shown as an artistic event, totally exceed the purely descriptive or documentary study,” in this case with regard to both the socio-political repression in Buenos Aires in the early 1970s and the spatial control inherent in the gallery model of artistic exhibition.

Cybernetics helps us to understand how *Laberinto Invisible* forms a model of the control of space and individuals in galleries and in society at large. The model, as an interactive experience, resists the “globalism” imagery that Lee critiques as being a period style for troubled times” (Lee 2011: 198). Rather than using the “form of large-scale photographs of a documentary nature” Benedit constructed an isomorphic and interactive model in which an apparently free space featured invisible control (201).

CYBERNETICS, A RELATIVE DEFINITION

From a cybernetic point of view, a word in a sentence, or a letter within the word, or the anatomy of some part within an organism, or the role of a species in an ecosystem, or the behavior of a member within a family – these are all to be (negatively) explained by an analysis of restraints

—Gregory Bateson

This quote from Bateson’s “Cybernetic Explanation” (1987: 406), originally published in 1967, two years before the inaugural exhibition of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación, reveals two critical points about his understanding of cybernetics as both a discipline and a methodology. First, it outlines the epistemological process of cybernetics; the negative explanation of a current systemic state through an examination of the restraining factors of the system in question. The cybernetician, according to Bateson, would argue that if there were no restraints, all variables would have equal probability of occurrence, and since probability is never truly homogeneously distributed across potentials, certain potential states must be restrained in some way. For Bateson, this process ought to be used in conjunction with “mapping”—the presentation of information in an alternate format to facilitate an understanding; for example, using Euclidean geometry to solve an equation (406).

Second, Bateson reveals the characteristically macroscopic application of cybernetic thinking. Using examples ranging from a letter within a word (the restraints being the structure of the language in which the word is written) to the functioning of an ecosystem whose restraints are incalculably large, Bateson demonstrates the infinitely microscopic and macroscopic goals of a cybernetic method of analysis; a way of thinking also adopted by Glusberg in his text *Art and Cybernetic*: “(...) one of the most important characteristics of cybernetics is its universality” (Glusberg 1971: 3).

The totality sought by both Bateson and Glusberg within the framework of cybernetics is indicative not only of cybernetics, but of a broader cultural shift throughout the twentieth century to address layered open systems by “shifting from substance to relation, to communication, to time”—a paradigmatic shift evident not only in the sciences, but also in the themes of conceptual art, as explicitly described by Peter Brüger (Stengers and Prigogine 2017: 48). The CAyC’s focus on the socio-cultural implications of understanding systems through cybernetics follows this shift. While its inaugural exhibition proposed a focus on the “social environment,” the works produced were highly technophilic (Glusberg 1969a: 1). By 1970, the center was focusing instead on models of society through cybernetics and the information theory of Abraham Moles, and by 1971 and the exhibition of *Laberinto Invisible*, they were modeling interactive systems of relations (1971).

For Glusberg, art constituted what Camnitzer observes and what Peter Brüger explains as “a new praxis for life from a basis in art” (Camnitzer 2007: 61). Furthermore, Camnitzer observes the fusion of political activism and art in the conceptual art production of the sixties and seventies in Argentina as constituting a total art that expanded beyond the boundaries of aesthetics. While more discussed Latin American works such as Cildo Meireles’ *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* interact with the systemic features of society by using pre-existing systems such as the circulation of currency, Benedit models socio-political “restraints” on multiple scales in an immersive environment.

This point of intersection between art, systems of governance, and the gallery exhibition model reflects another fundamental shift in Glusberg’s approach to cybernetics, from the linear causality of *Arte y Cibernetica*, to the interactivity demonstrated in *Laberinto Invisible*. The concept of interactivity and self-reflexivity in the context of conceptual art was emphasized by Robert Barry in the 1970 MoMA exhibition “Information” (which featured numerous Argentine conceptual artists), where he stated, “knowing of it [art] changes it” (1970: 18). Reflecting the rise of constructivist philosophy at the time, this positions the viewer within an extended system that forbids the positivist role of the observer as separate from the phenomenon and without an active influence on it.

Despite the classical role of the artist as the sole creator and observer of a reality reflected in his work, Glusberg reframes the artist as being fundamentally embedded and unable to escape the reality and society he observes, comments on, and transforms (1970: 5). In this sense, for

Benedit, the process of artistic creation, as well as the position of the artist, shifted in a way that reflected the developments of cybernetic thinking in the late sixties. For Benedit, artistic engagements with cybernetics involve the observer and are not technophilic, but rather offer a way of critiquing a socio-political system through interactive models that offer the participant an opportunity for self-reflection via participation.

Although Quiles asserts that “Benedit’s work was designed for the international arena, in an increasingly globalized art world in which local context was deemphasized” (2011: 5), I argue that this is a half-truth. If *Laberinto Invisible* contributes to what Geraldo Mosquera would call a Western metaculture of art that devaluates local context, it does so only insofar as the methods of oppressive governance and the model of gallery exhibition have become globally hegemonic (2010: 35–37). Quiles acknowledges the work’s adaptability to different contexts, yet the work, first exhibited in Buenos Aires on Glusberg’s theoretical foundations, arguably addresses both local and international contexts as a result of the Western hegemonic models of invisible control becoming global.

Dorothea von Hantelmann highlights this Western hegemony in *The Rise of the Exhibition and the Exhibition as Art*, arguing that the exhibition format itself is the culmination of Western values, and its (successful) export establishes a Western hegemony; an invisible control over socio-cultural values emphasized in the context of the Cold War (2011: 179). Benedit, makes visible the spatial control of the gallery space, the sensory tools used to establish mental geographies (and their limits), and the process of internalizing values. In this sense, an analysis should resist the dichotomy between local and international that is often imposed on artists outside of a Western canon, and argue that the adaptability of *Laberinto Invisible* stems from the totality of the global and invisible systems it critiques, which are no less prevalent in its local context. The CAyC exhibition history illustrates this reading.

For example, in the 1971 exhibition *Arte de Sistemas I*, the CAyC critiqued the Argentine political system by modeling its repressive capabilities through a participatory environment. This included the distribution of a false news story by Luis Pazos, Hector J. Puppo, and Jorge de Luján Gutiérrez that claimed Glusberg’s kidnapping through local media (141). Echoing Brüger’s call for a return of art to the praxis of life, CAyC continued the movement of *Arte de los Medios* by making the medium “the real” and thus inherently political (2011: 54).

Other exhibitions, such as CAyC al Aire Libre (1972), provided further immersive experiences beyond the gallery space in order to engage “a public not used to gallery spaces,” an intention made explicit in a 1970 press release (1970: 1). The outstanding work for this exhibition was Víctor Grippo and Jorge Gamarra’s *Construcción de un Horno Popular para Hacer Pan*, which encouraged the public to help bake and eat bread from a traditional oven (1971: 11).

Laberinto Invisible, however, was a political critique that remained within the gallery rubric. The key difference between it and the aforementioned works was the result of the interaction. While CAyC al Aire Libre as an exhibition involved audience participation, the participant could not change the fundamental structure of the exhibition or the works included. In *Laberinto Invisible*, on the other hand, the artwork itself relied on interactions to reveal its invisibility; without a human relationship the work would remain invisible.

While Arte de Sistemas and CAyC al Aire Libre adhere more closely to the types of participatory works that have been more readily disseminated in Western discourses on Argentine political art, *Laberinto Invisible* incorporates an understanding of cybernetics into its structure, going beyond the aesthetic documentation of government repression to establish a model of the function of repression; an expanded, interactive, political critique that makes visible an invisible process. As Hantelmann demonstrates, the process of “museification” is best addressed through a transformative critique of its process, not through an illusion of avoidance. *Laberinto Invisible* suggests that state oppression, too, is sometimes best tackled by illuminating its invisible power structures rather than documenting its unfolding (2011: 183).

CONCLUSION

Camnitzer is highly critical of the CAyC approach, seeing their focus on macro-systems as ignoring the need to focus on the local political context (2007: 248). Contrasting their work with that of Tucumán Arde, Camnitzer ignores their use of cybernetics and views their methods of publication as futile attempts at international recognition rather than an artistic praxis that helped the demographic in which they operated (248). By reengaging with the work of artists such as Benedi, we can open up the Anglophone discourse to an art history in which cybernetics was

explicitly used as a political tool—and simultaneously expand histories of alternative trajectories of cybernetics and conceptual art in Latin America.

The use of an art historical analysis informed by cybernetics has provided significant insights not only into the functioning of *Laberinto Invisible*, but also into the socio-cultural significance generated by these variable systems. While numerous attempts have been made to merge information theory and cybernetics with aesthetics and art, such as by Edward Shanken and Abraham Moles, what I propose here is not a quantification of aesthetics or artistic production/reception, but the potential benefits of understanding the temporal and interactive functionality of artworks through cybernetics.

Finally, building on Quiles, Bénédit's *Laberinto Invisible* and Glusberg's theory make clear that the task of mapping power structures involves the process of making visible what is otherwise invisible through isomorphic models. While on the one hand, this may be the "local context," on the other hand it is a complex and invisible web of Western hegemonic systems of relations, including the exhibition model itself, that have historically rendered the networks of the CAyC invisible. Not only did *Laberinto Invisible* require a public in order to make itself visible, but it also challenged the spatial and cultural control of people in public environments. Particularly in a world now dominated by invisible global structures, such as the cloud, that rely on unseen localities, such as data centers, a translocal approach to both art historical and broader problematics has never been more necessary. Bénédit's work seems more relevant now than ever, revealing both the porous ontological boundary between humans and invisible technological systems, and how these systems enact control over the human subject.

NOTE

1. Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* was published in 1948. While the publication of the book brought the term cybernetics into the mainstream, the subtitle of the book was critical for the reconceptualization of systems that were inclusive of both biotic and abiotic components. Luis Fernando Bénédit's work, among others, is indicative of this shift in thinking toward treating complex biotic and abiotic interactions as a singular system with a common language.

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Diário da República: Heavy Metal as a Territory of Ideological Emancipation

Heitor Alvelos and Anselmo Canha

Abstract This chapter presents the conceptual and ideological premises supporting “Diário da República” [DR], a Heavy Metal band that has been deliberately operating under the radar since early 2016. The band’s geometry corresponds to the traditional quartet: guitar, bass, drums, and voice. The rather conventional structure is meant to act as a constant that enables the project to develop in otherwise exploratory veins, based on a threefold purpose: Controlled Public and Online Visibility; Risk Maximization; Poetics in Legislation.

CONTROLLED PUBLIC AND ONLINE VISIBILITY

DR operates on the assumption that the current syndrome of digital ubiquity and public overexposure is ambivalent in its psychosocial dangers and benefits. This assumption has been the concern of various contemporary

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agents, including certain social media developers themselves. Andrew Keen argues:

[...] social information is becoming the *vital principle* of the global knowledge economy. And it is this contemporary revolution in the generation of personal data that explains the vertiginous valuation of today's social media companies. (...) today's digital economy is increasingly characterized by conflict over its vital principle – personal information. (...) Which explains why, as the [Wall Street Journal] confirms, “one of the fastest-growing business on the internet is the business of spying on Internet users.” (Keen 2012: 76–77)

If, on the one hand, Keen is directly referring to issues pertaining to online surveillance and data collection, particularly in relation to individuals, we argue that similar premises may currently be at work in the context of popular culture production.

A pervasive expectation in contemporary popular music is the grooming process within highly formulaic media productions (e.g., Pop Idol, The X Factor), whose tacitly consensual definition of success translates into overwhelming media exposure and immediate financial return; on the other hand, significant segments of popular music that do not choose the above coaching path and follow instead their own contexts of development and dissemination, often end up operating toward similar ambitions. The allure of pop stardom and “viral” financial return seems to cut across an entire cultural milieu, from mass media to social media, from bubblegum pop to alternative genres.

DR is therefore a context for the intuitive testing of a possible negation of the above, even if simply on an exploratory or metaphorical level. By sharing its name with the Portuguese state gazette, DR thus ensures a radical reduction of its own “googlization” factor. Furthermore, the project has no website, no social media profile, and no online archive; all performances are held in private, and no public performance is planned or scheduled. Sound recordings resulting from DR performances are scarcely shared, as snippets buried in online and offline contexts that are highly unlikely to generate momentum.

The above exercises in heavily controlled visibility are far from being a gimmick or a purely conceptual statement: they are ideological in that they seek to empirically prove the remaining (albeit shrinking) viability of the creative act emancipated from hyper-scrutiny (and consequently from a self-defeating perpetuation of formula)—as content is now most often

fundamentally dictated by its own mediation. Hakim Bey (1994) was particularly instrumental in proclaiming the possibility of refuge, signaling the phenomenon even before the exponential growth of over-exposure in online environments:

[...] we intend to practice Immediatism in secret, in order to avoid any contamination of mediation. Publicly we'll continue our work in publishing, radio, printing, music, etc., but privately we will create something else, something to be shared freely but never consumed passively, something which can be discussed openly but never understood by the agents of alienation, something with no commercial potential yet valuable beyond price, something occult yet woven completely into the fabric of everyday lives. (Bey 1994: 10)

RISK MAXIMIZATION

Neoliberal ideology has developed increasingly complex systems for predicting and minimizing losses; these systems are often conceived and communicated in chart form, as quantifiable parameters of risk assessment, which tend to become more and more distant from tangible scenarios, until they actually precede reality, defining it as a space of perpetual replication of predefined occurrences and procedures. As a consequence, are we witnessing a catastrophic stagnation in the name of safety?

DR argues that the above paradigm has bled into popular music, with the paradoxical effect of significantly reducing the potential for aesthetic rupture. As an antidote, DR operates without rehearsal, prior composition, or even a single attempt at replication: each “song” is performed only once, in an entirely improvised and unpredictable manner, and is never discussed or evaluated after its performance. Additionally, the aesthetics and semantics of catharsis, characteristic of Heavy Metal, are believed to possess antidotal properties to the current neurosis of performance that is choreographed according to expectations.

A reference point for further understanding of the above may best be drawn from shamanistic cultures and learnings, diametrically opposed to the currently pervasive belief that sheer objectivity and micromanagement are desirable or even possible. DR consciously adopts a shamanistic approach in the employment of instinct, physical outpouring, and a focus on channeling the ectoplasmic nature of sound rather than the expected sequence of composition, rehearsal, and execution.

POETICS IN LEGISLATION

As the lexicon of jurisdiction becomes ever more cryptic and foreboding, an ever-growing spiral of self-reference, DR feels the duty to denounce the oppressive nature of a system that seems keen on depriving citizens of the simple possibility to understand the very laws that regulate them. DR attempts this denunciation by recontextualizing legal lingo as Dadaist poetry. The sole source of the lyrics is the wealth of Portuguese laws as officially published by the Portuguese Government, and these remain untouched during the performance; however, a semantic alchemy is performed through acoustic intensity, expressive vocals, and the addition of rebellious aesthetics. This approach is once again diametrically opposed to the natural habitat of legal content: courtrooms, assemblies, governing bodies, lawyers' offices—and through this recontextualization, it again attempts epiphany.

A possible reference for further clarification of this parameter may be Franco Berardi's "The Uprising: on Poetry and Finance" (2012). Below we quote pages 139–140 of the aforementioned volume, while replacing the original terms pertaining to Finance with those pertaining to Law. We find that the pertinence of the essay remains untouched in this exercise:

Symbolism opened a new space for poetic praxis, starting from the emancipation of the word from its referential task.

The emancipation of law – the legal sign – from the production of human understanding follows the same semiotic procedure, from referential to nonreferential signification.

But the analogy between law and language should not mislead us: although law and language have something in common, their destinies do not coincide, as language exceeds bureaucratic exchange. Poetry is the language of nonexchangeability, the return to infinite hermeneutics, and the return of the sensuous body of language. I'm talking about poetry here as an excess of language, a hidden resource which enables us to shift from one paradigm to another. (Berardi 2012: 139–140; adapted by the researchers)

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27 OCTOBER 2017

The above project was presented as a hybrid paper/performance at the Invisible Republic Conference, held in October 2017 at the School of Humanities of the University of Lisbon. The affinity between the project

and the context of a conference was strengthened through the subscribed Conference research stream “*Politics and Aesthetics of Invisibility*.” Equally worthy of note is the fact that DR was thus publicly premiered in a scientific setting, rather than a musical or cultural one.

During the conference, a summary of the content discussed above was first presented by the authors as a formal communication, interspersed with quotes from the above authors and short samples of sound recordings from DR sessions. The conference presentation then began to gradually mutate into a cathartic performance, by slowly shifting a formal reading of Portuguese legislation into its dramatic declamation. At this point, random laws were distributed to the audience in paper form, as the audience was invited to create a spontaneous cacophony of legislative content. All present accepted the challenge, thus completing the full transformation of the formal conference presentation into an Immediatist event (Bey). The mayhem was loud, intense and brief, as the conference program dictated the time constraints, and adjacent rooms were affected by the loud noise bleeding through—and neighbors complained accordingly.

The core motivation for this hybrid mode of presentation was to test the potential resonance of the said viability of the creative act emancipated from hyper-scrutiny. We believed that the mode of presentation, and most importantly, the immediate and unconditional engagement of the audience, seemed to confirm the permanence of an ontological disposition for creative spontaneity; this, despite the current pressures for conformity and self-assimilation to pre-packaged parameters of virtuosity.

And by further rejecting an audiovisual mediation of the conference session, the authors, both members of DR, further intend to ensure the project’s immunity from potentially corruptive externalization. Between meta-discourse and empirical cognition, the mindful individual will connect the dots.

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Spillane, by John Zorn: Aural Cinema and the Lettrist Legacy

Anabela Duarte

Abstract John Zorn’s interest in Mickey Spillane, the master of hard-boiled novels, or what might be called postpulp, is fascinating and brings to the fore lesser-known issues in literature, music, and experimental cinema. Based on the 1987 release of *Spillane* and the 1999 CD edition of *Godard/Spillane*, this work aims to explore the notion of “aural cinema” as introduced by the composer in the liner notes to *G/S*, and the influence of Lettrism, an avant-garde artistic movement of the 1940s, on the building and development of such a concept. In our view, aural cinema opens up the field of possibilities for experimental film and a cinema without images by placing the emphasis on aural perception and speech rather than on the filmed image. However, as much as Godard and others have contributed to this new cinema of the ear, there is an overwhelming neglect of the true perpetrators of this paradigm shift: the Lettrists and the Lettrist legacy.

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SCREAMING OUT!

Out of Zorn's extensive list of favorite writers, all of them of a more experimental or controversial nature, such as the Marquis de Sade, Lawrence Sterne, William Burroughs, and others, the multifaceted musician chose the hardboiled author Mickey Spillane for his second approach to cinema. It wasn't a random choice, but the natural result of his interest in the aesthetics of violence and film noir/detective fiction. At first sight, the aesthetics of violence can be understood as an idealization of violence, and indeed Zorn's work has been more than often criticized as noisy, violently unmusical, transgressive, and even repulsive in regard to some of his record covers depicting sadomasochistic (S/M) imagery—*Torture Garden* (1990), for example, was accused of aestheticizing torture. But we should not confuse negative criticism with negative aesthetics. An aesthetic experience in art may be positive or negative depending on how it touches our sensory awareness/taste/cultural background as beautiful or ugly, but it is not neutral. In this case, the aesthetics of violence is a manifestation of such negativity, but one that consists of an artistic engagement with violence for the sake of a broader inquiry into “discursive, cultural, and societal boundaries” (Brackett 2008: 31).

Violence, according to Zorn, emerges from “an intense concentration of life” (Rovere and Chiti 1998: 34), where there are bad and good things as well. It's something very powerful that challenges average narratives, *telos*, progress and development, proposing instead to shake people's values and beliefs, alternative patterns of thinking and a coming to grips with oneself in extreme situations. It is a play of boundaries, of limits that ceaselessly cross and recross, a field of tensions that operate between and beyond dualities. This is different from a certain arbitrariness of violence that is taken for granted and therefore is neglected, devalued or turned invisible by various powers and/or institutions, as Hannah Arendt reports in *On Violence* (1970). Zorn's violence is real, subversive, and screams out against invisibility or inaudibility. So it's not hard to see the connection between Zorn and Spillane's world. In fact, in the liner notes to G/S (1999), Zorn supports the view that it was a natural choice “because of the extreme nature of his [Spillane's] vision” (n.p.), in which the dramatic elements immediately found a counterpart in his own musical world: a multiplicity of genres, jazz, rock, R&B, soundtracks, and techniques. He also emphasizes the “violent quality” of his writing, which allowed him to use noise as an extra (musical) dramatic device. This is interesting because

in many ways Spillane's narrative and style are considered a sort of noise or trash literature, in the more intellectual *milieu* of detective fiction and hardboiled novels. Walter Mosley in "Poisonville" (Mosley 2009: 598) sublimely describes such a language of noise:

Hardboiled language wasn't made up by an intellectual elite or discovered by university professors who subsequently popularized it. This tongue was torn from the mouths of the masses who came out of the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. It festered in speakeasies and cried out in the Black man's jazz and, most especially, his blues. This language cuts to the bone because it is the idiom of survival, of that moment when it's all or nothing. (599)

The idiom of survival is violent and unfolds disruptions and disturbances, just like the avant-gardes did when challenging linear progression to undermine the art world. It is a language of excess and loudness that is meant to give voice to the people and less visible strands of society and music. Thus, the extra-musicality of Zorn and the extra-literariness of Spillane is the condition that places both authors in the same audio and language frequency through the works of noise. But also, through the works of multiple musical genres, not only Blues, that reflect the literary noisiness of Spillane's time and world. Indeed, Kevin McNeilly argues that Zorn's music comes from "tensions between noises" (1995: 10) that is, "genre becomes noise itself," rendering the conventional distinction between music and noise arbitrary. Likewise, if Chandler and Hammet, the first hardboiled writers, were the "pulp avant-gardists" (Pennywark 2017: 23) fighting for a place between mass and high literary culture, Spillane and other postwar writers went a step further, dissolving the boundaries between literature and popular fiction, high and low culture. Whereas classical detective fiction relied on deductive cool reasoning (Duarte 2006), Spillane's detective Mike Hammer, for example, is extremely violent and physical, privileging feeling and sensation over a rationale, he is vile and sexual, an anti-organization man, moving away from "epistemological concerns and toward ontological uncertainty" (Pennywark 2017: 49) and ultimately toward postmodern chaos. Unlike Zorn, who finds spaces of resistance and alterity in his music, running over conservative concepts and praxis, Spillane's characters remain in the dark, trying to fight against the consumerism and media simulacrums of post-modern Cold War America. His noisiness, however, is still provocative and

amusical, because it goes against what is acceptable and predictable in the public and literary sphere.

GAMES AND MUSICAL NARRATIVE

John Zorn also shares a need for authenticity with Spillane's protagonists, which is why he embraces alternative projects and a free creative method. He combines improvisation with complex structural writing, numerous musical genres, unexpected techniques, and challenging approaches with games and file-card compositions. This has led him to a non-hierarchical vision of genres, but also to a non-hierarchical pursuit of objects of study and research. Although he has a background in Jazz, musical and cultural nomadism seems more appropriate to describe his preferences:

Jazz is part but not all of what I am. I think it is necessary not to stay in, to feel oneself part of, a single tradition in order to be able to see where you are and where you want to go. (...) So Jazz music is one of the things I have learned, like classical music or rock and on the same level as what I've read or the films I've seen: all these things make me what I am and the music I create. (Rovere and Chiti 1998:19)

There are no limits for Zorn. His piece *Cobra* (1986), for example, a game piece for improvisers, is inspired by a military (simulation) war game and its rules, subtitled "Patton's 1944 Summer Offensive in France" (Brackett 2010: 44). This move toward games or game structures and other alternative musical strategies, which are also part of the above-mentioned extra-musicality of the author, have no score and were planned as an event, a play of personalities with different vocabularies, ultimately reacting to a psychodrama. They were meant to be part of an oral/aural tradition, not to be recorded and fixed in a single object. Once again, it is about violence, the violence of the moment of each performance, which, in Zorn's view, amounts to "scream therapy, or primal therapy" (2008: 56). Here, art imitates life, its possibilities for liberation, and noise is the medium of this freedom, its socio-political mapping of reality and ontological quest.

Similarly, quotation, brevity, and the rapidity of the genre changes give the listener no rest, because they avoid a definite direction, a reference like in Spillane, as we'll see. In fact, the fabric of the game pieces was the result of Zorn's dissatisfaction with contemporary music and free improvisation,

which somehow ended in empty formalism and convention. By making up his own rules, he discovered a new field of experimentation that triggered his appetite for the new and for a heterogeneous and subversive imagination. His first works, with *The Theatre of Musical Optics*, a series of performances with found objects, through the mid-seventies (1975), illustrate this artistic restlessness as well as his lifetime concern with the relationship between image and music. Influenced by artistic movements such as Fluxus, Mauricio Kagel's concept of music theatre, and Richard Foreman's performances, he began to work with objects and visual images that produced sounds or "visual melodies" (Rovere and Chiti 1998: 97).

In *Fidel* (1979), one of the more successful pieces of the *Theatre*, he used a process of subtraction to create music without time, considering that each object has its own time and physicality, further providing clues to a broader inquiry on the materiality of sound. In other works, he explored the existence of music without sound, considering that an action (with or without sound) is a musical event. In such a redefinition of music, the anechoic chamber of John Cage seems like a joke, as does the famous piece 4:33. The former underlines the impossibility of silence, a form of music without sound, the latter the sound of a particular space in a particular time. In fact, according to Zorn, Cage stresses the importance of time in music by saying, "if you're going to take everything away from music, the most important element, the thing that will be left for it to still be music, will be time" (Rovere and Chiti 1998: 102). But why time, asks Zorn, since for him time is only a musical element, like rhythm or melody, not music itself. Ultimately, what is implicit in these performances of sets of objects or musical sculptures is a critique of sound and a critique of the lack of individuality in our postmodern world, just as the detective, the gumshoe, is a figure of resistance to consumerism and lack of agency in Spillane.

Similar processes of subtraction, addition, and juxtaposition occur in the construction of the musical narrative. The influence of the visual arts and film techniques, notably film montage, is symptomatic here, and it pays off in both of Zorn's cinematic musical works, *Godard* and *Spillane*. *Godard* was recorded and mixed in 1985 (and released for the first time in vinyl, in 1986—*Godard, Ça Vous Chante?*) and *Spillane* in 1986. Later, in 1999, a CD edition, by Tzadik, included both works in a single recording. Each composition is dedicated to its authors and their *oeuvre*, and was produced in studio. Unlike the game pieces *tout court*, which allow for a

more free and improvisational approach, these were conceptualized as individual file-card pieces that refer to musical or extra-musical information:

For this piece, each card relates to some aspect of Spillane's work, his world, his characters, his ideology. "Sometimes I wrote out only sounds: Opening scream. Route 66 intro starting with a high hat, then piano, strings, harp." Other times I thought of a scene like Year of the Dragon, and I wrote: "Scene of the crime #1 – high harp harmonics, basses and trombone drone, guitar sonorities, sounds of water dripping and narration on top." (Zorn 2002: 3)

Moreover, the musical narrative depends in form and content on the order of the file cards. This order follows a structure that is a montage of different and contrasting musical segments and ideas, blocks of sound that collide or come from very distinct sources or genres, giving the impression of arbitrary sequencing or extreme fragmentation. In this sense, it evokes the naked or dirty city of postmodern conspiratorial days, "wrapped up in day-to-day business, politics, and violence" (Pennywark 2017: 52), the very underworld of Spillane. The notion of speed and the concept of time are also non-linear, accelerated, schizophrenic, a mirror of the times dominated by radio, newspapers, and television. Speaking of speed, Zorn emphasizes his interest in the city part of Japanese culture: "...the fast, polyglot, transistorized, computerized, you know, engulfing all different kinds of information from all different countries, and mixing them up and creating a new blend" (Rovere and Chiti 1998: 38).

However, he also advocates that music (and covers) have to tell a story, suggesting that behind all the discontinuity of musical elements, there is a linear narrative: *Spillane* opens up with a scream, the scene of the crime, the detective takes the case and follows the leads throughout the city's bars and nightclubs, he chases the criminals, women and men alike: "The gun bucked back like she did. She didn't have room for any pockets. There was a party of bullets going on inside her shirt." There are repeated gunshots, more screams, barking dogs, and police sirens amid a panoply of musical genres and interludes: "the noise was so loud I didn't know if the bullet hit me or not." He solves the crime, but can he do right in a world gone wrong? The narrative ends, but the rain keeps falling: "Stupid idiots. I hate the rain. I hate people like that. They don't know how wet the rain can get."

FROM VISUAL MUSIC TO AURAL CINEMA

The musical narrative is thus designed to be linear, but at the same time it is built with disjointed blocks of sound that are compared to shots in film. It exhibits an “episodic collage form,” a musical organization “in which a disjunct piece divides through perceptible means into structures consisting of groups of segments or groups of units of roughly similar length” (Kolek 2013: 107–08). This musical practice, a rather unconventional way of processing narrative, is inspired by the visual narrative of cartoon music of the 40s, object music or visual music of earlier experiences such as *The Theatre of Musical Optics*, and films. In fact, Zorn states that he “got involved in music because of film” and that “there’s a lot of film elements in my music” (Windleburn 2019: 142).

In the file-card compositions of the eighties, the images of Spillane’s world combine with music through intertextual associations (his life, work, aesthetics), to create a narrative that doesn’t work by the tenets of variation, development, or hierarchical structure, but by the ideas of presentation and replacement that are typical of the visual arts at large and film/musical montage in particular. Sergei Eisenstein’s view that “montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots,” wherein “each sequential element is perceived not next to the other, but on top of the other,” does resonate with Zorn’s treatment of music: the sound blocks unfold by juxtaposition and not sequentially, they replace one another, dissolving musical (and medium) boundaries, and colliding with one another in order to warrant new textures and unexpected effects. Such early works are not abstract like previous game pieces, but refer to a dramatic subject that ties the disparate segments together, giving them a sense of unity rather than development: “not a set of pitches or a set of keys that modulate from one to the next. Instead, a group of images, ideas, all drawn from one source. Director Jean-Luc Godard was my first subject. Mickey Spillane is the next” (Zorn 2002: 3).

These file-card compositions are commonly known as Zorn’s visual music, or more precisely as “cinematic music” or “aural cinema”—for the author and his criticism, the three terms seem to be interchangeable. For example, in “Musica, Cinema, Letteratura e altro” (Music, Cinema, Literature and other) (Rovere and Chiti 1998: 33) Franco Mingano draws a parallel between Spillane’s soundtrack and the possibility of an “aural history” of hardboiled fiction (40), suggesting that sound shapes the audience’s perception or visual imaginary. Zorn himself says that music is not

just some notes “on a page or sounds in the air,” it has to create an image in one’s mind (59); and in the liner notes of *Godard/Spillane* he stresses this correspondence by calling it “aural cinema,” as we can see: “Even after fifteen years these pieces of aural cinema excite me, and bring back vivid images of the theater of their creation.” In the same line of thought, the mentor of the 2017’s project “In search of aural cinema,” Frederik Leroux-Roels, also emphasizes that “the term aural cinema [in G/S] was a reference to the better-known concept of visual music,” a term coined by the painter and art critic Roger Fry, in 1912. His aim is to apply film techniques to music and to “invoke a cinematographic world merely by sound,” i.e. an invisible cinema or an imaginistic one in which the images are forged in the mind. However, judging by his output, namely his performances, he seems to be merely replicating Zorn’s cinematic musical methods, albeit with a different subject/scenario—he does not apply the concept of “aural cinema” in a systematic and extended way to excavate new ground. He also emphasizes the existence of numerous publications and information on the field of visual music, but nothing equally prolific and relevant on the subject of aural cinema. Why is this so? Indeed, the reasons seem more complex than they might at first appear.

AURAL CINEMA AND THE LETTRIST LEGACY

Zorn acknowledges the influence of Fluxus, Ezra Pound’s Vorticism, Mauricio Kagel’s concept of music theatre and Richard Foreman’s theatre techniques and methods in his *Theatre of Musical Optics* and file-card compositions. They helped him to understand that music is not only related to sound, but can be expressed in other media and other media can be expressed in music/sound. The latter situation is obviously related to the *Theatre* mentioned above, where the concept of “visual music” came alive in his work, but the other, which gave rise to the notion of “aural cinema,” albeit dealing with images and sound as well, already points to a differential relationship. It is not only concerned with translating music into visual events (cinematic/visual music), but opens up a new direction in cinema where aural perception comes to be the bedrock for the new methods, forms and structures of experimental film; a new paradigm shift that is the domain of Lettrist cinema, from which Godard, the director, drew much of his inspiration and “original” methods and techniques; the same techniques that Zorn praises as having “a deep influence on my own way of making music” (1999).

It's no coincidence that Maurice Lemaître, one of the most prolific figures of Lettrism, accused Godard of plagiarism and dedicated him a few invective pages in "Les Nouvelles Escroqueries de Jean-Luc Godard" (1989) (The New Scams of Jean-Luc Godard). Others followed suit. According to Andrew V. Uroskiw, Lettrist's works, especially Isou's film *Traité de Bave et d'Éternité* (1950–51) (On Venom and Eternity) and Lemaître's *Le film est déjà commencé?* (1951) (Has the Film Already Started?) were not exactly "films" but a new form of art they entitled *un cinema ailleurs* (a cinema elsewhere):

Through the introduction of multiply disjunctive textual dimensions, they intended to reverse both the privileging of the image and the guise of narrative transparency within the integrated synthesis of commercial cinema. It was an idea whose provocative initial elaboration took place at the very site of art cinema's postwar emergence: the 1951 Film Festival in Cannes. (Uroskie 2011: 23)

In that same year, Isou asserted: "I'm certain that *Traité de Bave et D'éternité* will change cinema drastically and push it toward unexpected paths. It requires only that juries lend it an *attentive ear*" (Cabañas 2014: 1). And Daniel, the protagonist, affirms that photographic images will be destroyed by speech, pointing to the creation of a talking film "as a specific form of sound film" (8). What is at stake, then, is a consistent attack on the primacy of vision in film and on the reality effect produced by film synchronization. This resulted in a particular disjunction between sound and image, called "discrepant montage," and other dissociative strategies typical of Lettrist undertakings. It is a cinema without images, just as Zorn's is music without sound—challenging cinematic and musical grammars, exploring and interrogating preexisting materials in order to create new "assemblages for thought and experience" (Uroskie 2011: 26).

Decades later, Michel Chion, for example, writes in *Audiovision*, about the state of the art or the compartmentalized perception of cinema at the time:

In continuing to say that we "see" a film or a television program, we persist in ignoring how the soundtrack has modified perception. At best, some people are content with an additive model, according to which witnessing an audiovisual spectacle basically consists of seeing images plus hearing sounds. Each perception remains nicely in its own compartment. (1994: XXV)

However, there's no allusion to the Lettrist work in film, the first of which had long since been trafficking in more hybrid and lively audiovisual experiments—"the secret chances of speech and the nuances of sound combinations" (Cabañas 2014: 26), praising the movement of speech in film, to the detriment of the filmed image and semiotic transparency; drawing on the celluloid, using found footage, painting, discourses from various sources (news, state propaganda), sound poetry, and proceeding to their *détournement*—a real cinematic war machine, where the only limit is one's imagination. In "Cinema as a War Machine," Sonia Rangel states that "*Traité de bave et d'éternité* is perhaps the first form of essay cinema whose influence we can feel in the work of Guy Debord, Chris Marker and Godard, who recover the discrepant montage" (2020: I). And Chion plays with the notions of "visualists" of the ear and "auditives" of the eye, claiming that there are filmmakers who are guided by an auditive impulse, creating a true intersensory reciprocity. In his words, Godard is a visualist of the ear because he infuses "the soundtrack with visuality" (1994: 134).

Zorn is the heir of this avant-garde tradition, and in this sense we could also say that there are composers who are guided by a visual impulse, which they call "aural cinema." However, in my view, aural cinema is closer not to the idea of intersensoriality (even if it is part of it), as stated by Chion, but to the idea of an expanded cinema, the Lettrist Sincinema, which not only follows anti-narrative modalities, as in the case of Godard/Zorn, but challenges our capacity against the automatization of perception, questioning the limits of film, its institutional framing, codes, and presentation. Aural cinema, then, has its roots in the historical avant-garde, and *Spillane's* musical narrative, with its block structure and anti-linear character, its clash of heterogeneous elements and apparent discontinuity, is also indebted to this body of work that indeed has more implications than Zorn could have foreseen at the time of its creation. As much as Zorn's fascination with Godard stems from his "ability to survive in the marketplace on his own terms, straddling the Hollywood and experimental independent traditions" (1999), rather than the radicalism of his forms, the truth is that Godard makes extensive use of many of Lettrist film and sound techniques: found footage, pure sound aesthetics, effects of discontinuity and ceasures in the soundtrack/musical narrative, disjunctive organization of image and sound, intertextual and semantic deconstruction, film as essay, among others. That is to say, many of the techniques and working methods that Zorn takes as an influence in the production of his aural cinema and in *Spillane's*.

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PART V

Music, Sound and Literature



Concrete Voices and Resonant Bodies

Caitlin Woolsey

Abstract In 1955, the French artist Henri Chopin acquired a small portable tape recorder, newly commercially available. This impulsive purchase would prove decisive in the development of a new kind of experimental sound poetry, one in which the voice was rendered both “concrete” and heterogeneous. Chopin used the device to project, amplify, and multiply the sonic micro-particles and intensities of his own voice. Around the same time, William S. Burroughs deployed the metaphor of tape-recorded transmissions to explore how the voice might function like a virus, as in his cut-up novel *The Ticket that Exploded*. This essay considers the relationship between the tape recorder and the intimate voice made public in the work of Burroughs and Chopin, exploring how each artist addressed the material conditions of the tape recorder to elicit the uncomfortable intimacies of the body in different ways, in multiple media, and, more importantly, to different ends.

The Parisian metro is re-imagined as a tape recorder. Plastic tape reels are affixed to a commercial map, and strands of translucent beige magnetic tape connect the reels, forming a matrix that crisscrosses the surface of the

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city, overlaid and fused with the modern public transit system (Fig. 19.1). This collage by the French artist Henri Chopin, titled *Tubes*, references multiple kinds of hidden passages: the underground metro, the apparatus of sound recording technology, and even the messy interiority of the human body. In the decades following the Second World War, the portable tape recorder became commercially available, and amateurs, including artists, could for the first time cut and layer sound as a raw material.

In 1955, Chopin purchased a small used recorder from a street vendor, an act that would prove decisive in the development of a new kind of experimental *poésie sonore* (sound poetry).¹ He used the device to project, amplify, and multiply the sonic particles and intensities of his own voice, exploring the materiality and concrete qualities of human sounds like a traveler through modern Paris.

Just a few years later, the American writer William S. Burroughs popularized the literary cut-up, wherein he applied the techniques of collage to the printed page: he would cut apart and then randomly reassemble his

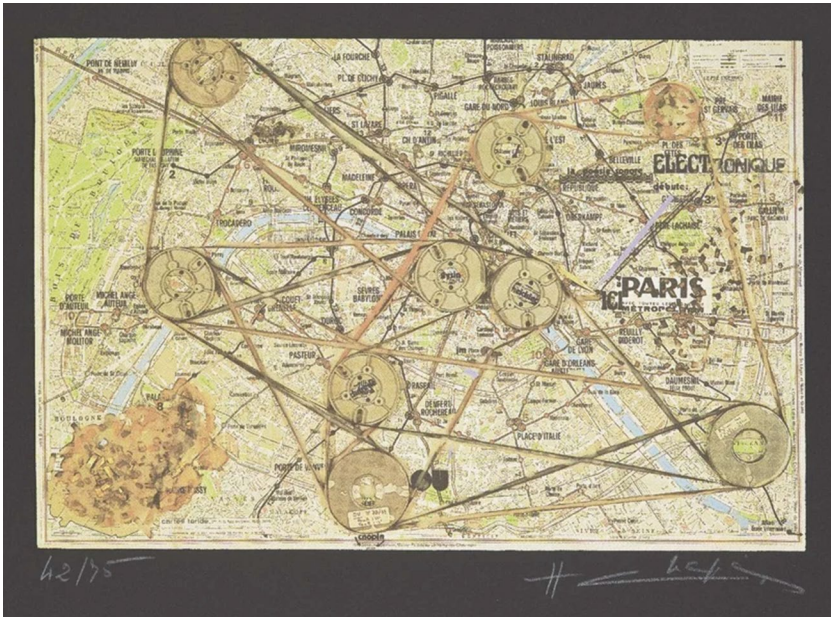


Fig. 19.1 Henri Chopin, *Tubes*, undated collage. Released as a limited edition screenprint folio by Coriander Studio in London, 1980. (© Henri Chopin. Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

own writing, or sometimes the writing of others. The peculiar heterogeneity of Burroughs' narrative voice led Joan Didion to declare that in his cut-up novels "the medium is the message: the point is not what the voice says but the voice itself" (1966: 2). What is the relationship between the act of splicing and the construction of the voice in the works of Chopin and Burroughs, who encountered one another in Paris in the 1960s? Theirs are exceptional voices: Chopin's is complex, layered, and obscure, vocalizing in a post-linguistic register; Burroughs' is direct, schizophrenic, flitting, under the skin. In different media, each of them heightens the tension between the simultaneity and multiplicity of the voice, generating a striking sense of instability, voices that seem at once visceral, mutable, and roving.

Futurism and Dada had already pioneered the radical fragmentation and juxtaposition of sound, image, and text in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but Chopin believed that the introduction of the tape recorder around 1950 marked a definitive turning point. What distinguished postwar sound poetry from both the lyric tradition and the artistic avant-gardes, Chopin argued, was the action achieved through the technical manipulations made possible by the tape recorder (1975: 135). The apparatus produced different kinds of simultaneity through the interplay of layers of sound, spliced or looped, and could create a dialogue between a pre-recorded track and live performance. In this way, in Chopin's sound poems such as *Le corps* (1957–1966), as well as in collages like *Tubes*, simultaneity is constructed through a plurality of bodily, vocalic, and technical elements. William S. Burroughs' cut-up novel *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962) similarly thematizes this complex interface, probing the possibilities of a metonymic equation between the human and the tape recorder.

Chopin and Burroughs both deployed the material conditions of the tape recorder to elicit and distribute the uncomfortable intimacies of the body. But if Burroughs wrote in *The Ticket that Exploded* that the tape recorder is an "externalized section of the human nervous system" (123), Chopin called the body the specific machine of the voice (1980: 18). Moreover, Chopin resisted accounts of sound poetry that primarily emphasized the underlying technical support (the term "machine poetry" favored by Burroughs' collaborator Brion Gysin, for example). Instead, he emphasized attention to the activity of diverse sounds, a process that he described as "a voyage" (a journey) (1979: 7). This characterization suggests that the voice is always an active agent, circumnavigating through

space as well as across time. Many postwar practitioners used metaphors of circulation to describe and image sonic work. Moreover, new formats of dissemination, particularly the long-playing record distributed for domestic consumption, expanded the range of what kinds of sound work could be circulated. How does the recorded voice remain active, rather than reduced to a fixed sound object, a *re-voicing*—and to what end? The following pages explore how three key attributes of the tape recorder—simultaneity, multiplicity, and circulation—allowed Chopin and Burroughs to present the recorded voice as at once concrete yet layered, heterogeneous, and perpetually underway.

THE SOUNDED SELF AS “ALWAYS ALREADY PLURAL”

Two years after his initial experiments with the tape recorder, Henri Chopin began a three-part *sound poem* titled *Le corps* (The Body), of which he made a definitive recording in 1966 (Chopin 1967). The first section, titled “Déchirure de l’air” (Tearing Apart the Air), features high-pitched whines that oscillate back and forth, the auditory equivalent of an arcing lighthouse beam. These shrill pulses are interspersed with, and at certain moments overtaken by, etymological chattering; a throaty huffing, like air passing over the mouth of a glass; electronic crackles that bounce and jitter; feedback that dances like electricity on a wire. Shrill pulses return throughout the nine-minute piece. The only instrument used is the artist’s own voice, processed in and on the magnetic tape. The second section, called “Brisure du corps” (Fragmentation of the Body), features the voices of Chopin, his wife, and two young children, manipulated to the point of becoming elements of sonic verve and texture, with no trace of identifiable speech. The final segment, “Chant du corps” (Body Chant), includes the vocalizations of artist Jiri Látal alongside Chopin. The term “chant,” rather than denoting solely a melody with words, may also describe the instinctual song of a bird, an ambivalence that is reflected in the tectonic quality of this five-minute segment, which is full with low-pitched creaks and the impression of shifting climatological conditions, as if we were listening through plugged ears, underwater, or at a great distance. The final minute pivots: a discernably human voice abruptly eclipses the bubbling drone, whispering in a frenetic but hushed manner, seemingly repeating the same inarticulate phrases over and over with increasing intensity. Then, just as abruptly, the low drone returns and the piece ends in this ambient atmosphere.

What is the poetics of clicks and beeps, shrill screeches, high-pitched whines and gurgles, an oscillating echo that suggests movement, rumblings that seem closer to geologic time than to human expression? What are we to make of voices that do not properly speak, voices that are scarcely recognizable as voices? Chopin declared that with the tape recorder, the voice could finally be presented in all its “solidity,” as “concrete” (1980: 16)—that is, rendered a material like any other, with particulate qualities and “infinite variety” (1994) that he could mine. In *Le corps*, he maximized the technical variations produced through speeding up, slowing down, or overdubbing, and he physically manipulated the tape path to create deliberate distortions, sticking matchsticks in the eraser head, or poking his fingers in and out of the tape path,² and “otherwise molest[ing] the machine,” in the words of one of his contemporaries, the sound poet Larry Wendt (1985: 16). Like a film editor suturing celluloid to create a cinematic montage, or like Burroughs crafting a cut-up text, Chopin would also at times cut the magnetic tape and randomly glue strands together to see what would happen (Morton 2015). Indeed, while the materials may have been different—working with lips, tongue, teeth, larynx, microphone, magnetic tape, and recorder—Chopin’s tactile interventions are closely related to the process of assembling images, text, and objects in visual media such as collage. *Le corps* captures the auditory touch of mouth, lips, and tongue, and touches the ear of the listener with sonic demands, including aural traces of the interference of the artist’s hand as well as technical stoppages and delays. Chopin refused to edit his recordings after the fact, which he felt might erase lingering signals of his interventions, or obfuscate the electric hum of the recorder, the “voice” of this mediating apparatus. Or perhaps he feared that a sound poem that was too smoothly manipulated might remove the voice completely from its embodied state, its human scale.

By the 1950s, the machinery of modern warfare had transformed awareness of how the machine might act as a prosthetic extension of the body, as well as how the human body might itself be deployed as a kind of apparatus. As a young man during the war, Chopin spent time in a labor camp and was sent on one of the infamous “death marches” toward the border of what was then Czechoslovakia. “I have no words to express what happened,” he told his daughter later in life (Morton 2015). These experiences of precarity and linguistic fragmentation taught him to be attentive to the repetitive noises of footfall, utterance, digestion, excretion, inhalation and exhalation, day in and day out. The aural texture and

density of *Le corps* preserves a sense of the situated, provisional body from which the recorded voice emanates, but just barely. The human voice is variously dismantled, distended, and otherwise manipulated to the point where it registers more as an ambient sonic texture than as a voice. Yet, just as sloughed-off detritus in a visual collage may point to its source (an object circulating in the world) while at the same time registering very differently within the artwork, so too the trace vocal elements in *Le corps* point to the presence of an embodied utterer, even as their distorted sonicity challenges that very subjectivity. N. Katherine Hayles formulates this tension in terms of a newly porous interface between human subjectivity and technological prosthesis: “Can the tape recorder be understood as a surrogate body? In that case, does the body become a tape recorder?” (1999: 209). William S. Burroughs leaned into this slippage to explore what happens to the stories we tell when they are no longer produced in the subvocalizations of the body but are now located in the machine.

LISTENING IN ON THE BODY AS TAPE RECORDER

Small microphones were attached to the two sides of his body the sound recorded on two tape recorders—He heard the beating of his heart, the gurgle of shifting secretions and food, the rattle of breath and scratches of throat gristle—crystal bubbles in the sinus chambers magnified from the recorders—The attendant ran the tape from one recorder onto the other to produce the sound of feedback between the two body halves—a rhythmic twang—soft hammer of heartbeats pounding along the divide line of his body...

—William Burroughs

Were these lines not from Burroughs’ *The Ticket that Exploded* (1967), one might be forgiven for imagining this passage as a description of how Chopin made *Le corps*. The effects of the tape recorder had by this time acquired the force of paradox: a record that was both mutable and permanent, one that ensured exact replication but also allowed for mediation that could radically alter the structure and meaning (Hayles 210). Part of the thrill and uneasiness of a voice inscribed on magnetic tape is the voice’s detachment from the original body. So when the recorded voice is fragmented, out of sync, distorted, or incomprehensible, it is particularly unsettling because the very idea of a unified subject is implicitly cast into doubt. The listener wonders: am I, too, fragmented and fragmentary? For

Burroughs, the tape recorder is not a metaphor for or copy of real sound, but rather, in the words of Steven Connor, “is continuous with it” (2010).

The Ticket that Exploded loosely follows the adventures of its protagonist, one Agent Lee, on a mission to dispel and foil methods of mind control by psychic, physical, and other means—including, most prominently, the intervention of the tape recorder—being used by an intergalactic mob intent on destroying the inhabitants of Earth. While the novel bears the hallmarks of a postmodern science fiction tale, the narrative is premised on the Buddhist-inflected notion that one’s sense of self is sustained through a constant internal monologue. *The Ticket that Exploded* considers the possibility that one’s inner voice (that is, one’s self) might in fact be a mechanical production, susceptible to appropriation and co-optation by the mass media or other forces external to oneself, whether benign or insidious. If one’s internal monologue can be unconsciously interspersed with messages from outside oneself (political propaganda, for instance), then the internal voice can no longer be assumed to be naturalized, a proof of subjectivity.

The novel thus commands the characters and the readers to get the voice *out* of the body by speaking their thoughts into a tape recorder. But this is only the first step: then, one must subject one’s speech to manipulations, to splicing and suturing. By creating sonic cut-ups, the characters evacuate their internal monologues from the body-as-tape-recorder. One passage instructs: “The first step is to record the sounds of your body and start splicing them in yourself. Splice in your body sounds with the body sounds of your best friend and see how familiar he gets... Splice your body sounds in with anybody or anything” (50). *The Ticket that Exploded* equates the effects of spliced speech with that of a virus: the virus infiltrates the human body against the subject’s will. It insistently reminds one of its undesired presence like the twinge of a cold sore that nags. In the world of the novel, the tape recorder is no longer understood as a passive receptacle, but rather as an active agent capable of slicing through bodies and the systems that control them. Wielded in this manner, the tape recorder challenges the complicity between presence, voice, technology, and power.

In the years immediately following the initial publication of *The Ticket that Exploded*, Burroughs began to use a bank of tape recorders, wired in tandem, as a means of further multiplying the voice (Rhodes 1967). He would record himself reading sections of already cut-up texts and then subjecting the tape to the same procedures of disjunction and

juxtaposition.³ In writing this novel, Burroughs also implemented a permutation of the cut-up, which he called the fold-in method, whereby he would fold a page of text down the middle and place it on another page; the composite text, read across, would thus be the conjoining of one half of a text to another.⁴ The fact that his characters enact the same methods of dislocation and disjunction is a meta-textual gesture meant to draw attention to the constructed, plural nature of all acts of voicing. Fragmentary and discontinuous text and images may “irritate certain bodily and neural areas,” he later explained (1971: 20), forcing the subject to remain attentive to processes of transmission and reception, reminding the subject that they are listening and seeing.

Could we think of Chopin’s manipulations with the tape recorder as a similar provocation? With a sound poem like *Le corps*, the receiver must listen attentively to hear the interface, the uneasy points of conjunction and disjuncture (1990: 18). Chopin claimed that his avant-garde poetics could produce a vertiginous intersection of “vision, of hearing, and of all the senses” (1986), achieved by the tape recorder entering “our bodily resonators” and enabling us to “hear sounds more fully” than if we listened with the ear alone (1976: 61). He went on to make precisely the same claim for sound poetry as an aesthetic form. In this formulation, the body, rather than the apparatus, acts as the resonance chamber, processing, transmitting, and making perceptible what we would otherwise disregard or tune out. The voice images the body; at the same time, the body is the specific machine of the voice (1980: 17).

Chopin and Burroughs each recognized how the tape recorder introduces technical effects that far exceed what may be achieved by a singular human voice. These effects allow both speaker and listener to redistribute the boundaries of sensibility and subjectivity. In the opening lines of his treatise on the revolutionary potential of the tape recorder, published by Chopin in a bilingual edition nearly a decade after *The Ticket that Exploded* first appeared, Burroughs describes this interplay in a poetic litany: “To be me, to be you, to stay here, to stay there, to be a body, to be bodies, to stay in, to stay out, to stay present, to stay absent” (1971: 1). The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has described how, in listening, the subject always refers back to itself, a kind of feedback circuit in which the listener is oriented toward the form and “movement of an infinite referral” (2002: 25). Nancy opposes this act of audition to that of the gaze, in which the subject looks at itself, as if from the outside: thus seeing itself as an object. We might think again of Burroughs’ invocation of “a rhythmic

twang—soft hammer of heartbeats pounding along the divide line of his body” (1967: 72) or how the *Tubes* collage visually enacts this feedback with the collaged cycling of the tape reels and the traversal of the metro. The tape recorder may enhance and extend our ability to capture, fracture, multiply, and hear voices, but it cannot fully overtake the asymmetries and particularities of the bodily, which is to say: it does not become akin to listening.

CIRCULATING THE VOICE

Chopin first released *Le corps* in 1967 on a 10” vinyl record as part of issue 30/31 of *OU*, the unorthodox audio-visual magazine that he edited for more than a decade starting in 1964, which had a modest but impressive international distribution. In French, *ou* means “or,” and when the word has the diacritical mark *accent grave* (*où*), it can mean “where.”⁵ This double entendre is made explicit on the cover, where the word *OU* is embedded over a commercial map of the Indian subcontinent (Fig. 19.2a). Arrows extend in the four cardinal directions, labeled alternately *ici* (here) or *là* (there), indicating that *OU* is moving outward from the center to overtake the periphery. On the back cover (Fig. 19.2b), the three terms *ici*, *ou*, and *là* are interspersed with eccentrically paired images: close-ups



Fig. 19.2 a–b Front and back cover of *OU* no. 30/31, published by Henri Chopin in Paris, 1967. (© Henri Chopin. Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

of cartographic landmasses, parts of the human body like eyes, lips, stomach, and face, and, in the final row, missiles and fighter jets; the images in the left column are oriented upright, but those in the right column appear upside down. In this design, the voice of *OU* colonizes place, the body, and technology.

Yet the strategies of scrambling and disorientation on display, leave open the question of how exactly these different registers relate to one another. With the idiosyncratic refrain “here, or, there,” or “here, where, there,” we are left to wonder: is Chopin referencing the site of the voice, the guttural utterance “ou,” or the body, or the circulation of both through the tape recorder?

The cover of the first edition of *The Ticket that Exploded*, published in Paris, prominently features a map (Fig. 19.3). Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that this is not the aerial patchwork of natural topographies and modern infrastructure that one might at first assume, but rather is comprised of a jumbled assemblage of fragmentary pages, images, and text. “In my writing I am acting as a map maker,” Burroughs explained in

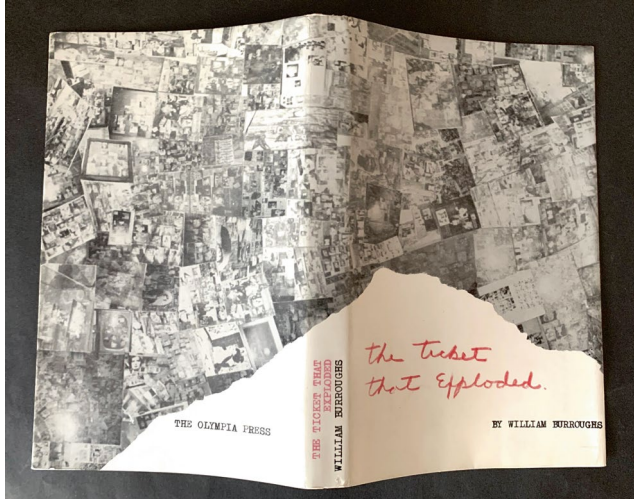


Fig. 19.3 First edition of *The Ticket that Exploded* by William S. Burroughs, published in Paris by Olympia Press, December 1962. (Cover photo by Williams S. Burroughs. © Williams S. Burroughs. Image courtesy Wylie Agency)

1964 (the same year *The Ticket that Exploded* was released in the United States).

This ambiguous feedback between mapping space and mapping signs (language, images) operates not only in *The Ticket that Exploded*, but also resonates in Chopin's work.

The late 1970s collage *Tubes* (see Fig. 19.1) depicts this crossing-over in a slightly different way.⁶ Chopin referred to the human body an "immense, complex factory," and this work places the body in sync with the technological rather than in opposition to it (1994). The circuits of the printed metro routes in *Tubes*, as well as the magnetic tape pun on the tubular innards of the body: nasal passages, esophagus, intestines, veins, and arteries. In fact, modern urban planners derived traffic flow from biology and the study of the human circulatory system.⁷ The viscous blob on the lower left of the page, speckled with unidentifiable matter, calls to mind fluid projected from some bodily cavity, like spittle on the city sidewalk. This collage posits the tape recorder as a kind of metro that grants access to an interior space otherwise inaccessible, a passage-point intersecting the plane of the body. Specific hubs of Chopin's artistic milieu are marked. At top right, for example, the applied text reads: "Electronic sound poetry was born here." Several of the affixed reels are labeled with the names of contemporary sound poets like François Dufrêne and Brion Gysin, while two others are labeled with issue numbers of *OU*. Looking at *Tubes*, an earlier appropriated map of modern Paris may come to mind: Guy Debord's psychogeographic guides to Paris, which trace the flow of a *dérive*, or drift, through the city. In *The Naked City* (Fig. 19.4), one of several iterations of the "guides" published in 1957, the nodes of "psychic intensity" marked on the cut-up map are understood as *plaques tournantes*, a term implying a turning motion that sends circulation in different, unpredictable directions.

In *Tubes*, the *plaques tournantes* explicitly mirror the spinning of a tape reel and also conflate the excavation of the industrial city and the human body. Burroughs also envisioned the vast terrain of psychic states he sought to mine in spatial terms, emphasizing material actions and interventions of voicing. "I feel that the future of writing is in space not time," he predicted (1964: 4), what Debord might have called a psychogeographical technique.

Burroughs' process of physically folding-in, cutting up, and pasting together typewritten pages and recorded magnetic tape are instances of this spatial future, in which by making the voice concrete, one may trace

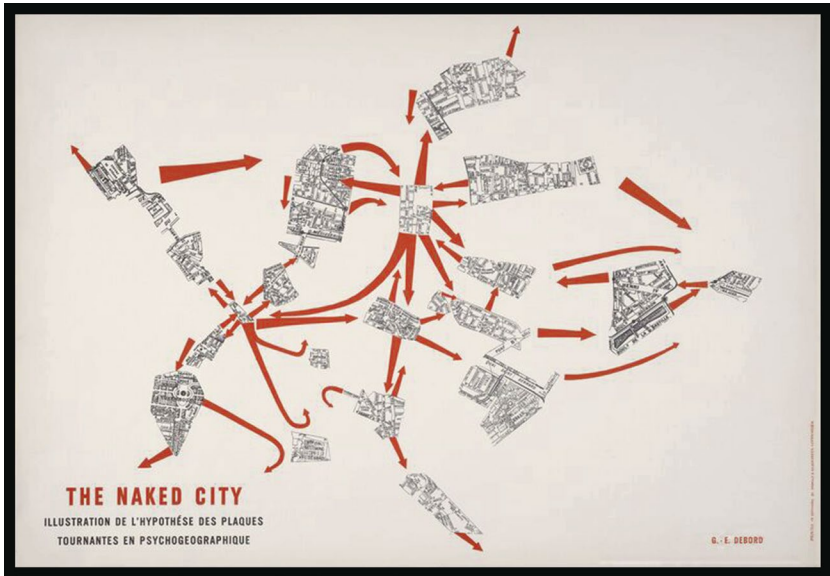


Fig. 19.4 Guy Debord, *The Naked City*. *Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique*, 1957. (© Guy Debord. Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

its mutations, transformations, and shifting relations over time. The jittery oscillations of *The Ticket that Exploded* invite close reading in a way that privileges a plurality of voices (indeed, Joan Didion described Burroughs less as a writer than as “a sound” [1966: 3]). *Le corps* is similarly versatile: not merely a recording of a particular voice, this sound poem grafts the concrete, specific qualities of the voice with technical and material interventions in order to produce open-ended relations. On the back cover of *OU 30/31* (see Fig. 19.2b), the final word is not *là*, as in the preceding lines of the column, but rather a stylized script that reads: I sign everything. Chopin wrote elsewhere that *je*—I, the self—is always already plural—“more plural than a crowd of people” (1975: 34). These works imagine how the tape recorder might delve into and cut apart the voice: sounding out its evocative affectivity and making visible its irrepressible multiplicity.

CODA: MAPPING DIRECTIONS IN MOTION

In their landmark compendium *A Thousand Plateaus*, first published in French in 1980 (the same year Chopin distributed *Tubes* as a limited edition screenprint), the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe how bodies move in the world through a field of forces defined as smooth or striated space.⁸ Smooth space is a heterogeneous, open field without fixed conduits, which allows for circulation akin to that practiced in Debord's psychogeographic *dérive*: in a "variability [and] polyvocality of directions" rather than in accordance with fixed vectors (1987: 382).⁹ Deleuze and Guattari model these "directions in motion" as patchwork, as rhythm and harmony, as navigation, in the aesthetic realm as haptic sensation. This is the space of the *plaques tournantes* of Chopin and Burroughs. Striated space, conversely, is regulated and quantitative. This is the space of the State, conditioned by systems of economic, political, and social hierarchy.

For Chopin and for Burroughs, language threatens control, ossification, repetition: the regulated movement of striated space.¹⁰ This attitude was born in part of this historical moment, not quite a generation after the end of the Second World War, when the movement (or control) of language, bodies, and technology was at the forefront of the cultural consciousness. Moreover, these artworks were created in the years immediately before and after the global wave of protest against systems of control that is now simply referred to as "1968." Just as Chopin's deployment of the voice and sound recording technology in *Le corps* grapples with the fraught status of language and the body after the war, so Burroughs' assessment of the disruptive potential of the tape recorder must be understood within the broader context of postwar and Cold War surveillance culture, in which simultaneity and multiplicity are interwoven with the conflicting specters of control and autonomy. Burroughs directly linked the scrambled meanings of cut-up sound and text to the use of speech scramblers for sensitive military communications during the war, as well as to the numbing repetition of mass media communication more broadly. But in his cosmology, the tape recorder also becomes a "long-range weapon" that can scramble what he calls the restrictive "lines of association" that are established and constantly reinforced by social conditioning (1971: 7–10).

The tape recorder enabled Burroughs as well as Chopin to embody the voice as a plurality of bodily, material, and relational sounds. Furthermore, the collage of media, materials, bodies, voices, and technologies through

which they produced *Tubes*, *Le corps*, and *The Ticket that Exploded*—which in turn are sounded, spoken, and imaged by these same works—can be read as acts toward a smooth space. This is of course not a smooth space of unity, but of plurality. In this sense, smooth space is not unlike the simultaneity and multiplicity made possible by the tape recorder. This is the circulation of the *plaques tournantes*.

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NOTES

1. François Dufréne and Jacques Villeglé coined the term *poésie sonore*, which came to encompass Chopin's oeuvre as well as diverse sound works produced with the tape recorder, primarily in the 1960s and 1970s. Chopin referred to his own poems more specifically as *audio-poèmes*, with the term *audio* underscoring the important role of mechanical intervention by means of the tape recorder.
2. Through these simple interventions, Chopin duplicated effects typically achieved using more sophisticated techniques and high-end equipment.
3. A second edition of *The Ticket that Exploded*, released in the United States in 1967, incorporated new material generated through this tape-recorded cut-up process.
4. In crafting the finished text, Burroughs did not bind himself to these chance outcomes but openly described how he would delete and rearrange to craft a desirable finished text; in this way he diverges from Chopin in the degree to which he edited after the fact. See, for example, Burroughs, "The Future of the Novel," typescript draft published in *Stereo Headphones* no. 8/9/10, 1982, p. 5.
5. Chopin's exploitation of the double entendre of the term "ou" is surely indebted to Jacques Prévert, a French poet of the previous generation, who through the 1920s worked with such Surrealist writers as André Breton and Louis Aragon to renew interest in oral poetry traditions. These investigations led Prévert to develop his highly popular "song poems," which were collected in *Paroles* (Words), first published in 1945. Many of these poems were in fact set to music, including a piece titled "L'accent grave," in which a French language professor and a student drolly named

- Hamlet spar over the pupil's perplexed musings on the ambiguities of the French verb "être" and the conjunction "ou." The poem closes with Hamlet protesting "That's just it, professor, / I am 'where' I am not / And, in the end, well, after reflection, / To be 'where' not to be / Is perhaps also the question."
6. Chopin issued the undated collage *Tubes* as one of three screenprints in a small edition folio collectively titled *Tubes*; the other prints are collages using appropriated maps of the London underground and the New York subway system. With London and New York, the artist used a typewriter to impress graphic symbols atop the commercially printed maps, and affixed lines, arrows, and geometric shapes, but the Paris metro is the only one of the three to feature physical objects affixed to the surface of the map, and is the only one to explicitly reference and reflect upon the material conditions of sound recording, transmission, and circulation.
 7. The first instance of the term "circulation" being deployed to describe human movement within the built environment can be traced to 1872, when the architect and theorist Eugène Viollet-le-Duc described the organization of architecture as akin to the organization of the human body.
 8. Deleuze and Guattari take this formulation from the postwar avant-garde French composer Pierre Boulez (a contemporary of Chopin's and Burroughs'), who first distinguished between "striated" musical forms, or those determined by fixed schemata (e.g., the octave), and "smooth" forms, which allow for irregularity (e.g., non-octave-based scales).
 9. To render the many-voiced qualities of smooth space more conceptually concrete, Deleuze and Guattari use the active metaphor of the rhizome, which is characterized by its horizontal structure, which connects any point to any other point, as opposed to the linear or hierarchical arrangement of a vertical structure.
 10. As much as Chopin admired and supported Burroughs' work, he felt that Burroughs never went far enough because the writer remained committed to the possibility of "the Word."

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Music, Literature, and Cinema: When the Score Guides the Narrative

Francesco Bacci

Abstract This essay scrutinizes little-discussed aspects of intermediality by working with contamination and strategies of estrangement. Drawing on scholarship on intermediality at the intersection of literary theory and comparative literature, such as Elleström’s *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Rajewsky’s *Systemkontamination*, and Fornäs’ “Intermedial Passages in Time and Space,” four works of art are analyzed: Fitzgerald’s short story “Three Acts of Music,” two movies—Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange* and Larraín’s *Jackie*, and Pynchon’s novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*. My aim is to show how the employment of music in both cinema and works of literature affects the narrative process and structure, and how elements belonging to different artistic genres interrelate. In literature and cinema, contamination is based on the union of different media, and in exposing this phenomenon, I want to explore a middle ground where the absence of boundaries creates an intermedial interrelationship. To understand the role and effect of this interrelation, the discussion of a series of examples reveals the process of recontextualization of songs and the perceptions of their audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

When Louis and Auguste Lumière held their first private screening of projected motion pictures on December 28, 1895, cinema became an art form. This essay examines various literary genres, namely modernist and postmodernist literary works, and contemporary cinematic works. The analytical *fil rouge* is the presence of a recontextualized narrative soundtrack. As cinema and literature have become intertwined since this time, their boundaries are often unstable. This essay aims to explore this instability by taking a close look at selected moments of cinematic and literary narratives, in which there is a dissonance between lyrics/text and story.

By comparing contemporary and classic literary and cinematic examples, this essay shows how elements belonging to different artistic genres are interrelated. Four works of art are analyzed—the short story “Three Acts of Music,” two films—*A Clockwork Orange* and *Jackie*, and the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In these four case studies, I use a multidisciplinary approach to demonstrate how the use of music in both cinema and literature affects the narrative process and structure. This technique of “contamination” ultimately creates a series of unique themes within the narrative microcosm. My essay investigates little-discussed aspects of intermediality by working with contamination and strategies of estrangement.

The study focuses on three key points: intermediality, contamination, and estrangement. The concept of intermediality clarifies the hybrid character of the arts and derives from the term medium, which implies the intertwining between two or more elements. The technique of contamination refers to the process of mixing different arts, which results in the new combination of elements and creates modifications. In literature and cinema, contamination is based on the union of different media, and in exposing this phenomenon, we aim to explore a middle ground where the absence of boundaries creates an intermedial interrelation. In order to understand the role and effect of this interrelationship, this essay discusses a series of examples that represent the process of recontextualization of songs in literary and cinematic works, and the perceptions of their audiences.

In *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, L. Elleström highlights that intermediality “cannot fully be understood without grasping the fundamental conditions of every single medium and these conditions constitute a complex network of both tangible qualities of media and various perceptual and interpretive operations performed by the recipients

of media” (2014: 13). This interrelation of media corresponds to the transmission of information between different channels. It is a complex system that reveals the ambiguous nature of each discipline. For instance, the meaning of the short story “Three Acts of Music” is based on the presence of lyrics that guide the reader and disrupt with the narrative flow.

Intermediality represents the changes and transformations of boundaries and divisions between artistic fields. This concept is essential for the analysis of “in-between” arts. While intermediality renews existing media,¹ the process poses problems in defining its specificity due to its complex nature. As Johan Fornäs points out: “The complex flow of intermediality and the multimodality of every form of expression make the mutual borders between literary studies, film studies, art history and musicology dysfunctional” (2004: 326). It is not easy to give a clear and unambiguous definition to this composite integration between different arts, but this essay proposes some examples of literary and cinematic works that represent this intersection. All in all, this essay aims to explore our case studies with the analysis of contamination through strategies such as estrangement. In Irina Rajewsky’s vision, contamination works “by actualization” and “by translation” (2014: 163) and can clarify the nature and the dynamics behind the narrative development of this selection of works.² The scholar states that intermediality is a “critical category for the concrete analysis of individual medial configurations” (54), and she proposes three categories that represent this phenomenon. Our analysis focuses on “intermedial references,” which consist of references to other media within the primary medium. The sense of estrangement³ reveals the readers’ reception and experience of intermedial texts or films based on the sense of alienation and defamiliarization (Tippi 2015: 355). The critical discussion of the concept began with the definition of the “estrangement effect” by Bertholt Brecht, who did not want his audience to emotionally sympathize with the characters, but rather to critically understand the characters’ dilemmas. Estrangement is rooted in the “naturalization of the marvelous” and “making the familiar strange” (Suvin 1984: 376), and contemporary scholars, such as Simon Spiegel (2008), use the term “diegetic estrangement”⁴ to explore this ambiguous notion. In his view, the estranging effect occurs after the viewer becomes aware of a process of recontextualization. As Spiegel clarifies, “the familiar appears in new surroundings and is thereby re-contextualized” (375), and diegetic estrangement is perceived by the audience along with defamiliarization as complementary. Our examples, “Three Acts of Music,” *A Clockwork*

Orange, Jackie, and *Gravity Rainbow* are grounded in contamination, but they can also be considered in terms of their estrangement effect on readers and viewers.

“THREE ACTS OF MUSIC”

One of Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s last short stories, “Three Acts of Music” is a dialogue between two lovers, a nurse, and a doctor. The plot revolves around several songs that are written by famous composers, such as Irving Berlin, or from the musical *No, No, Nanette*. Fitzgerald lived through the rise of cinema and witnessed the revolutionary changes that this new art brought. He was influenced by cinematic works and developed intermedial narrative strategies as a result. We have chosen an example that shows how the dynamics and the reception of a short story can be affected by the textual presence of music, and in particular how the choice of a selection of songs can change the effect on the reader by recontextualizing them.

The two characters in this story love each other, but are unable to consider the possibility of marriage, or even the concretization of their union, due to a number of social-economic variables. Fitzgerald manages to portray the changes and the differences that these two characters face over the years, and the author uses the songs to reinforce the narrative. By incorporating four songs into the text—“Tea for Two,” “Remember,” “Always,” and “Blue Skies”—a series of implications and effects are created. These songs were popular in the 1920s and 1930s; “Tea for Two” is the most prominent choice, as it is a song from the 1925 musical *No, No, Nanette*, with music by Vincent Youmans and lyrics by Irving Caesar. In the musical, Nanette and Tom (Louise Groody and Jack Barker) sing it as a duet in the second act, imagining their future. *No, No, Nanette* was a hit and was celebrated in the late 1920s, coincidentally around the time Fitzgerald wrote this short story for *Esquire*. The story uses some passages of the musical song to convey the feelings of the two protagonists, but at the same time, it creates a contrast with what they are saying. Throughout the story, in fact, “Tea for two” may evoke a specific reaction in readers who are familiar with the idyllic love story of *No, No, Nanette*, but they feel a sense of defamiliarization toward the song because it takes on a new meaning in this new context. As part of the musical and fictional world of *No, No, Nanette*, “Tea for Two” represents a moment of happiness between Tom and Nanette: the two are imagining a future together, a future they will have. In this fictional song, Fitzgerald’s lyrics depict a playful exchange

of tea between two people, emphasizing their mutual sharing and connection.

In Fitzgerald's "Three Acts of Music," the narrator tells a story that cannot have a happy ending, a story of two people who are blocked and unable to anticipate a future together. In this case, the music is used to create a metanarrative dimension that allows the reader to think and reflect on both the story and the lyrics, and how the two manage to connect, creating a kind of soundtrack within the narrative. While the audience is familiar with the meaning of the musical song, they notice its paradoxical presence in the narrative. The effect of estrangement comes from the realization of the strange use of a familiar element in a story that does not have the same happy ending.

The same can be said of the references to "Blue Skies," where the symbol of the bluebird of happiness creates an opposition between the positivity of the image presented in the lyrics and the actual outcome expressed in the narrative, which does not share and present the same feelings. Even the story behind the composer of these songs, Irving Berlin's personal struggles, conveys an idea of love that does not correspond to the love story between these two characters. Clearly, we can see this use of popular songs as a way of broadening the cultural background of "Three Acts of Music" and also as a way of creating direct access to the reader's unconscious reaction to a famous piece of a known musical. As John Irwin points out and confirms, Fitzgerald's choices were not casual:

In "Three Acts of Music," Fitzgerald manages in the space of five pages to mention or quote lines from Vincent Youmans's "Tea for Two," Irving Berlin's "All Alone," "Remember," "Always," "Blue Skies," and "How About Me," and Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields's "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "Lovely to Look At," while in the unfinished *Last Tycoon* he names seven different songs and quotes a line from "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." Fitzgerald clearly respected the light verse tradition represented by Porter and the best popular song lyrics of his era. (2014: 39)

Fitzgerald creates a dimension in which the lyrics are familiar and a vehicle for a subconscious message that the reader must critically perceive. It is a process of contamination through the translation of established songs and images into a new medium that also presents an estranging effect. Reading "Three Acts" and perceiving this inner contradiction, the

recipient is stuck in this middle ground⁵ between two different spheres and cannot fully empathize with the characters.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE AND “SINGIN’ IN THE RAIN”

In terms of the contamination of music and narrative, our analysis moves forward in time, and considers a classic of 1970s American cinema: Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*. The film includes a recontextualized song from the musical “Singin’ in the Rain,” and the analysis intends to study this transposition to another narrative genre. It is no coincidence that this song was written at the time of the transition from silent film to “talkies.” In the musical, the song centers on Gene Kelly’s jubilant performance during a downpour. Kelly’s character, Don, has finally found a solution to the transformation of *The Dueling Cavalier* into a musical and has fallen in love with Kathy. As a result of this positive outcome, he lets his heart sing. As Kyle Turner points out in his article: “Few songs are as unapologetically joyful as “Singin’ in the Rain,” a track that was originally written by Arthur Freed and Nancio Herb Brown for the 1929 stage revue, “The Hollywood Music Box Revue” (2014: 1). This song is a happy and joyful moment in the musical, and it is reappropriated by Kubrick to create a dissonance with what the viewer is seeing. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the song is played during a sequence in which the protagonist attacks and rapes a woman. Indeed, the soundtrack adds a sense of irony to the narrative, and manages to be a powerful influence. As Turner clearly states: ““Singin’ in the Rain is so deeply rooted in everything that Alex, the protagonist does not understand. His vocalization of it is a horrific piece of irony. His actions are the very antithesis of the song: a battle between entrancing adoration and sickening psychosis” (2014: 1). Kubrick successfully portrays the protagonist’s psychosis by using a song that typically evokes a specific unconscious joyful reaction in the viewer and, at the same time, is perversely incongruous with the scenes they are watching. Once again, a distance is created between the reader’s unconscious auditory association and the viewer’s reaction. Contamination and estrangement result from the translation of a popular song into a completely different narratological situation and from the defamiliarization of the viewer.

JACKIE AND “CAMELOT”

The same narrative strategy can be seen in Pablo Larraín’s 2016 film *Jackie*. Exploring the days after JFK’s death, this film incorporates the song “Camelot,”⁶ and its use as a soundtrack within the narrative is consistent with what we have highlighted with Fitzgerald and Kubrick. As Natalie Portman’s Jackie walks through the streets of Washington, DC, the lyrics are used as a familiar element that presents the same dissonance and estranging effect. Larraín not only attempts to recreate an iconic figure from world history, but also portrays a woman who must face an unexpected and sudden loss and has to share her grief with the rest of the world. The contradiction comes from the lyrics and the meaning of “Camelot,” a word that assumes a prominent symbolic value. This song, sung by Richard Burton in the musical of the 1960s, has several implications: it represents the beginning of a process of catharsis, and it has a historical value, given the Kennedys’ myth of “Camelot” and JFK’s obsession with the story of King Arthur. The lyrics describe the idealized and enchanting nature of Camelot, highlighting its unique laws, perpetual beauty, and the perfect setting it provides for a happily-ever-after.

In two moments of the narrative, the use of this piece creates a poignant scene in which we can look inside Jackie’s personality and perceive her suffering. The first takes place in the White House as Jackie tries to cope with her overwhelming grief. She is drinking and taking pills, and then this song starts, and through her behavior and body language, we can get a glimpse of the weight of her loss. The lyrics of “Camelot (Reprise)” urge listeners to recall the enchanting stories of Camelot each night, to share its fleeting glory with others, and to remember the magic and laws that defined this legendary place.

The second moment on examination relates to the ending: as Jackie leaves the White House, she accepts her new personal condition. In this case, “Camelot” connects the viewer to Jackie’s past as opposed to her present attempt to move on, but at the same time it allows for a deeper understanding of Jackie’s inner self. In his article on *Jackie*, Matthew Jacobs concludes:

The scene invokes the duality of the Kennedys: the intimacy Jackie and John shared while listening to “Camelot” before bed, juxtaposed with the frosty notion of her closing the door to her conjoining room and climbing into a different bed after its conclusion. It summons the impermanence of life

inside the White House, where Jackie's inevitable eviction notice arrived earlier than expected. It forces us to consider the calculations of the complicated, unknowable Jacqueline Kennedy. (2017: 3)

This is a crucial scene in which the character reveals her inner demons. The viewer perceives Jackie's emotional fragility through the *mise-en-scene*, in conjunction with the song's lyrics, which are at once familiar and alien. It is the same sense of estrangement and defamiliarization: the viewer is alienated by the meaning of the scene and the disconnect between the music and the narrative developments. "Camelot" also recalls the intimacy of John and Jackie. The protagonist is portrayed in her grief because of the absence of this dimension. The viewer is divided between the perception of a romantic intimacy and the vision of its destruction. Ultimately, it is important to note how the term "Camelot" is often used to refer to the legacy of Kennedy's policies or, more generally, his presidency. As if the word defined his "throne," even members of the Kennedy family were considered heirs to Camelot. In "For One Brief Shining Moment," Linda Czuba Brigrance illustrates this unbreakable bond: "Camelot defined Jackie until the end of her life. In the article 'A Moment Called Camelot,' a mourner is seen outside of the former First Lady's New York apartment holds [sic] a hand-written sign that says, 'Camelot will be reunited in heaven'" (2003: 6). In light of what we have outlined, the use of the song evokes a double reaction in the viewer, who empathizes with Jackie O's grief and recalls the meaning of the word, but also thinks critically about the paradox between soundtrack and action. The various semantic levels associated with the lyrics and the symbolic value of the term amplify the song's effect.

GRAVITY'S RAINBOW AND PARANOIA

Our final example is a postmodern novel: Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. In this story, music becomes a means of exploring themes and character strengths and weaknesses. This element of music is woven throughout the text, emphasizing the central theme of **Paranoia**. The narrative develops through this recurring state of mind, and at a particularly pivotal moment in the text, this song appears. The lyrics express a satirical portrayal of paranoia that is repeated several times, linking it to a familiar yet disturbing presence from the past and humorously suggesting that even the artist Goya could not capture its essence.

First, Pynchon's use of these lyrics in the flow of the narrative is a contamination between literature and music. Again, the contamination is driven by translation. Second, the use of this song helps the author focus the reader's attention and shape his or her perception of what follows. This narrative soundtrack reveals several poignant and interesting aspects of the story and the characters. Indeed, through these songs and allusions to musical pieces, Pynchon offers a commentary on the plot and characters of the novel. For instance, after listening to this song, Katje realizes a number of things about herself—such as that “she is the allegorical figure of Paranoia” (1973: 494)—and begins to reflect on her self-perception.

Indeed, Pynchon's use of music is also connected to the theme of entropy, and the writer creates a specific dimension for it through the presence of lyrics. As the literary critic Harold Bloom points out in *Thomas Pynchon*: “‘Entropy’ examines various notions of order and disorder in such a way as to make it very difficult to locate Pynchon's own view-point. Music is, of course, non-verbal and so an ideal means of binding his story together without committing himself to any one view-point” (2013: 127). In some of his novels, Pynchon not only incorporates existing songs into his narrative, but also includes original songs. The author juxtaposes traditional dialogue, with oral variants of the language and integrates songs to expose problematics of order and disorder. None of Pynchon's lyrics feels forced, because they fit precisely into the flow of the story and the backgrounds of the characters. The act of translation does not create a sense of estrangement as in the previous case studies, but it is well integrated into the narrative flow and supports the exploration of the meaning of entropy. Given the chaotic structure of the novel, the claim of entropy is supported by the general narrative disorder and the emotional confusion of the characters, created by songs such as “Pa-ra-noia!” that add another diegetic dimension to the text.

This case study demonstrates how Pynchon's use of contamination is intended to alienate readers who do not empathize with the characters from the first pages of the narrative. Rather than recontextualizing a familiar song, Pynchon reinforces the reader's general alienation with his original lyrics. The different uses of contamination in *Gravity's Rainbow* illustrate the many forms this technique can take, depending on the author's purpose.

CONCLUSION

As these case studies show, the rise of cinema and the frequent use of songs as narrative soundtracks facilitate the process of interrelation between the arts and influence the construction of literary and cinematic works. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the analysis of these works reveals how the process of contamination within narratives produces an estranging effect. We have also clarified when contamination does not work with estrangement, but instead reinforces the narrative. As Dave Astor points out in his article, “music is so much a part of our lives that its presence in literature can help readers relate to fictional situations and characters” (2013: 1). In these narratives, readers and viewers cannot fully relate to fictional situations because they are blocked by the strangeness created by the dissonance between the story told by the characters, and the one told by the song. Clearly, this essay has shown that there are several examples of contamination of the arts and strategies of estrangement, but the strength of this analysis is that it exposes the use of recontextualized narrative soundtracks in correlation with the exploration of the characters’ disorders. This approach examines this little-discussed technique and its connection to a particular strategy, estrangement, in order to create a better understanding of the narrative construction of literary and cinematic works and their reception.

In fact, the results illustrate, with some concrete examples, how this process of contamination has developed a type of narrative with its own set of rules. Fitzgerald’s short story is one of the first examples of this complex construction, and Larraín’s Jackie is one of the most recent cases. The interaction between different arts and their subsequent interrelationship reveals how the translation or the actualization of an external element belonging to another medium can often create a sense of estrangement or alienation, which we can identify as the main strategy applied in the case studies. They all exhibit a similar pattern in which readers and viewers are confronted with an unconscious reaction based on the defamiliarization of the complexity and intermediality of the works of art they are in contact with and their discrepancy in the recontextualized narrative. Thus, these case studies are part of a broader system of intermodal and intermedial narratives.

NOTES

1. See Dick Higgins, *Intermedia*. Leonardo, 49–54.
2. “*Systemkontamination*” and “*teilaktualisierende*” are terms employed by Rajewsky. Moreover, Gabrielle Tippi clarifies that with translation, “media specifics of the compound film are ‘translated’ into literature. [...] ‘actualization of film’ is achieved if the filmic applied to literature are conventionally seen as filmic, but actually transmedial and/or congruent to the rules of literary expression.” See *Handbook of Intermediality*, 45.
3. In a work of art, estrangement and the estranging effect describe the impossibility of understanding events or situations, or fully empathizing with the characters. Brecht, Spiegel, and other scholars also employ these terms to describe the process of making the strange seem ordinary. In his essay “Things Made Strange,” Simon Spiegel examines the various aspects of “estrangement” and mentions “the estranging effect” in conjunction with Brecht’s “V-Effekt,” the German term “*Verfremdung*.” Some translators render “V-Effekt” as estrangement effect, other scholars as estranging effect.
4. Spiegel employs “diegetic estrangement” to illustrate the thematic defamiliarization at the level of the narrative.
5. In the context of art, the term middle ground refers to a focal area of a painting, a space between foreground and background. In this essay, it describes the focal area created by the interrelation of arts—an intermedial dimension.
6. *Camelot* (1960) is a song and a musical created by Alan Jay Lerner (lyrics) and Frederick Loewe (music) and the plot is based on the King Arthur legend and T.H. White’s novel *The Once and Future King* (1958). The show ran for 873 performances on Broadway and won four Tony Awards. *Camelot* was associated with the Kennedy administration. Book, Music and Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, under copyright, reprinted with permission.

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The Politics of a Voice: Demetrio Stratos

Fabio Guidali

Abstract The chapter focuses on the career of Demetrio Stratos, from youthful rebellion as a rock singer to vocal experimentation as a result of his growing awareness of voice and body as political weapons. Stratos, a singer and musician of Greek descent active in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, interpreted words as barriers to sound and a reduction of the phonetic capacity. He sought to free the expressive potential of the human voice and to deconstruct language as a personal and political liberation. First as a member of *Area*, a politically engaged progressive rock band with avant-garde intentions, and then mainly as a vocal experimenter, he sought to unravel the mechanisms of social oppression starting with the private issues of life, since in his opinion individual emancipation comes from bodily emancipation, not merely from sexual and social emancipation.

In June 1979, at the age of thirty-four, Demetrio Stratos died of aplastic anemia in the New York Memorial Hospital. The next day, in Milan's neo-classical Civic Arena, a big concert that had been organized to raise money for Stratos' medical expenses turned into a celebration of his music and persona in front of 60,000 young people. Many of the big names of Italian

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rock contributed to what became a kind of collective ritual, proving on the one hand that music festivals, which in the seventies had been occasions for scuffles and political divisions, were once again becoming apolitical events (Volpi 2015), and on the other that Stratos had attracted the attention of all kinds of musicians with his career trajectory, from youthful rebellion to vocal experimentation. Stratos' artistic path, focused on a growing awareness of the voice and the body as political weapons and on the deconstruction of language as an essential component of his political and countercultural manifesto, was in fact the result of both the context in which he operated and his origin, for his voice was undoubtedly the voice of the Mediterranean diaspora (Chianura and Ronconi Demetriou 2015: 9–16).¹

Born Efstratios Dimitriou in Alexandria, Egypt in 1945, he began immersing himself early in his family's Greek Orthodox culture, Arab music, and the sounds of the Byzantine tradition. He also attended a British school as a young boy (a circumstance that would prove very helpful in the early stages of his career as a frontman and cover singer in Italy) and studied piano and accordion at the conservatory, but the tense domestic situation in Egypt around 1956 convinced his family to send him to Cyprus. Finally, at the age of seventeen, he moved to Italy to study architecture, but he never graduated (Kornetis 2007).²

In Milan, he changed his name to the easier-to-pronounce Demetrio Stratos and, after gaining experience in live music clubs, began his career as a keyboard player and singer in the band *I Ribelli* (*The Rebels*), the backup band for top billing singer Celentano. In 1967 *I Ribelli* recorded the hit rhythm and blues ballad *Pugni chiusi* (*Closed Fists*), in which one can already recognize the power, range and warmth of Stratos' voice, the strength of his intonation and his unusual vocal ability. Although the song still respects a classical structure, Stratos' interpretation suggests a personal reimagining of the model (Gatti 1979).

This was a time when Italian music was beginning to free itself from the restraints of melodic tradition under the influence of British and American rock and roll (Minganti 1993), but it still lacked political stamina, beyond the use of symbolic weapons such as challenging looks, enjoying beat sonorities, or singing somehow thought-provoking lyrics (Casilio 2013). Stratos was also dissatisfied with collaborations that did not enhance his talent. Moreover, after the birth of his daughter in 1970, observing the baby's lallation phase and the gradual acquisition of verbal language, he assumed that this learning process begins with the toddler experimenting with the voice and ends with the achievement of both the "correct" way

of speaking (through verbal language and words) and harmonic singing and monody (which means performing only one sound at a time). He interpreted this development as a reduction of phonetic capacity and of words as barriers to sound, and set himself the goal of liberating the expressive potential of the human voice.

This liberation had to be, first, a physical liberation from the limitations of a preformed and standardized language. Second, it had to be a personal and psychological liberation, because one had to be freed from the pressure to conform to a particular social model. Thirdly, this liberation was a political action, because it had to concern not only the individual but the whole community. Indeed, Stratos insisted both on the fact that a different use of the voice is possible for everyone, and on collective and participatory listening that can become a ritual. “If a new vocality can exist,” he would later write, “it should be lived by anyone” (1976a).

What Stratos was trying to do as a musician, without any scientific proof or solid ideological basis, was to get to the root of what people considered normal and acquired, in order to trace the reasons for their submission to the status quo. The same feeling was beginning to become a politically burning question in those years,³ as in the case of the underground magazine *Re Nudo*. Founded in Milan in 1970, it expressed the idea that not only economic conditions, but also aspects of everyday life, such as sexuality or the use of leisure time, kept people subservient to the system, and considered the libertarian young concertgoers as people ready to start a revolution (Bertante 2005). Nevertheless, student organizations, trade unions, extra-parliamentary left-wing groups and the influential Communist Party were still convinced that only economic issues were crucial, and deemed music and cultural aspects in general to be superstructural and thus marginal, according to the Marxist point of view. For this reason, it was not easy to be a politically engaged artist outside of the Communist Party and the left-wing groups, and Stratos himself had to forge his own path, both by co-founding a rock band and by experimenting with phonetics.

STRATOS AND THE *AREA*

In 1972, in collaboration with Gianni Sassi, the founder of Cramps Records (Borio 2013: 42–43),⁴ Stratos contributed to the birth of the progressive rock band *Area*. *International POPular Group*, composed of instrumentalists from different cultural and musical backgrounds.⁵ The

name was chosen to be understandable in different languages and referred to the epigraph “Widen the area of consciousness” in Allen Ginsberg’s book *Kaddish and Other Poems 1958–1960*. *Area* played multi-genre and experimental music influenced by popular melodies, Balkan and Middle Eastern rhythms, using saxophone, bass, guitar, and synthesizer for electronic music. Stratos played the keyboard and only at a later stage began to use his voice as an instrument through his vocalizations. Indeed, writing the lyrics, which were the result of a collaboration with highly politicized avant-garde intellectuals such as Gianni Emilio Simonetti and Sassi himself, was only the last step. Thus, political messages were conveyed through both lyrics and musical references.

This is particularly evident in the 1973 song *Luglio, agosto, settembre (nero)* (*July, August, [Black] September*) from *Area*’s first studio album *Arbeit macht frei* (*Work sets you free*), which was written just one year after the 1972 Munich massacre and even caught the attention of the conservative newspaper *Corriere d’Informazione* (Fegiz 1974a).⁶ Apart from the first lines of the song, a glossolalic recitative of Dadaist taste sung by an unknown Egyptian woman, which are actually a call for peace (Oleari 2009), the vehement lyrics “Non è colpa mia se la tua realtà/Mi costringe a fare guerra all’umanità” (It’s not my fault if your reality forces me to wage war on humanity) combine with echoes of Islamic music through the trills Stratos sings, referring to the Middle East where he came from.

Not only was this musical patchwork genuine, contrary to what the leading music critic Riccardo Bertoncetti believed (1975), but the band’s political commitment was also authentic, as they even took part in the first national meeting of Italian underground groups in 1973, putting forth various proposals (*Area* 1973a: 4, 1973b: 8). Nevertheless, *Area*’s mission was not only political, since they aimed to abolish the differences between music and life, according to Stratos’ words, like any avant-garde project.⁷ *Area* were not composers of songs, but creators of situations and events (Lelli and Masotti 2015). Even more impressive than the studio albums were indeed *Area*’s live performances (Aprile and Mayer 1980), which were inspired by Guy Debord’s meditations in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and referred to typical happenings of the Situationist International. They presented revolution as *joie de vivre* and unrestrained creativity in opposition to the dullness and mortification of life under capitalism, as Raoul Vaneigem noted in *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967).

In *Caos (parte seconda)/Chaos (second part)*, for example, *Area* brought an exposed cable from the synthesizer into the audience: the people who

touched it, forming a human chain could alter the sound, whose intensity and extension were not decided on the stage, but by the audience itself, which was directly involved in the creation of the piece of music. Another occasion was a well-known happening in October 1976 at the University of Milan, then occupied by students. Each member of *Area*, inspired by John Cage, improvised and played specifically without listening to the others (Area 1979); the audience, though initially disoriented, began to respond to this strange performance, co-creating the music by making noise with their shoes, umbrellas, and jingling keys. The band's goal of breaking down the barrier between the musicians on stage and the audience had been achieved.

Although the "intellectualism" of such performances was "certainly presumptuous," according to Mario Luzzatto Fegiz (1974b), *Area* had a strong purpose: in Stratos' words, "Music must be lived by all and not only by those who are on stage," because "Music means discussion nowadays" (1976b: 32). Therefore, even if *Area*, as he stated in another interview, "decided from the beginning to live among people's problems, not to run away from them" (Masotti 1977:12), the need to achieve consciousness seemed more urgent than any political stance (Oleari 2009: 70). *Area* did not openly side with any particular group within the anti-establishment New Left (which actually considered them to be their band) (Fegiz 1975), despite the closed fists at concerts and the adaptation of the socialist anthem *The Internationale*. The artist, unlike the politician, does not offer solutions, but he has the mission to open people's eyes, as Stratos sings in *Gioia e rivoluzione (Joy and revolution)* from the 1975 album *Crac!*: "My submachine gun is a double bass / that shoots in your face / [...] what I think about life."

VOCAL EXPERIMENTATION AS A POLITICAL WEAPON

In line with his commitments within *Area*, Stratos intensified his activities as a vocal experimenter. In the absence of a reference point in this field in Italy (Rossani 1978), he studied on his own and with his own funds ethnic vocalization and, above all, traditional overtone singing from the Middle East and Asia, and was involved in Milan with the group *Zaj*, which explored intermediality within the Fluxus movement. He recorded John Cage's *Sixty-Two Mesostics Re Merce Cunningham*, a recitative that acknowledges both the primacy of the signifier and the artist's freedom of interpretation. Despite the negative review by the leading critic Massimo

Mila (1975), he even performed it in 1974 as a political gesture in front of thousands of youngsters at the Parco Lambro Festival, on the outskirts of Milan. Later, he worked directly with Cage at the Roundabout Theatre in New York, proving that he had become a recognized member of the international avant-garde. Through Cage, Stratos claimed to have understood “what is there beyond the singing, the music, abolishing any barrier between life and music” (Masotti 1977: 12), thus giving agency to his early sensations and experiments with the voice.

The decision to develop this kind of research into vocal abilities can be traced back to the fact that, in the wake of the second-wave feminism, there was a shift from mere emancipation (still sought in 1968–69) to true liberation. The latter included the political and personal need to unravel the mechanisms of social oppression, starting with the private issues of one’s own life, as had been anticipated in Italy by the above-mentioned periodical *Re Nudo*. Furthermore, the meditations of French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and Michel Foucault, who denounced the networks of influence that constrain the body in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) or *The History of Sexuality* (1976), arrived in Italy in the mid-1970s.

It is impossible to say whether Stratos read the writings of these thinkers, but such ideas were certainly circulating within the Italian countercultural movement. On the one hand, if personal issues are political issues, as the motto said, nothing is more personal than the body and the voice it produces; on the other hand, if capitalist society concealed the bodies, even the study of voice could be a revolutionary weapon. Stratos was therefore convinced that, in order to liberate the body, one should know it, and in order to know something, one should be familiar with its limits. But he was not a theorist: his statements were his feverish activity and his artistic achievements, including his first solo studio album, *Metrodora*, released in 1976. Referring to the album, whose title evokes a sixth-century Byzantine physician and midwife, Stratos claimed that his vocal studies were a mind-control technique, a proprioceptive study, and thus a first step in overcoming traditional vocal expression. His research, beyond conventions such as *bel canto*, was an exploration of the body as a whole. As he literally declared, he sought to let his “whole body pass through the tongue” (1999),⁸ meaning that individual emancipation comes from bodily emancipation, not merely from sexual and social emancipation. Stratos conceived of music as “the *pharmakon*, the ultimate means for liberation” (1978a: 107),⁹ and considered language as a creative act

capable of transforming reality, not through its rationality or through the signified, but rather through the signifier, the sound.

Stratos' aim was to bring to light a kind of hidden counterculture, something that had remained silent and subterranean, and to do so he explored the relationship between spoken language and the psyche through psychoanalysis. Indeed, the study of the organic structures of the mind was, according to him, the consequence of the study of the vocal tract and articulatory phonetics (1979).¹⁰ His performances, although very disruptive and somehow inexplicable, had no room for mysticism or occultism, as demonstrated by his recording of the Greek tongue twister *O Tzitziras o Mitziras* (1978b),¹¹ which he used to reinterpret Greco-Roman mysteries, because the continuous repetition of a series of words acted on the nervous system and induced a trance state. Although it was also performed for young audiences, it had nothing to do with psychedelia: Stratos always stuck to the facts, as a former good architecture student who had learned to deal with materiality.

Not surprisingly, he also collaborated with speech therapists at the CNR (Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche) Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies in Padua, where it was discovered that he was able to perform with his voice at a frequency that could exceed 6000 Hz (Ceolin et al. 2011). His purpose in Padua was to deepen the study of his own body as a musical instrument. In fact, he believed that by studying how his vocal tract worked, he could teach other people how to do the same with their voices (Pessina 2011). In contributing to their own liberation, he would be fulfilling a political task.

One of the fruits of this in-depth analysis was *Cantare la voce* (*Singing the voice*) in 1978. In this studio album, Stratos used extended vocal techniques and, above all, overtone singing with great precision, playing two or three inharmonic sounds at the same time (diplophonia and triplophonia), together with flute-like vocalizations. In Paris, in February 1979, he was also the protagonist of a free interpretation of Antonin Artaud's play *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (1947). In fact, his performances were in the same vein as the most disturbing experiences of the Surrealist tradition. Like Artaud before him, Stratos sought an "origin" (Franchin 2010), a primordial and unconscious dimension from which sound emerges as a physical and emotional feature before being transformed into words and logical patterns. He explained: "Making use of sound is like rappelling down into the origins of one's own conscience" (Tannenbaum 1979: 14).

Although he had no ideological organization, Stratos' activity went beyond the avant-garde, likening his voice to that of the proletariat and conveying the need to undermine the "expressive habits that are privileged and institutionalized by the ruling classes' culture," as he explained in the liner notes of *Metrodora*. His fellow poet Simonetti even stated that his voice was "the political metaphor of the crumbling apart of aesthetics in front of ethics" (2015: 74).

CONCLUSION

Stratos' album *Cantare la voce* and the interpretation of Artaud came between 1978 and 1979, at a very different time from the early and mid-seventies. In Italy, the so-called Movimento del Settantasette (1977-Movement) represented a second wave of protest after the escalation of 1968 and 1969 (Falciola 2015). It was the height of creativity in the service of politics (Salaris 1997), but also the height of political violence and of the demonstrations against Marxist-Leninist parties and trade unions in the name of group autonomy. As the movement waned, it quickly gave way to a-politicization and hedonism,¹² paving the way for the explosion of creativity and to the "Cramps records" brand in design, fashion, and advertising in the eighties.

Yet in the new climate after 1977, Stratos' vocal experiments still had a political significance, even though the number of political rallies decreased and he was forced to perform more and more often in theaters. The large number of collaborations and concerts in his final months before the onset of his illness show that his commitment was still there. He was searching for a different kind of reality, and true politics is also a prefiguration of new ways to go. Of course, no one knows what would have come next. Indeed, Stratos was diagnosed with aplastic anemia in April 1979 and died just two months later.

Despite his untimely death, Stratos had already become an icon, which explains the huge concert held in his honor in Milan. A knight fighting against the musical and political establishment, but also against the alleged limits of the human body, he had managed to put the voice at the center of the stage and to present his art not to an intellectual elite, but to young rock concertgoers. Even more importantly, his avant-garde and scientific research into the voice and its origins took place at a time and in a place that was appropriate for it, because the urge for individual emancipation

was extremely deep felt, at the point where one could even think of pushing beyond the human limits.

Two mythological figures were embodied by Stratos: Orpheus, because he combined the Apollonian (the rational control of natural processes) and the Dionysian (as he unleashed the biological world within him) (Franchin 2010), but also Icarus. In fact, the legend around Stratos recounts that the cause of his death (perhaps due to the abuse of antibiotics, which weakened his body) was precisely his very pushing beyond human limits. After all, Stratos himself had prophetically asserted *in tempore non suspecto* in *Metrodora*'s liner notes, in 1976, that progressing from the level of passive listener to the status of active protagonist through phonetics was, as he said, quoting the French artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, "a game in which life is at stake."

NOTES

1. The first person to undertake the study of Stratos' work was Janete El Haouli in 1999. See also Laino (2009). Murphy (2018) and Oleari (2009).
2. Many well-educated Greek youngsters traditionally emigrated to Italy, where they could easier graduate.
3. On the Seventies as a whole, see at least Bull and Giorgio (2006). On a cultural level, see Echaurren and Salaris (1999), and Balestrini and Moroni (2017).
4. The exceptional figure of Sassi is highlighted in Marino (2013), and Pollini (2019).
5. On the experimental music context in the seventies, see Chiriaco (2005), Coduto (2005), Trambusti (2009), and Croce (2016).
6. Cramps Records also produced *Area*'s studio albums *Caution Radiation Area* (1974), *Crac!* (1975), and *Maledetti* (1976).
7. *Area* also made a direct reference to Dadaism in *La mela di Odessa* (1920), from the album *Crac!* (1975).
8. Interview with Demetrio Stratos, in the documentary film by Massimo Villa, 1999.
9. See also Musolino (2014).
10. See a sketch of his study in the footsteps of the Lacanian school in Stratos (1979).
11. Recorded in *Futura*, sound poetry anthology, Cramps Records, 1978.
12. On political reflux, see *Il trionfo del privato* 1980 and Morando (2009).

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Sound as Model: Lucier Versus Murail

Bert Van Herck

Abstract When the properties of sound become the center of the work, we might think of sound art. By focusing on sound, we may escape the traditional architecture of classical composition. However, sound art may be more of an attitude than a focus on sound. When Alvin Lucier composed “I’m sitting in a room,” he literally showed the result of a repeated recorded loop at work. Exactly the same idea is used by Tristan Murail in “Mémoire, Érosion”: he composed from the deterioration of the sonic properties of sound as if it were played in a loop. The theory of Michael Polanyi is used in this chapter to study and compare these two approaches, with a specific focus on how a composition is the result of the perspectives held by the composer—even if they take the same phenomenon as a starting point.

Sound as a model is a frequently used statement among composers from diverse backgrounds. Yet, the resulting musical pieces remain diverse. So is “sound as a model” merely an attempt to validate and recognize the compositional process? Is it a sign of relevance in contemporary culture, similar to serialism in the past? Therefore, a critical examination of the usage of sound as a model is necessary.

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To begin with, there is an uncanny resemblance between Alvin Lucier's "I am sitting in a room" and Tristan Murail's "Mémoire, érosion" (1976). Both compositions use the tape recorder as a model, specifically the fact that the recorded sound deteriorates through repeated re-recording. Lucier literally shows this fact at work in his composition: he reads the text and records it. From there, he records his recorded reading and continues the process, each subsequent recording showing more and more distortion. Lucier describes this process as follows: "As the process continued more and more of the resonances of the room came forth; the intelligibility of the speech disappeared. Speech became music. It was magical" (2012: 90). Clearly, Lucier is fascinated by the process of speech dissolving into music. This is due to the acoustic properties of the room: by re-recording in the same room over and over again, the resonant frequencies of that room become stronger and stronger until they destroy the speech into noise. To achieve this, it is important that no other new sounds interfere with the process. Therefore, Lucier made the recordings at night to avoid unwanted ambient noise.

Murail applied the model in a different manner. He envisioned two tape recorders placed a certain distance apart, with the first recording and the second playing back. The distance between the two recorders determines the delay in the playback of the recorded sound. The first recorder continues to record and will include the previously recorded material when it is played back by the second recorder. This setup comes from early experiments with live instruments mixed with electronic sounds and is called the re-injection loop. For his composition Murail has an imaginary re-injection loop: the horn is the soloist "being recorded" while the ensemble functions as the "playback" of the recording. In his writing for the ensemble Murail imitates the distortion of the original signal as he further explains in the following passage:

But the initial phrase (or sound) will never be exactly repeated. With each repetition, a process of erosion will be played out that, while destroying the original musical structures played by the horn, will gradually reconstitute new structures that, in turn, will be put to the same process of erosion; and in this way the piece develops. (2005a: 125)

The obvious difference is that Murail composed an instrumental work, while Lucier used only his voice and the tape recorders. However, both composers are fascinated by the sound of the tape recorder, especially how it deteriorates through repeated re-recording. This is clear for Lucier, as he

described above, but Murail also has sound as the original creative impulse for his composition, as he declares:

The interest in the process is that the sound, recopied and, above all, continually remixed with the new signals, is progressively worn down, degraded, transformed, destroyed. The sound merges with white noise, and the process ends with the emergence of new frequencies, of self-generated rhythms, of interferences. (125)

Therefore, for the composer, the tape recorder is not only a conceptual model, but also a model of sound. This should not surprise us: from the beginning, spectral composers have strongly emphasized sound as their model, in contrast to the parametric organization of the serialists. Gérard Grisey, together with Murail the founder of spectral music, vehemently asserts: “We are musicians and our model is sound and not literature, sound and not mathematics, sound and not theatre, the visual arts, quantum physics, geology, astrology, or acupuncture!” (1998: 298). Indeed, both Lucier and Murail, share an interest in sound. Rather than abstract concepts, they base their creativity on sound itself. Despite this commonality, their music differs substantially, so the resemblance between the two compositions discussed above is indeed striking. Based on this discovery, our investigation will center on the role of sound for both composers. How do they employ sound, and for what purposes?

An interesting starting point is the text Alvin Lucier wrote and recorded for his composition titled “I am sitting in a room”. The text outlines the steps involved in creating the composition, and it is intentionally simple. Lucier himself wrote about the text: “It was crucial to avoid poetic references – poems, prayers, anything with high aesthetic value. I felt that would only get in the way. I wanted the acoustic exploration to be paramount, the room acoustics and its gradual transformation to be the point of the piece” (2012: 90). Thus, the text’s sole significance is to provide audio material useful in executing the gradual transformation. This leads us to a crucial feature of Lucier’s approach, which he shared with other Sonic Arts Union members: the process constitutes the content of the work. In one of his discussions about his and his colleagues’ Sonic Arts Union music, Lucier observes: “Most of the works share a common compositional principle: an action or process, set into motion and sustained throughout the course of the work, produces unexpected and complex results” (1998: 11).

The focus on a process is for Lucier and his colleagues a way to realize non-subjective music, similar to John Cage's methods of using chance. The difference with John Cage, however, is that Alvin Lucier is not realizing an abstract concept, but the process is audible. His music, as non-subjective as it is intended to be, is realized with extreme care for sound. It is beautiful, and that is intentional. This is not a contradiction: the beauty comes from a process that unfolds in a carefully controlled situation. There is no chance involved, and the process runs its course without any intervention from the composer. As a result, the process is the music, no more and no less. This is the non-subjective music as intended by the composer. While the process is carefully executed, it is an act that is not emotionally involved.

Murail, together with Grisey, the founders of the spectral school, also use processes in their music. It is the main technique to build musical form, especially in the early years. But their purpose is different, and later the spectralists use the processes in different ways because they find the result too predictable. This can be understood from the purpose for which they use sound. As mentioned before, spectral composers emphasize sound in their compositional approach. Nevertheless, Murail avoids using sound solely for aesthetics, stating that "The craft that takes sound as its point of departure is not a pursuit of 'beautiful sound' as is sometimes alleged. It rather tries to create a method of communicating clearly with sonic material" (2005b: 150). This implies that the objective is not sound, but communication through sound. It indicates the personal intention of a composer is to convey a message, to establish a communication.

The intriguing aspect regarding Murail and by extension the spectral composers, and Lucier and the other sonic arts union composers is their use of sound for what appear to be different and contrasting purposes. Strikingly, as we can see, this resonates with Michael Polanyi's ideas about knowledge and perception in relation to the use of a tool:

(...) the impacts of a tool on our hands are integrated in a way similar to that by which internal stimuli are integrated to form our perceptions: the integrated stimuli are noticed at a distance removed outward from the point where they impinge on us. In this sense impacts of a tool on our hands function as internal stimuli, and a tool functions accordingly as an extension of our hands. (1969: 127)

Polanyi explains that when we use a tool, we do not feel the tool in our hands, but rather through the tool we feel the object that the tool is touching. He uses the example of a blind person using a stick to feel, where the blind person feels the materials touched by the stick, not the stick itself. Therefore, the stick becomes an extension of the hands. Translating this analogy to music, Murail's approach can be seen as perceiving the sound as a stimulus that extends beyond the vibrations we hear. The communication through the sound is the goal of our listening, not just the sound that reaches our ears. On the other hand, Lucier's focus is purely on the sound itself, as if the blind person would focus on the sensations of the stick in their hand instead of the surface touched by the stick. According to Polanyi, the difference between both types of perception is as follows:

We can be aware of them uncomprehendingly, i.e. in themselves, or understandingly in their participation in a comprehensive entity. In the first case we focus our attention on the isolated particulars; in the second, our attention is directed beyond them to the entity to which they contribute. In the first case therefore we may say that we are aware of the particulars focally; in the second, that we notice them subsidiarily in terms of their participation in a whole. (128)

Here, Polanyi explains how we can direct our focus either on our perception or on the significance of our perception which goes beyond what we perceive. However, despite the accuracy of this description, it is unfortunate that Polanyi uses the terms “uncomprehendingly” and “understandingly” to differentiate between two forms of perception. While this terminology is appropriate in the context of a physician examining a patient's symptoms, something typical of Polanyi, being a scientist himself, it is not suitable for describing the music of Lucier and the Sonic Arts Union. Instead, the term “focal” attention would be more appropriate. This suggests that the composers prioritized the sound without conveying any additional intentions or meanings. The term “uncomprehendingly” would be inappropriate since there is no intention beyond the sound to comprehend. With that said, Polanyi's observation is useful and accurate for our discussion. Familiarity with the codes of concert music enables comprehension of Murail's music and spectral music in general. Comprehension in the sense that our communication with the composer is solely through the sound we hear.¹ However, Sonic Arts Union music

differs in that it doesn't require familiarity with concert music. There is nothing to gain or miss, but simply an opportunity to listen and experience the sound unfolding in time.

With this in mind, could the difference in perception indicate that spectral music is a more developed form of music, or that the experimental music of the Sonic Arts Union is less sophisticated? Not quite. As Polanyi further elaborates:

We can articulate this distinction in terms of meaning. When we focus solely on a set of particulars without understanding them, they remain relatively meaningless as compared to their significance when noticed within the broader context to which they contribute. As a result we have two kinds of meaning: [...] In the first case, unspecificity impedes the analysis of a given meaning; in the second case, it restricts the discovery of an unknown meaning. (128: 29)

The implication of this quote is informative: if Murail and spectral composers use sound to communicate, it is to convey meaning and, therefore, understanding their context and tradition is crucial. Conversely, the lack of an explicitly intended meaning beyond the sound can lead to discoveries of previously unknown meanings. This appears to be a scenario with two contrasting perspectives: having established expectations, the attention remains limited within the range of these expectations and its tradition; alternatively, the absence of expectations enables one to explore an array of possibilities without prior delineated limitations. Therefore, it is fitting to describe Lucier and the Sonic Arts Union composers as experimental composers, as they demonstrated a willingness to pioneer novel methods of creating music and contribute to a fresh form of musical expression.

Nevertheless, it may be tempting to interpret the room reflections in Alvin Lucier's "I am sitting in a room" as a newfound aspect with potential meaning. The gradual amplification of room frequencies with each re-recording is a captivating technique employed by Lucier. Through the repeated recordings, the room functions as an amplifier of frequencies with sound waves that fit the size of the room. All other frequencies with different wavelengths are filtered out and disappear. Lucier describes this process as follows:

Imagine a room so many meters long. Now imagine a sound wave that fits the room, which reflects off the wall in sync with itself. It will be louder (constructive interference). This is called a standing wave. If the wave doesn't fit it will bounce back out of sync and dissipate its energy (destructive interference). This is a simplistic model of what happens in *I am Sitting in a Room*. All the components of my speech that related to the physical dimensions of the room are reinforced; those that don't, disappear. (2012: 90)

While room frequencies are a widely accepted fact, the manner in which Lucier uses them in this composition is truly remarkable. The gradual dissipation of speech in the room's frequencies is the primary concept in Lucier's composition and the natural outcome of re-recording in the same room devoid of any interference that can impact the process. So given that fact, what possible meaning did experimental composers aim to uncover or discover? One possibility is the assumption that the listening attitude in experimental music differs: one should listen with an open mind and full attention, but without any personal involvement or expectations. This approach contrasts with the experience of a traditional concert, where attention is linked to personal fulfillment in reaction to the musical discourse and expectations. In experimental music, the sonic experience and its transformation take precedence over any attempt to create a narrative. The listener only needs to provide attentive reception—devoid of expectations—to fully appreciate the music. Consequently, enjoyment derives solely from the sounds themselves. Therefore, listener engagement is not necessary or desired, as the sound process evolves independently.

Finally, it could be argued that as spectral music intends to establish communication, it could potentially lead to lesser focus to the actual sound. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between concert music created by spectralists and that of experimental composers does not stem from an increase or decrease in attention for the perception of sound. Returning to Polanyi once again, we find:

These alternatives do not necessarily involve any change in the degree of attention given to the particulars. When after having first looked uncomprehendingly at the symptoms of a patient we hit on the diagnosis of his illness, his symptoms become meaningful without becoming less noticeable. Focal and subsidiary awareness are definitely not two degrees of attention but two kinds of attention given to the same particulars. (1969: 128)

Again, Polanyi takes the model of a physician. His statement that focal and subsidiary awareness are two kinds of attention (not two degrees of attention) can easily be applied to music. Awareness of the sound is not diminished by awareness of the musical discourse. Therefore, spectral music's goal to communicate through sound does not reduce the sound to a mere means of communication. In fact, spectral composers also draw inspiration from the unique characteristics of sound in their compositions and both Murail, as well as Gérard Grisey mentioned above, held a fascination with the scientific aspects of sound. The discrepancy lies not in awareness of, or sensitivity toward sound, but in the approach to music: spectral composers craft concert music with a musical discourse while experimental composers manipulate sound to follow a meticulously controlled trajectory. The process set up by Alvin Lucier coincides with the musical form, while the musical processes used by Murail are tools to establish communication. In short, the focus on the communication does not diminish the attention to sound; communication is established precisely through sound.

To conclude, Lucier and Murail, along with the respective schools they champion, use sound as a model. The Sonic Arts Union composers do so in response to Cage's employment of random chance as a method, whereas the spectralists do so as a counterreaction to the dominant serial music in the 1960s and 1970s. From their shared focus on sound, both experimental composers and spectralists possess a highly developed sensitivity and scientific interest in its perception. However, their distinction lies in the application of sound. Polanyi's theory of knowledge helps to articulate this distinction: while experimental composers subject sound to a process without interference, paying particular attention to its gradual transformation, spectralists use sound to convey meaning. Sometimes this approach is referred to as sound art, a sonic situation, or an installation. No categories with different names have been established in this essay due to Lucier's self-identification as a composer and his work as compositions. However, the terminology developed by Polanyi, which distinguishes between focal awareness of sound and subsidiary awareness of sound, may be useful in expressing the difference between traditional composition and experimental composition or sound art.

NOTE

1. The word “comprehension” can be misleading. Spectral music is rooted in perception, not in knowledge. Therefore, understanding music is not the result of musical study, but the result of attentive (and perhaps repeated) listening that leads to the experience of musical communication.

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Bert Van Herck received his doctorate from Harvard University, where he studied with Magnus Lindberg, Julian Anderson, Chaya Czernowin, Brian Ferneyhough, Helmut Lachenmann, and with Tristan Murail at Columbia University. He presented his analytical work at international conferences on the music of Scriabin, Oliver Knussen, spectral music, and Magnus Lindberg. Van Herck's compositions have been performed in several countries and festivals, including Gaudeamus Week and ISCM World New Music Days in Sweden and Australia.

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Gravitas: An Audiovisual Cadavre Exquis for Times of Lexicon Reduction

Daniel Brandão and Heitor Alvelos

Abstract Gravitas is an audiovisual piece that brings together three creative outputs generated independently: a concert, an audio reconstruction/edit, and a video. All three converge in the final piece while the overall motto (acoustic ascension / figurative revelation) remains consistent. The piece signals a migration of the avant-garde onto a broader sphere of resonance, by weaving pure acoustics with field recordings, visual abstraction with tangible figuration, semiotic deconstruction with narrative allure. However, while the avant-garde can no longer afford its own traditional entrenchment, visibility as a duty in contemporary culture may demand dilution to the point of irrelevance. Gravitas attempts to untangle this conundrum.

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WHY “GRAVITAS”?

Every year from 2008 to 2017, The FuturePlaces Medialab for Citizenship was a deliberately chaotic meeting place where media research met citizenship, in contextual, hands-on projects that rehearsed unorthodox uses of new media; viral epiphanies, one might say.

This mission, at the core of FuturePlaces since its inception, observed and interpreted then-current trends and developments. Every year a *motto* was proposed, a response to the *zeitgeist*. Gravitas was proposed as the *motto* for the 2015 edition, as a potential antidote to the hallucinatory abandon and volatility of the present times; a call for wisdom, for grounding and sobriety. And like a wider set of choice words that seem to have vanished from our vocabulary, it is a largely absent term whose meaning—whose role in our consciousness—has paradoxically never seemed so crucial. Through gravitas we emerge and rise: a journey from infrasound to ultrasound. From uncertainty to clarity, from rootedness to elevation.

PROCESS

The sound component of the audiovisual piece “Gravitas” is a studio reconstruction and re-consideration of a sound performance that took place at FuturePlaces on October 24, 2015. The performance was the closing event of the MediaLab’s annual meeting, bringing together various local and guest musicians with no prior shared musical experience. This approach had worked well in past instances, as the musicians were given a set of parameters that allowed for an open structure in their improvisational dynamics. In keeping with the overall *motto* of the 2015 edition, each musician was invited to begin their contribution by generating low frequency sounds, gradually and intuitively moving toward higher frequencies, culminating in ultrasound.

Originally, the medialab editors planned to release the gig itself via the FuturePlaces online archive, but a number of technical and aesthetic drawbacks affecting both the performance and the recording rendered this undesirable. The drawbacks boil down to one simple evidence: every performer has at some point found themselves in a situation where all the ideal ingredients seem to be there, and yet momentum just does not follow; this was one such evening. Technically, the concert was made particularly challenging by the inclusion of a sound device prototyped at the medialab: a lemon tree activated as a theremin through the use of arduino

technology.¹ While certainly promising as a prototype, it created unexpected challenges in the acoustic integration and harmonization of its fairly unpredictable sound behavior.

In the aftermath of the performance, the team could respond by acknowledging that the momentum simply did not occur—or the experience itself could be used as a source for further interpretation and development, namely by providing an opportunity to contrast live improvisational dynamics with a studio-based experiment that could more successfully ensure an equivalent level of obliquity.

The performance was therefore subsequently reconstructed as a studio piece, with each original performer contributing with their own source material, unaware of each other's inputs. On December 28, 2015, the same set of musicians were invited to provide a new sound piece following the original, frequency-based premise, and place it on a shared online storage space. Only after providing their own piece could the musician listen to other contributions. Some musicians chose to provide a single piece, while others chose to contribute with multiple pieces. Although all original musicians agreed to participate, one original performer ended up not contributing.

Once all the contributions had been gathered, the same set of musicians was invited to edit the wealth of materials into a single sound composition. In theory, this could result in multiple variations of the “infrasound-ultrasound” premise; in practice, only one piece surfaced, edited by the medialab curator. This editing process thus attempted to harmonize the chance encounter of the various sources with an intuitive compositional element. The edited piece was then shared and approved by all contributors, and subsequently made available as an online edition via Touch Music.

In order to redeem the previous year's experiment, in mid-2016 a videomaker was invited to produce a film with no prior listening of the sound piece—the only information provided was the length, the timecode of a series of key moments, and the “ascension” premise. The video piece, with the exception of a 30-second segment, consisted entirely of video footage provided by the Museum of Ransom, an audiovisual ethnography project that challenges anonymous citizens and visitors to Porto to collectively build a contemporary portrait of the city by documenting fragments of their daily lives in a fairly random fashion. This video, along with the audio edit, formed an audiovisual piece that premiered at the closing of the following FuturePlaces annual meeting on October 22, 2016.

The visual collage took the sound piece as its template and itself engaged in a process of gradual unraveling, this time from abstraction to figuration—while maintaining metaphorical resonance. The visions of the citizens were intersected through overlapping layers and merged through extremely smooth transitions, creating soft passages between dark and bright moments. This kind of continuous imagery traveling was accelerated and decelerated as a quasi-figurative template open to recognition and interpretation.

INTERPRETATION

Gravitas, the audiovisual piece, emerged from a relatively unsuccessful onstage experience, to become an experiment in the meaning and aesthetic value provided by chance layering. The convergence of autonomous elements argues for an often undervalued (even unwelcome) factor in the creative process: the purposeful investment in uncontrolled outcomes. Editing is ultimately the key moment in the mediation between what could be a dissonant collage of unrelated sources, and a proto-compositional approach that points toward an intuitive semantic development.

This can be seen as an antidote to the lexical reduction often currently at work in online instances today, where we may simultaneously witness processes of hyper-literality (or a death of the metaphorical) and an ever-growing self-generation of algorithmic content that provides a perverse semblance of meaning.

Furthermore, the piece signals a possible migration of the avant-garde into a broader sphere of resonance, by weaving pure acoustics with field recordings, visual abstraction with tangible figuration, semiotic deconstruction with narrative allure. However, this broader sphere of resonance is itself a conundrum: while the avant-garde can no longer afford its own traditional entrenchment, visibility as an unspoken duty in contemporary culture may require concept or content dilution to the point of irrelevance. It is this conundrum that Gravitas attempts to untangle in its own way.

GRAVITAS

All visuals randomly provided by citizens and visitors of Porto, Portugal, 2012–2016

Raw footage available at the Museum of Ransom
 Wave sequence by Heitor Alvelos, 2015
 Edited by Daniel Brandão for futureplaces medialab, 2016
 Sound by the futureplaces Impromptu All-Stars Orchestra:

Heitor Alvelos, digital frequencies
Anselmo Canha, bass, field recordings
Anabela Duarte, treated voice
José Maria Lopes, guitar
Jaime Munárriz guitar, trumpet, electronics
Jono Podmore, theremin
Pupa, saxophone (concert)
André Rocha, arduino-activated lemon tree (concert)

Woven and edited by Heitor Alvelos, Porto, August–September 2016
 Mastered by Jono Podmore, Köln, September 2016
 The words that bookend the piece belong to Bernadette Martou (1962–2015)

Related content available at: futureplaces.org/gravitas-video/futureplaces.bandcamp.com/album/gravitastouch33.net/?s=gravitasmuseudoresgate.org
 In memoriam Bruce Geduldig 1953–2016.

NOTE

1. Arduino is an open-source electronics platform based on easy-to-use hardware and software.

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