

Template for Chapter VI

music of sounds, music of things

Laura Netz – Medial Ages

In the last few years, since 2012 I have been working on a live AV performance which can be defined as an experimental electromagnetic, power-noise performance. It uses DIY circuits consisting of oscillators, LDR, solar cells, Schmitt triggers, light sources (lamps, strobes) and induction coils. The oscillators, based on the 555 IC or Schmitt triggers, take 9V input and transform it into sound. The circuitry is also made by optoelectronic components. The result produces a repetitively modulated wave that could be a sine-wave or square-wave. The light sources control the circuits modulating the signal, or in other words, the light triggers sonic signals. In a sound/light integration, the modulation of tone activates an interactive system based on DIY circuitry. It is a self-generated sonic machine creating a syncopated, high-pitched, noisy beep. Moreover, the field emanated from the Light Electromagnetic Pulse (LEMP) creates interferences captured by the induction coils making audible the electromagnetic field. The result is an a-rhythmic noise performance based on saturation and collapse. The triggering of the sonic signal through different media devices causes an innovative sound based on new bio-sonic materialism that try to move forward to cutting-edge sound development. The performance investigates Simondon's transduction effects: precisely the same process occurs when light stimulates brain waves. Suffice it to say that the process involves the complex, split-second operation of a system of signals between neurons in the skin and brain, the light and the sound. Also, an a-rhythmic noise performance based on post-war non-musical tendencies, with an improvised composition, and an indeterminate response, which does not create either a melody, a narration, nor harmony or structure. It is a work of deconstruction, where interpretation opens to subjective somatic experience transgressing the law of composition. The flickering from the strobes assaults the senses to create neurological after-images. The audiences' subconscious and altered states are activated to open experimentation of feelings and knowledge. The result is an open experience opposed to rhythm, discourse, narrative, and composition. Contrary, the performance facilitates open meaning, subjectivity and possibility is the result.

The aesthetics of my performance are mainly influenced by the DIY movement. It is clear that all artists perform an intellectual and aesthetic process until reaching a practical resolution for their work. In my particular case, the story begins with the influence of new media in contemporary art. The inclusion of technologies such as video and audio in the 70s with Name June Paik and John Cage blur an aesthetic profile that separates me from the visual arts, practically conceived as painting and sculpture. Moreover, my education and practice are split between performance noise and also the theoretical research that culminates in curatorial practice.

My noise performance is made of handmade electronics, and this determines the aesthetics of its sound. In this theoretical pursuit of an ethic of production, the performance is defined by creating low-cost pieces that deviate from the dynamics of capitalist and technological production. At a time when the culmination of the capitalist process enters the post phase, the differentiation between technology and capitalism is practically impossible. Evolution, growth, capital and technology are

unsustainably inseparable. I intend to defend an ethic of production, within the limits of a technophobic technology that can offer critical alternatives to the system.

Moreover, if we talk about aesthetics, I have to reference, Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of the New Music*, which explains the surrealist change made by the twelve-tone music to the traditional system of notation. The strident a-melodic definition of atonal music could be applied to some parts of electronic music principles, which are perceived far from the usual canons, in favour of experimentation, noise and criticism.

Aesthetically what I try to communicate is a logical relationship between material and production, with influences of the Anthropocene, and how the human has manipulated/transformed nature. I also refer to *Archaeology of the Media*, in Jussi Parikka, where a temporary logic is replaced by the sequence of facts focused on materialism, geopolitics and scarcity of resources (matter replaces time). I look for the simplicity of electronics in primary materials, and I try not to participate in the technological consumption of mass production. Although, I do agree to acquire raw materials and electronic components thanks to the emergence of the internet which has given the opportunity to access the market with platforms such as Ali Baba. It allows the production in the critical distance of the maker, facilitated in hackerspaces, hack labs, and others.

On the other hand, my curatorship has as references, other curators. I am interested in the interrelationship between science and art in the projects of Bruno Latour, theorist and sociologist who also writes about the Anthropocene. My starting point for the exhibition is the process. Due to the influence of the new media, I am interested in transforming the space of the exhibition into a place of interactions, where the subjects or audiences are part of the action, not only as a passive reception but also touching and experiencing. I am influenced by the emergence of hands-on practice in the DIY, and the practice of workshops in hack labs. So, I am interested in transforming the exhibition into a workshop, transferring the laboratory to the gallery and museum, as in the case of the Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas who transforms presentation space into a workshop, where new art is created and film screenings, concerts and performance are part of the production.

My curatorial practice is denouncing the risk of a highly techno-scientific society. In this way represents the extreme subjectivism in DIY techniques and confronts the industrial process vs the DIY / open source technologies. There is in all of this a constant concern for climate change and sustainability, and also an interest in the emerging innovation that happens in the sonic labs. These labs where I practice my curatorship are representatives of the new economic paradigms that aim to strengthen the cultural network, the community. The labs based on self-organisation, cultural dynamism, and the stimulation of creativity, legitimise the collective through cultural activities in a specific context. The lab does not exist in one particular stipulated form and can be located in different spaces: artists' studios, galleries, industrial buildings, art centres, community centres, museums, etc. The lab and the curating tasks in the lab are community actions, with support from the government, but in an alternative, self-sustaining economic development, and part of a micro-economy. Contrary to that, the museum is a well-established form of culture, which suffers from a lack of public accountability.

Moreover, my curatorial practice is influenced by the transformations in culture, capital and ecology during the late 90s which are the contextual history for the emergence of hackerspaces, media labs, and sonic labs. In Bruno Latour's text, *Give Me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World* (1983), the essay defines the laboratory as the place in science and technology, where innovation happens. From the depth of the lab, the society is so directly modified. It defines the power of the lab to transform society, rebuilding the system in which is embedded. Moreover, since the 1990s, the sonic

labs have aligned with critical and alternative practices indicating a separation from the neoliberal economies of private sector galleries and established cultural institutions in the public sector (Jaron Rowan, 2015). Reacting against these, the sonic lab is often characterised by using open source and digital media and focuses on radically transforming production denouncing how capitalistic market speculates with the value of art objects. The sonic lab offers a confrontation with the methods of capitalistic technologies and provides models of collaborative practices which encourage experimentation and creativity in the curation of sound arts. The sonic lab operates in this direction offering practices of collaborative networks or instrument making that make these processes of production more personal but located in a community. Such labs can address new institutional opportunities in humanities to engage with practice-based knowledge creation and extend their mission to include tools, techniques and a new curatorial scope. So, my practice can be defined as curating the lab.

Promoting participation in workshops, the sonic labs dissociate from the institutional space of the museum, allied with passive and contemplative aesthetics. Although many museums are nowadays aware of this dimension, their root is classically forged in contemplative aesthetics. Recently Tate Modern has offered more interactive and dynamics works in the exhibition, but the transformative function of the lab would be to transform the museum into a learning machine.

Moreover, the practices developed in the sonic lab enhance new media curating, for instance setting the exhibition space as a sonic lab. The labs' forms are those of the music studio, the studio where artistic experiments are conducted along with various practices and machines, electronic synthesisers, films, audio tapes, and electronic components. Furthermore, the procedural way in which sonic labs engage with creative work is dynamic, allowing open processes in trans-disciplinary experimentation. To approach these manners of working into exhibition space – recreating and re-enacting sonic lab practices in an exhibition -- can be understood as exhibiting the lab. However, how useful is it? Is this the site of display and the site of production? Is it possible to expose the work in process?

The sonic lab offers new opportunities to the exhibition in the art gallery, transforming it into a lab where applied arts are mediated through interdisciplinary work with science, producing experiments. It is a socially constructed structure that permits to give answers to new creative developments. Following Bruno Latour, in the lab, art, science and technology fuse with critical and cultural activity; the lab becomes a site of mediation, in between theory and practice, discursive and non-discursive. Latour notes that labs in the art approach to the science lab, extend the material practices into the exhibition place, and proceed to experimentation, work in process, and an open-ended process to build knowledge.

The result, the exhibition lab, can be seen in many other labs. From maker spaces to fab labs, but very few have explicitly related to sound. So here the interest is to address the role of sonic arts, audio arts, and sound arts in the space of the lab critically. So many examples of media labs, hacker zones, maker spaces, humanities labs, fab labs, tech incubators, innovation centres, hack labs and media archaeology labs already exist, and now it is the turn of the sonic labs to be positioned and claim for their existence and results.

Also, my practice as a performer and curator is based on the search of sound producing devices. My practice is influenced by the theory of sound that considers it as something intangible and immaterial. Thus, the object becomes abject, fetishised, monetised, and anthropomorphised. Therefore, I contrast musical instruments with other instruments created with raw materials, which are dematerialised instruments. In this, DIY techniques and the process of creation or deconstruction

have a lot to do with it. In a minimalist interest in electronics, my approach is deconstructive. As a critical attitude, I am not interested in providing more instruments but to formalise elementary practices. In the process of catalysis, I propose to expose as well as to act with instruments without a body, those enacted in an organ without the body; definitely, devices which are disembodied.

In this way, the relationship with materials is physical. Interested in the Anthropocene, I think about how my performance can denounce the exploitation of natural resources. It is known that all information and communication technologies need minerals to be created. Any piece of hardware is dependent on this source of natural wealth that are minerals. Currently, computers need rare minerals and minerals such as silicon, coltan, zinc, copper, cobalt, gallium, tantalum, antimony, germanium, etc. A little investigation around the production channels of these technologies reveals that most of the minerals come from ex-colony countries that have been mistreated by colonialist policies. In this inheritance, for example, the Congo, is currently suffering from post-national politics based on imperialist capitalism that is intensely technological. In Congo, the case of the red mines has exploded. Those mines are not regulated by the government of the Congo. The green mines are those that are subject to government controls and issue certificates of authentication to the EU and US corporations. In western countries, a law has been decreed according to which corporations must only acquire minerals with certifications. However, the red mines are currently resulting in child exploitation, the guerrillas (who control these mines) and the displacement of people, with consequent famine and unhygienic living conditions.

The interest in mineral materials fits with the theory of Media Archaeology by Jussy Parikka. In the words of Parikka, the necessary mining for computer technology, the environmental impact and the electronic waste are shaping a new landscape. This dependence of the computational with the minerals transforms the geographical content into a geological dimension. The interest of the materials lies in the so-called materialisation of the media, where geophysical elements express the scarcity of resources, the technological regimes, the geopolitics of labour, the planetary excavations, and the aftereffects of electronic waste. Here, my position is critical with the programmed obsolescence of the capitalist-technological and unsustainable model of innovation.

The logical consequence in between technique and technology in my performance culminates with the influence of dodecaphonic music. Rejecting the commercialised mass production of traditionally notated music, and questioning the esoteric characteristics of the modern technique of composition, I am interested in atonality as a new movement contrary to merchandise. Radical music against the commercial, based on the experimental, the unconscious, the anarchy. Because from an Adornian point of view, technical progress has a rationalist origin, based on calculation, while the atonal music destroys the aesthetic appearance of the technical work in pursuit of a liberated, advanced, critical, expressionist, and subjective music. The autonomy and subjective freedom are contrary to any techne. Already in Adorno, like in Benjamin, the technical work of art is part of the commercialisation and the mass product. Thus in these founding authors, the link between capitalism and technology is already glimpsed. In this way, the artist with a critical spirit must stay away from both currents because this is the essential social motor of art, for which society is built.

Due to the social component of music, it interrelates with other disciplines, like visual arts or new media. It makes electronic music especially a social actor, which is also part of the new media art. The interest in new media is evident in the practice of electronic music from this critical and evolutionary distance of the technical material and the technology of music. From my experience, as a curator, I have always mixed the robotics with DIY art to optimise a critical and broad perspective of electronic music with new media. For example, in the last exhibition organised in London, hacked prototypes of Japanese robotics, old assembled scanners, and creations of handmade electronics

were exhibited. In this way, different prototypes lived in the same environment, sharing features of the electronic music and the new media.

The truth is that I am not interested in the world of celebrities, I prefer to speak in terms of art worker or artist or curator. I do not believe in fame as access to a better life but in hard work and equal opportunities. Also, a system based on fame as a value for their sustenance is uncomfortable and inconsistent. My tradition is Marxist and of materialist roots where the work is done measured according to value - understood as investment time - by which an exchange must be demanded. However, in these current times, the precariousness is a phenomenon extended to all the arts, from its production and development to its exhibition and distribution. According to my experience, art is a social structure that suffers from greater insecurities and economic instability. Judging by my practice, only part of my curatorial activity is remunerated. Both the independent curator and the performer are two disciplines affected by a temporary discontinuity, so they lack a permanent program unless working in a museum, institution and gallery. According to the writer and blogger *soymenos*, the precariousness of the worker of culture, of cultural employment, is today more flagrant than ever; it is something verifiable in the treatment of the institution with the artists or the relations of the educational and university institution with a good part of its community. Also, the art system is nothing more than a masquerade of the classiest and patriarchal neoliberal system. The scarcity of resources that legitimise the possibility of access to super-structures of all those who participate in art and culture is irremediably unequal. While museums invest large amounts of money in blockbuster exhibitions of recognised talents, the gap in the local/alternative context continues to suffer from a scarcity of resources and lack of interest on the part of institutions. It does not make it easier for the artist or curator to make himself known, and that is why own names are scarce, especially in the current experimental art and music scene. There is also another economic dimension, based on innovation, and perhaps the use of technology, and that is the false hope in freelance and independence. It generates a dependence on institutional super-structures such as the Arts Council England, which consider this irregularity and spontaneity but does not strive to reinforce the community. In this way, the use of new media has also facilitated access to micro-economic structures, but these continue to legitimise the *precarariat*. If at any time, the institutional, economic structure would be interested in giving visibility and continuity to experimental art, it would open the door of museums with stable and defined programs. In short, I believe that talent and artistic practice suffer a lot from this economic structure that does not facilitate access to better conditions in which a performer, an artist or curator can develop their activity and make their name known.

Apparently, in this context, there can be a difference between the high art and the experimental scene. I do not know precisely to what extent the relationship art / popular music can fit into the high art / experimental art. In the history of electronic music, there are excellent references that are still struggling to position themselves in the history of art. The figure of John Cage is critical, which has been recognised with several individual exhibitions in large international museums. However, to this extent, I believe that inequalities do nothing but grow. The figure of women artists (those great strangers) is stigmatised, and the value of a great genius (parents of art, Picasso, Dali) is legitimised. If the context and the relational practice of these artists (John Cage, and other avant-garde figures who seek to establish themselves) were more valued, art would realise that this personal and egotistical legitimisation entails a trap. The logic of our time is to claim a different story in which there are not erected, geniuses or gender inequalities, but maybe an art that emerges without differing from the popular because it is generated and generates community.

As a curator, I started in the world of curating when I came into contact with art and new media. After a few years of studying electronic art from the 60s until the 90s, I became interested in the open source and Linux movement. The history of computation is marked by the creation by Linus Torvaldsen and Richard Stallman of an alternative system to Microsoft with different intentions. The world of free software has been erected in pursuit of non-commercial values. It is a system also called open and structured around the community. A community of users and developers that contribute to its cause, based on the access and transfer of knowledge, entirely contrary to the capitalist interest of its enrichment. In this anticapitalistic logic, the pioneers of free code also declare themselves enemies of copyright. So ideologically related to the world of free software is the movement of Creative Commons. Creative Commons facilitates distribution licenses for artists that can exemplify diverse uses of work: Attribution, Share-alike, Non-commercial, No Derivative Works. However, non-commercial / no-derivatives are problematic if you take the Four Freedoms of Free Software as a guide. The defenders of the Creative Commons, like the lawyer Lawrence Lessig, author of Code 2.0, are defenders of the net neutrality and the free culture. This interest in FLOSS Free Libre Open Source Software leads me to publish my works under Creative Commons licences. So, my record label is published under licenses that protect my work, but at the same time, they grant me freedom and independence.

Moreover, my performance, as I explained above, has some political identity in the radicalism of its sounds, which does not seek to be attractive to the public, and sometimes can be perceived as unpleasant. It is because in the aesthetics of my sound there is an ethical background that tries to reflect on geopolitical conflicts around the scarcity of materials and technological production. So it is contradictorily a performance facilitated by technology, but criticises the use of it. This is undoubtedly a technophobic posture. So, yes, there is a political dimension to my performance. Also, I want to say that it is much more complicated to relate these political aesthetics in an exhibition, since the environment of the exhibition is almost always neutral and aseptic, in comparison to the performance. The traditional world of the exhibition is directed towards more delimited spectatorial roles within the ensemble of the arts, while in the experimental and musical field the performance is always more radical, transgressive.

From my experience, I believe that music is a complex discipline that needs much work, from reading notation to composition. For my part, my studies are theoretical in musicology and history of music, but my practical ambition brings me closer to electronic music and DIY art. In general, I think we all have a lot of proximity to music, the most significant of the arts, and the most personal. Who has never whistled or sung or a song? I think the music is very accessible, but it encloses an enigmatic and mysterious system that makes it a very complex aesthetic art. I also think that it is effortless to access the great works of the past and to feel admiration for the creation of beauty that they have left us. Sadly, this time that we live in is severely dependent on technology and has given us the opportunity to access another aesthetic, perhaps one darker.