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Contingent Conspiracies: Art, Philosophy, Science

[If] we consider art as a material-driven process of production, these anonymous materials enjoy an autonomy of their own; and such autonomy continuously interferes with the artwork itself regardless of the decisions of the artist – that is, whether or not the artist determines to be ‘open’ to their influence.

-Reza Negarestani

The question of whether creativity comes from being “open” or “closed” to contingent processes, deeply intersects art-historical discourse on authorship, style, technique and practice: from the Greek notion of the *Daimon*, through *commedia dell'arte*'s improvised styles and romanticism's investment of fatality, to the modern cults of madness and primitivism and the avant-garde's explicit use of divination, chance and “automatic” operations. Even idealist aesthetics where the notion of *beauty* hinges on the notion of freedom, articulated on the distinction between determinism and will (Schiller, Kant, Hegel) contain a deeper tension between contingency and necessity, often revealed in correlate discussions of the *sublime*. But as artists find themselves returning again to a *concern* or *care* for contingency (a thread running through Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida) or the question how to *conspire* with contingency (Negarestani), they do so today with a new paradigm of scientific knowledge at their disposal. For science too has increasingly been forced to respond to the notion of contingency. Progressively discovering the ubiquity of non-linear dynamics, deterministic chaos and emergent complexity in the natural world, science has been forced it to reassess its foundational motifs. Contingency and necessity, or unreason and reason, are philosophically inextricable from science's discovery of systems where randomness emerges from simple deterministic processes or where ordered patterns emerge from random distributions (chaos). Perhaps most intriguingly of all, on the “edge of chaos”, between order and randomness, universal computing (Turing) has been shown to emerge in simple rule-based systems such as Conway's “Game of Life” and Wolfram's “rule 110”, implying that any computational universe can be emulated within them, and more importantly, that complex life-like *metastable* individuations are possible in all but the most trivial systems in nature. Furthermore, just as recent speculative philosophy (Meillassoux) has attempted to disentangle itself from the feedback loops that occur when the observer's limiting constraints are taken into account, science is also confronting the so-called “correlational circle”. The question of the observer or agent and its inherent complexity, is at the center of the scientific model's unavoidable distinction between *noise and signal*, or between irrelevant and relevant information. Wolfram, for example, theorizes that *computational irreducibility*—that is, algorithms found to be unpredictable (undecidable)—are merely cases where the system is of *equal complexity* as our own (*principle of computational equivalence*). Incidentally, from the point of view of aesthetics, it is difficult not to detect in this principle a hint of the *kantian sublime*. This paper will offer a survey of these and other findings drawn from my doctoral research. Following a *speculative pragmatic* approach, several implicit conceptual links between art practice (understood as an aesthetic concern for contingency, innovation and emergence), science's attempts to model complex systems, and philosophies of process (Deleuze, Simondon, Whitehead) will be discussed.

Tuning Speculation (list of presenters and abstracts)

BIO:

Alexander Wilson is a media artist and theorist based in Montreal, Canada. His broadly interdisciplinary practice deals with processes of self-organization, evolution, chaos, signification and ritual. His audiovisual performances involve the synchronization of patterns of light and sound (*The Soliton Crossing*, *The Fine Tuning*), and have been presented in Canada, USA, France, Spain, Germany and Greece. He has been commissioned to produce interactive architectural installations (*...Of the Trace*, 2013, 2014; *Hinge_Dimension*, with Karmen Franinovic, 2007). As co-founder of Parabolik Guerilla Theatre, he has also directed several experimental works for the stage: *Organon* (2012), *Homo Faber* (2012), *Symbolocaust* (2007). As a musician and composer he is involved with the live-electronics trio K.A.N.T.N.A.G.A.N.O. (with Alexandre St-Onge et Jonathan Parant: *Blessure Narcissique*, 2012, *Se résigner au silence extraterrestre*, 2011, *Existe*, 2009), and his now defunct solo project *01ek* (*Suicide Prevention*, 2007, Oral records, *Imposture & Vacuity*, 2010 Encodages de l'oubli), among other electroacoustic and electronic projects. Currently a PhD candidate at UQAM, under Jean-Philippe Uzel and Bernard Stiegler (École de Philosophie d'Épineuil), his dissertation is a philosophical investigation of the links between art practice and the emergence of complexity in nature. He teaches media arts and theory at Concordia University in Montreal.

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Affordance and the Speculative Perceptual System

What terms might define a concept of “ecologicity”, and how might this concept mobilize a broader politics and aesthetics of ecological being? This paper charts the convergence of perceptual studies and ecology through the study of three theoretical trajectories: first, James J. Gibson’s notion of ecological perception; second, through developments in the field of neuroaesthetics; and third, through an analysis of a number of artworks that explicitly address the aesthetic dimensions of ecological crisis. In this way I will argue that an ecological consciousness is currently being articulated through a neurological understanding of the transactions between human and nonhuman life.

The cognitive psychologist James J. Gibson spearheaded the notion of ecological perception in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979), a book that has had a considerable impact on fields as diverse as design, phenomenology, art history, and eco-criticism. Not only did Gibson rethink human perception through the study of animal behavior, more profoundly, he defined visual perception as a crosscut between subjective experience and the objective world. This approach was especially influential in the realm of neuroaesthetics, as it has been developed through figures such as Ernst Gombrich, Michael Baxandall, and John Onians. If we are to think of the senses as netted to a larger field of neurologically-charged activity, the boundaries that subtend the traditional concept of “nature” and its related ontologies of the “human”, give way to new cartographies of the sensorial world. I will suggest that a speculative ecologicity is cultivated through the work of Dutch artist, Levi van Veluw, and German artist, Mariele Neudecker.

Amanda Boetzkes specializes in contemporary art, theory and criticism, with an emphasis on the intersection of the biological sciences and artistic practices of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Her first book, *The Ethics of Earth Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), considers the development of the earth art movement, focusing on how ecology transitioned from a scientific discourse to a domain of ethical and aesthetic concern. She is currently writing a book entitled, *Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste*, which analyzes the use and representation of garbage in contemporary art, and more subtly, how waste as such is defined, narrativized and aestheticized in the age of global capitalism. Other areas of research and publication include: currency, economic exchange and the concept of value; theories of consciousness and perception, specifically ecological perception and neuroplasticity; art and visual culture that problematizes the ontological and political status of animal species; phenomenology and art historiography; art of the American counterculture; landscape art and aesthetics from the 18th century to the present.

Noise: An Ontology of the Avant-Garde

This paper sets out from a critique of Enlightenment modernity informed by recent developments in continental realism, focusing particularly on the work of Nick Land. For Land, the modern critical subject is haunted by Kant's enumeration of the transcendental conditions of human experience in the Critique of Pure Reason which effectively enforces an epistemological limit on thought, thus consolidating modernity's most profound anxiety: human finitude. While, for Kant, transcendental mediation constitutes the human subject, underwriting the clarity and objectivity of its judgments, for Land it constitutes a veiling. In the latter's writing, Kant's a priori forms are betrayed as agents of distortion and obfuscation. At the threshold of human experience, in the very instant it attempts to commune with the outside, the transcendental human subject cannot but jam its own signal.

In this paper, I contend that the ontological condition of the moderns is akin to what is known in information theory as 'noise'. However, unlike the noise that disrupts a signal by means of non-signification, transcendental noise, following its Landian inversion, disrupts communication by means of signification itself. A representational prohibition necessarily subtends this epistemological one, and it is in the context of the former that I will suggest that it is the twentieth century avant-garde, beginning with the Futurists, who go furthest in mobilising an alternative representational modality with which to disrupt the signifying noise of transcendental mediation on the symbolic battleground of artistic representation. More profoundly, however, this modality can be understood as a species of noise itself, but a productive, primary noise that precedes any mediation by the human. Here, the avant-garde is reconsidered as a vector of a formless noise of non-signifying matter, actively deploying a performative non-savoir, a thanatropic negation of the negation that constitutes representation, invoking, as Joseph Nechvatal has put it, 'an exaltation of the void and the melting of unstable frontiers', namely, those intervening between thought and its outside, the human and the nonhuman.

Amy Ireland is a PhD Candidate in Creative Writing with the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales. Her research is focused on a reappraisal of twentieth century poetics through the prism of new theories of philosophical realism. She is also interested in cybernetic noise as a model for human cognition and ways in which formal experimentation might simulate revolt, interrupt or symbolically reinvent the transcendental scrambling of signals from a pre-representational outside. Amy is co-convenor of 'Aesthetics After Finitude', a Sydneybased speculative aesthetics research cluster and she holds an APA and an REA from the University of New South Wales.

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I propose to present sonic art research on deep geological repository sites, designed for long-term storage of nuclear waste. These sites are proposed as speculative fictions, both paranoid fantasy of containment and human-decentring opportunity for thought. I have made work recording and re-circulating digital audio recorded at these sites, premised on sonic fictions of deep time contagion. This work opens up questions, which I propose resonate with the central contradiction of the conference call between, on one hand, claimst o access material reality and, on the other hand, rhetorics of immersion and immediacy. This contradiction has led me to develop practical and theoretical work around the limits of an aesthetics of opacity and potentials of a kind of ‘gelatinous diachronicity’, where I borrow Meillassoux’s use of the ‘dia-chronic statement’ to think it in the context of this contradiction. From this, I have developed the work, combining techniques of acoustic fossil oscillation detection, used by theoretical cosmologists to infer properties of the early universe through modelling sound waves, with computer simulations, to model the material effects of stored nuclear waste over an extended time period beyond human life. Together these methods are used to simulate future acoustic oscillations. Through this focus on technological strategies of prediction, augmentation and abstraction, I propose thinking sonic matter as a seductive and anxious interface, immanent to the real. Through this, I aim to shift concepts of the sonic into a more speculative realm, and to rethink aesthetics as not excluded by but redefined by speculative thought.

Practice

The focus of my work is on indifferent temporalities- too slow and too fast for the human subject. This is informed by a context of ecological and economic crisis, and paranoid accelerated marketing, where data and materials increasingly overwhelm and bombard us, too vast or fast for the brain to consciously comprehend. It has led to an interest in digital video, sonic matter and web-based forms as anxious and seductive interfaces for registering material that can’t be directly sensed or perceived. I’m interested in what kind of affects, politics, and productions of subjectivity are at stake in this ‘de-prioritising’ of the human for Contemporary Art and the building of practices to come.

Christof Migone & Alexandre St-Onge
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Turn, turn, turn: undo's dizzy tactics in *des tournages*

Before the linguistic turn, before the curatorial turn, before the educational turn, before the speculative turn, before the sonic turn, there was Plato's turn in the *Cratylus* which depicted the dizziness of philosophers encountered once they realized that the only constant was instability and ephemerality. This paradoxical conclusion was the impetus for the duo undo's audio work *des tournages*. Performed in 2002 and published in 2008, now in 2013, the members of undo, Christof Migone and Alexandre St-Onge, propose to turn *des tournages* into a performative presentation that will confront the plethora of dualities that not only informs their collaboration but also proliferates in the theories and practices that stake knowledge onto the unknown. Since its inception in 1997, undo explores the barely perceptible, the unacceptable and the forgettable. It resolutely does an undoing and it embraces the weird, for as Eileen A. Joy points out, the etymology of the weird sends us back to turn, to bend. undo first got lost in the lowercase turn of reductive signal processing and inhaling of canned snails as a *bouche-trou* uncommunicative practice. undo is presently adrift in a virtual reality where the encounter is impossible, but their sonic performances produce "transitions caught *in actu*" (William James) where the ungraspable lingers and nourishes a hermetic process open to its mutations. *des tournages* not only speculates around the platonic circle, it creates the necessary confusion for an entirely other space/time—one where pragmatics is unprogrammed.

Christof Migone is an artist, curator and writer. His work and research delves into language, voice, bodies, performance, intimacy, complicity, endurance. He co-edited the book and CD *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001) and his writings have been published in *Aural Cultures*, *S:ON*, *Experimental Sound & Radio*, *Musicworks*, *Radio Rethink*, *Semiotext(e)*, *Angelaki*, *Esse*, *Inter*, *Performance Research*, etc. He obtained an MFA from NSCAD in 1996 and a PhD from the Department of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts of New York University in 2007. He has released seven solo audio cds on various labels (*Avatar*, *ND*, *Alien 8*, *Locust*, *Oral*). A monograph on his work, *Christof Migone - Sound Voice Perform*, was published in 2005. In 2006, the Galerie de l'UQAM in Montreal presented a mid-career survey of his work accompanied by a catalog and a DVD entitled *Christof Migone - Trou*. He currently lives in Toronto and is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto Mississauga and the Director/Curator of the Blackwood Gallery.

Alexandre St-Onge is an audio artist, a musician/improviser (acoustic bass, bass, voice and electronics) and a sound performer. He has studied literature and philosophy and he is currently doing his PhD in art. He is fascinated by creativity as a pragmatic approach of the ineffable. He has released eight solo CDs and plays in numerous bands, including *K.A.N.T.N.A.G.A.N.O.*, *Klaxon Gueule*, *Les esprits frappeurs*, *Pink Saliva*, *mineminemine*, *Shalabi Effect* and *undo*. As a composer he has worked for *kondition pluriel*, *Marie Brassard*, *Karine Denault*, *Lynda Gaudreau*, *Line Nault*, *Jérémie Niel*, *Maryse Poulin* and *Mariko Tanabe*.

Craig Smith

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Country Rats and Cage Matches; the Fabular Objects of Serres' Sonic Parasite

This proposal is for an illustrated lecture/paper describing a live sonic landscape created by two artists working from Michel Serres' fable *Le Parasite*. In 2012, visual and performing artist Craig Smith and sound recording engineer Dave Copenhaver used Serres' *Parasite* (a 1980 English translation by Lawrence Scher) to study how fictional objects and causality operate. This paper argues that studies of fiction and sonic landscapes provide a treatise that literary objects withdraw from relations, and that this is achieved by sonically performing the succinct fiction of the fable.

Michel Serres' *Parasite* is a fictional story that features rats, wrestlers, and a Roman phoenix that have human qualities. Serres' use of the fable is to allow for the exploration of relations by emphasizing object-hosts. Smith and Copenhaver's study of this fable was to sonically create objects not translated by relation but instead objects that could be illustrated through sound. Smith and Copenhaver selected pieces from Serres original text that would remove, or take out of context, the 'relational' connections between vermin, wrestlers, and mythical creatures and allows these creatures to maintain a singular object status prior to causation or relation. They culled selections of text and character descriptions in the Serres' fable that illustrated the traits of individual animal, human, and mythical creatures themselves. From these selections they created unique and original sound landscapes. The result is a one hour musical recording and live performance of sound, accompanied by video projection and a human orchestra. As a sound art performance, the *Parasite* an aesthetic of causality, and its performance of the original Serres' fiction demonstrates what Graham Harmon has called "vicarious causation."

This paper attempts to illustrate how Smith and Copenhaver's sonic creation allows fictional characters appearing in fables to be demonstrated as irreducible, fabular objects. Following from Harmon, the fabular objects in Smith and Copenhaver's sonic parasite are individual entities that are never exhausted by their relations. As fabular objects they withdraw from these relations. The fabular object of their sound art performance is described in the paper as a composition made up of irreducible objects. The sonic parasite is therefore put forth in this paper as a form of studying fiction to seek how causality operates from the fabular object. Like the parasite who seeks a host; Smith and Copenhaver's sonic parasite performance is an object with its own set of specialized behaviors and senses. The behavior of these objects is contradictory and physical; it has the ability to tolerate itself as a contradictory thing while maintaining its status as withdrawn from relations in the world. The sonic parasite is populated by objects that cannot be reduced to anything whatsoever. For Smith and Copenhaver, to perform fiction sonically is to seek to demonstrate the operations of causality.

Craig Smith is an American media artist whose art and research focuses on the process, aesthetics, and ethics of human-to-human interactivity in contemporary art, especially photography, sound, and social performance. Smith's practice includes the production of photography, performance art, sonic art, video, writing and sound recordings. He has had twenty-one solo exhibitions of photography and other media in the last ten years of his career. His

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exhibitions of photography and other art media have been featured at an international range of venues including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, PS1MOMA Contemporary Art Institute, The Tate Modern, The George Eastman House, The Hudson River Museum and galleries including CEPA Gallery Galerie Schuster Photo (Berlin), RARE Art (New York), SCM Hong Kong, ARTSPACE Sydney, The Kent Gallery and White Columns (New York). Smith has recently been awarded grants from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, a highly selective and competitive funding program supporting exhibition practices from conception to completion. Smith's forthcoming publication, entitled *Relational Art: A Guided Tour*, will be published by I.B. Tauris, LTD from London (2014).

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‘Santonate, Intonate, Detonate’: Anthelmintic SID-EAR-REALITY—Pre-Platonic, Cymatic & Cybernetic

This will be a paper on the topic (or topos) ‘tone’ as it was articulated amongst the first great speculative philosophers, the Greek phusiologoi; more specifically, on the ‘tonos’ of Pythagoras and Heraclitus (Pythagoras’s infamous ‘hypotonos’ and Heraclitus’s equally-infamous ‘palintonos’). The idea is to move from the ancient Greek tonos, hypotonos and palintonos in the first ten minutes of the paper to the cymatics of Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (and Friedrich Nietzsche’s reference to the latter in the 1873 fragment from his Nachlass) in the second ten minutes, and, in the final ten minutes, the cybernetics of Gilbert Simondon (and its resonances in the work of both Gilles Deleuze and of Gilles Châtelet). The three ten-minute sections will all fall under the exemplificative shadow of Samuel Beckett — a key figure for Deleuze and far-less-importantly myself — whose two self-referential statements “My work is a matter of fundamental sounds made as fully as possible. [...] If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them” (Disjecta 109) and “Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?” (Disjecta 172) will be the Ariadne’s-thread of the entire endeavor. “I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum” — The Unnamable (not-Murphy, not-Mercier, not-Molloy, not-Malone, not-Mahood, nor even, inverting these “M”s with a “W”, Worm) in Beckett’s *Innomable: The Unnamable*.

Dan Mellamphy, is Adjunct Professor at the Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western. He is the co-founder of the annual Nietzsche Workshop @ Western, the co-translator of Gilbert Simondon’s treatise *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (forthcoming from Semiotexte/MIT Press), and the author of works that have appeared in journals such as *Modern Drama*; *Foucault Studies*; *Deleuze Studies*; *Dalhousie French Studies*; *Contre-Attaques*; *The Canadian Journal of Comparative Literature*; *Symposium: International Journal of Continental Philosophy*; *Paideusis: International Journal in the Philosophy of Education*; *Collapse: Journal of Philosophical Research and Development*; *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts*; and in anthologies such as *Alchemical Traditions* (July 2012, ed. Aaron Cheak) and *Leper Creativity: The Cyclonopedia Symposium* (February 2012, eds. Eugene Thacker, Ed Keller, and Nicola Masciandaro).

David Cecchetto
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Four aural-neiric speculations with a very fat head

The impulse behind this paper is a desire to speculatively historicize sound, both in its mechanical and psychoacoustic trajectories. Since the mid-60s, our understanding of sound has been dominated by spectrum analysers that effectively represent a given sound as a combination of frequencies, a representation that is at the heart of both waveform analysis and sound synthesis. Supplementing this (ultimately positivist) rendering of sound, debates have proliferated (under the umbrella of 'psychoacoustics') over the role of hearing itself in constituting sound: hearing, after all, is a perceptual and sensual event as much as it is a mechanical one. With this in mind the paper considers the wearable artwork FATHEAD, which basically amounts to a microphone/headset that simulates ways the world would sound if the wearer's head were 1000 feet wide. The language of thresholds that the piece executes proves a particularly robust site of exploration: the piece supplements the conventional thresholds of audibility (pitch and amplitude) with that of stereo relation.

David Cecchetto is Assistant Professor (Critical Digital Theory) in the Department of Humanities at York University in Toronto, Canada. His research critiques constructions of technological posthumanism, and sound-based readings of media art are often featured prominently. David has published numerous articles and chapters in a variety of settings, and also co-edited *Collision: Interarts Practice and Research* (CSP, 2009). His monograph, titled *Humanesis: Sound and Technological Posthumanism*, was released in 2013 on the Posthumanities series of the University of Minnesota Press. His informal writing and news about upcoming talks can be found on the collaborative blog **theoculture.net**. As an artist working with sound, David has presented his work in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Russia.

Geomancy: Rumble, Repetition, Decay

The situation is mutable, the stones can be shook – “the fundamental decisions that underlie metaphysics [which] invariably reappear, albeit in a caricatural form, in ideologies [what 'must be]”¹ indeed ‘must be’ reduced to dust. The epistemic criminals of German Idealism patch together solipsistic, escapist, Newton-proof ‘harmonies’ of subjectus and subjectum – mediated by their ludicrous all-but-theological metaphysics – their contemporary materialist acolytes, Althusser and Badiou, nonetheless keep the beat. This paper will take up ‘speculative geomancy’ – being the realist specification of a discordant ‘new earth’ in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Debord, Deleuze, Guattari, Hardt, Negri, Bifo and Haar – as a ‘reterritorialization’ that rumbles the ‘grounds’ of the Subject: “delay and plateau, shocks of difference, distances, a whole play of conjunctions and disjunctions, a whole depth which forms a graduated scale rather than a qualitative duration.”² Žižek defends Stalin’s ‘humanism,’ writing “[the] high Stalinism of the 1930s stood for the return of ethics at its most violent, as an extreme measure to counteract the threat that traditional moral categories would be rendered meaningless, where unacceptable behaviour would not be perceived as involving the subject’s guilt, but as a malfunctioning measured by a special pressure gauge or speedometer.”³ Render the traditional moral categories meaningless! Give us the pressure gauge! Give us the speedometer! The subject is one possible *product* of biopolitical manipulation, neither is it its ideal product nor is it the bio-political’s ideal arbiter. The distinction can only be made by biopolitical analyses that identify concentrations of sovereign power, of whatever stripe; that identify the particular composition and epistemic exhaustion of their respective subjectivities; and that identify how to level them on both a molar and molecular level. William Gibson once wrote that he took the ‘weird noises’ being emitted from London and New York as a sign that he should start writing; that Punk was like “the detonation of some slow-fused projectile buried deep in society's flank.”⁴ He was right and we should be hard at work burying more.

Dock Currie is a second year PhD student in Political Science and York’s Chancellor Bennett Scholar for the Liberal Arts. His interests are in Object-Oriented Ontology, Speculative Materialism, the construction of novel situations and the development of better games.

¹ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* tr. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2009), 49.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* tr. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 238.

³ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 212 - 213.

⁴ William Gibson, *Distrust that Particular Flavor* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2012), 22.

AFTER SOUND: TOWARDS A SPECULATIVE-CRITICAL MUSIC

Considering the coterminous trend found in Continental philosophy and contemporary artistic practice in which linguistically oriented paradigms of thought and interpretation wrestle forcefully with those more invested in the material properties of objects, what are the political and aesthetic implications inherent in such a conflict? In philosophy, the broadly textual, discursive, and deconstructivist methods that characterize much of the past several decades of thought have met more recently with the turn to philosophical realism emblemized in the watershed work by contemporary French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*. Meillassoux argues that since Kant's so-called Copernican Revolution, philosophy has split into separate autonomous spheres of thinking and being leaving as a remainder only the correlation between the two. This “correlationism,” Meillassoux maintains, which has characterized most of (non-“naive”) thought since Kant, has prevented thinking from getting outside of itself to access the object in-itself.

Contemporary art has witnessed a similar shift from conceptual and discursive strategies to a reconsideration of practices rooted in categories devoted to specific materials, objects, and physical things. The tendencies of Rosalind Krauss’ “post-medium condition”—practices defined against essentialist conceptions of media in the wake of Greenbergian modernism—rub up against this return of the medium- specific tendencies evident in, for instance, what might be termed the recent sonic turn: a proliferation of literature, artistic practices, criticism, and theory that attempts to consider sound in its material form and substance. Relevant to this body of work and perhaps also to the broader relationship between speculative realism and “textualist” practices is the debate between sound art theorist Christoph Cox and artist/writer Seth Kim-Cohen. While the former draws upon a realist/materialist reading of Deleuze, the latter utilizes a Derridian interpretive framework. Still, however, it should be added that neither of these perspectives considers the inherent inconsistency of sound as an aesthetic category, its grouping together of an “unremarked commonality,” to use the words of Max Neuhaus (“Sound Art?”). Building from the author’s recent related work (2013), and looking at a key set of artists and musicians (Marina Rosenfeld, Elana Mann, and Ultra-red), this paper attempts a speculative inquiry into the political and collectivizing potential of a musical frame identified beyond the finitude of sound.

G DOUGLAS BARRETT is an artist, writer, and musician working at the intersection of performance, conceptualism, and social practice. Often situated between visual art, the performing arts, activism, and theory, Barrett’s work is presented throughout North America, Europe, and Japan. His writing is published in the interdisciplinary literary journal *Mosaic* (U of Manitoba) and *Contemporary Music Review*. In 2009 Barrett received a DAAD research grant to Berlin. He is currently a Critical Writing Fellow at Recess Activities (New York) and the recipient of a 2012-13 Franklin Furnace Fund award. Barrett has obtained advanced degrees from California Institute of the Arts (MFA) and the State University of New York at Buffalo (Ph.D.).

Distracted Abductions: A hyperstitional theory of earworms

Often I dream about a worm that lives in my ear who's not only fond of stray melodies and autonomic processes, but who likes to remind me, again and again, that the future is over and what I'm hearing in my head is the noise of my own uselessness. Though I've tried many times to make sense of this dream, I think it's become increasingly apparent to me that involuntary musical imagery, what's popularly known as an "earworm," is not a cognitive tick or a neurological aberration but simply what distraction sounds like in a post-attentional environment. In this paper I approach "earworms" as symptomatic of the way ubiquitous audio technologies and the omnipresence of music in contemporary culture produce a mode of listening that breaks away from the overdeterminations of its local codings to participate in a standardized economy of feeling. This standardization and habituation of listening I see as part of an increasing encroachment on the background registers of experience, and link this trend to recent attempts in neuroscience to identify a "default-state" for the brain at rest where its spontaneous and taskless psychic activity—daydreaming and mind-wandering—is speculated to function conceptually as the new basis for one's sense of self.

eldritch Priest is a SSRHC post-doctoral fellow in the Radical Empiricism Workshop at Université de Montréal. His writing on sound, music, aesthetics, and affect is extremely hyperstitional and actively works to confuse the difference between theory and fiction. eldrich is also a composer and the author of *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (Bloomsbury, 2013). His writing has also appeared in journals such as *Postmodern Culture*, *Parallax*, and *Mosaic*, and the collected volumes *Resonances: Noise and Contemporary Music* (2013) and *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* (2013).

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Trail of Soft Matter

This essay concerns a move from the aesthetics to the ethics of speculation, which is to say, from the ability within speech to make a testimony on behalf of speculation to the transformation within existing conditions that allows this testimony to be received or enacted. The project Care Of Editions will be cited as a test case.

Care Of Editions is a record label that explores the relationship between physical and digital distribution through the means of an experimental business model. While selling vinyl records, the incoming profits are then given to customers who download the same albums. Downloads are limited in real time and only made available as more records sell.

Payments to customers are made in the form of checks sent in the mail. This ceremonial exchange counteracts the logic of both the market and the materiality of downloads. It also embraces a fiction, which is that of the unique download, while exposing the reality that aura and value can be seen, not only in originals or in physical objects, but in digital reproductions as well. Customers can therefore participate in an act of speculation when deciding to either keep or cash a check. If a check goes uncashed, its value on paper could be outweighed by its value as an art object. This wager is amplified by the fact that the website is programmed to automatically shrink and potentially disappear in proportion to downloads going out of stock, while a trail of expired checks could be left in its wake.

This act of amplification is a curatorial one, along with the operations of alteration, regulation or of safeguarding. They act on the relations that control how something is valued or seen. This essay draws a number of parallels between price and curatorial critique.

Dietrich Diederichsen defines speculation as the relationship between price and value. If price witnesses value from a speculative distance, then curatorial critique witnesses artistic critique from an indeterminate distance. This essay will expand on Suhail Malik's notion that indeterminacy is the ethos of contemporary art, and, by making a distinction between indeterminacy and its image, outline how a re-imagining of the concept could transform an ethos into an exit.

For Hegel, a speculative sentence is one in which the predicate overwhelms the subject. This essay will explore how Care Of Editions is an act of curatorial critique engaged in a process of localization, which is to say, of crafting a predicate, or place, for objects such as downloads, where the matter of the subject is outweighed.

The music released by Care Of Editions navigates the gap between profit and criticality, so even in a more traditional curatorial sense, Care Of Editions express a tangential indifference to the logic of contemporary art. Meanwhile, it applies a curatorial operation to digital media in general by rearranging the intensities of value surrounding them. This is at an historical moment when downloads, although they are the most contemporary and useful of media, have a weak economic foothold.

Gerhard Schultz (US/NL, b. 1982, Michigan) founded Care Of Editions in 2013 as a research fellow at the University of Art's Graduate School for Arts and Sciences in Berlin. Together with Armen Avanesian, he coordinates *Peripheral Listening and Speculative Materialism*, a series of workshops on sound and theory.

TO SPECULATE – ON SPECULATION

*The way one says that something functions on such and such an energy source, or such and such a fuel—for example, to run on high octane. To the point of exhaustion.*¹

*But I must say to the Muse of fiction, as the Earl of Pembroke said to the rejected nun of Wilten, “Go spin, you jade, go spin!”*²

*Until the ear tunes into another music, the voice starts to sing again, the very gaze stops squinting.*³

In response to the call for papers for this conference on ‘Tuning Speculation: Experimental Aesthetics and the Sonic Imaginary’ I decided to collect all the ‘speculations’ (and cognates) that crossed my path in whatever I happened to be reading or listening to at the time with a view to making a composition out of them. Tuning speculation.

*Tuning, to produce music from, to play upon.*⁴

*Tune, as a noun, means a melodic succession of notes that ‘makes sense’, so to speak—notes that are felt to be in such relation to one another that the succession becomes a unit in itself.*⁵

I decided to make notes (in every sense of the word note)* of/on/from these ‘found speculations’ and their various resonances and reverberations (some of which are cited in this abstract) to use them as the compositional material for an experiment in writing in the sense of writing outlined by Barthes in ‘The Grain of the Voice’ and ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’ for example: that is, writing as ‘an adventure of the signifier, an excess of exchange’.⁶

*Ruth speculated further, drawing from the conservative biology that had influenced her when she married Stanley. “It might be that she is only at ease in sex if children were the ultimate implication”.*⁷

An experiment in writing – re-writing speculation – as a ‘space of dispersion of desire, where Law is dismissed’,⁸ a ‘space of pleasure, of thrill, a site where language works for nothing’,⁹ where ‘significations germinate from within language and its very materiality’.¹⁰

*What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his [sic] individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead.*¹¹

This is writing that works on/at/with (even against) language in order to displace, disorder, dissipate, and dissolve its sedimented meanings and forms, in this case the language of

* **Note.** *sb*¹ Use, usefulness, profit, advantage. b. the milk given by a cow; the period of giving milk; the condition of a cow when giving, or beginning to give milk after calving. 2. Office; employment, work. *sb*² A written character or sign, expressing the pitch and duration of a musical sound. b. a key of a piano, etc. 2. A single tone of definite pitch, as produced by a musical instrument or by the human singing voice ... II. A mark, sign, token, or indication of some quality, condition, or fact; a characteristic or distinguishing feature. b. One of certain characteristics by which the true Church may be known; a sign or proof of genuine origin, authority, and practice.

Tuning Speculation (list of presenters and abstracts)

speculation and in particular the institutionalized specularity of its types and stereotypes: to make speculation resonate and ring and dance and sing to another tune/tone on/off the page.

*There is a progressive movement from the language to the poem, from the poem to the song and from the song to its performance.*¹²

*The essential thing is to set the song in motion as a graft and not as a meaning or spectacle.*¹³

*Graft, shoot or scion inserted in a slit of another stock from which it receives sap, piece of transplanted living tissue, process of grafting, place where graft is located, hard work.*¹⁴

*Like a step taken in the fog—no one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead.*¹⁵

NOTES

1. Derrida, *Points ... Interviews, 1974 – 1994*: 48.
2. Sir Walter Scott, *Journal* 9 Feb 1826, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*: 418.
3. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*: 143.
4. *The Oxford English Dictionary*.
5. *The Oxford Companion to Music* 10th edition: 1055.
6. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*: 198.
7. Lois Banner, *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle*: 294.
8. Barthes, *op.cit.* 201.
9. *Ibid.* 187.
10. *Ibid.* 182.
11. Freud, *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter Gay: 606.
12. Barthes, *op.cit.* 186.
13. Philippe Sollers cited by Derrida in *Dissemination*: 332.
14. *The Oxford English Dictionary*.
15. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*: 3.

Geraldine Finn is Professor of Philosophy at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Her area of expertise is twentieth century Continental Philosophy and its relevance to contemporary interdisciplinary studies in politics, culture and the arts. She has published widely on a variety of issues at the intersection of philosophy, feminism, music(ology) and cultural studies and is currently working on three major research projects: (i) *The Truth in Music* and (ii) *Songs of Philosophy* both of which seek to write by and for the ear that hears rather than the seeing eye/I and include sound recordings of (what she calls) *mousikē*-philosophy/philosophy-*mousikē*, and (iii) a book on *Man – God – Religion* which examines the political implications of the naturalization of ‘religion’ as it is deployed in contemporary debates about the proper place of religion in culture and society.

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An Experimental Analytic of the Beautiful Real

This presentation explores the possibility of a radically immanent aesthetics of sound art, aiming to exemplify John Cage's aspiration "to find a way of writing which though coming from ideas is not about them; or is not about ideas but produces them." The form of the presentation is a mobile constellation, the elements of which are Alvin Lucier's *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977) and texts of François Laruelle, Immanuel Kant, and Jacques Lacan. I begin with Laruelle's *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics* (2012) and develop a model from his approach to photography for an immanent (and thus non-standard) aesthetics of sound art. I turn then to "The Analytic of the Beautiful" in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) and sketch a *détournement* of the four "moments" of the judgment of taste, transforming Kant's transcendental analysis of aesthetic judgment into an immanent analysis of four "paradoxes" characterizing the beautiful real. On this analysis, then, Kant's claim that what we judge to be beautiful is that which produces a satisfaction "without any interest" becomes a claim about the impossibility of any differential distance between the real and its auditor. Similarly, Kant's striking insistence that what we take to be beautiful exhibits purposiveness "without representation of an end" becomes an axiom about the real's paradoxical non-teleological teleology. With this outline of the impossible real's beauty, I consider ways in which Lacan's account of "the discourse of the analyst" in *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969-1970) might complement the aesthetic model derived from Laruelle. In particular, if we take the work of sound art to occupy the position of the analyst and thereby stand as an impossibly real *objet a*, then sound art effectively makes of its auditor a split-subject. In other words, the work of sound art hystericizes its auditor, and this fact has significant consequences for an immanent aesthetics of the medium of sound art.

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The Drone of the Real: On the Sound-works of Catherine Christer Hennix

In this talk I will give a brief overview of the sound based works of Swedish composer, musician and mathematician Catherine Christer Hennix, from her 1970s works like *The Electric Harpsichord* through to her recent installation piece "The Illuminatory Sound Environment". I will look at the ontological premises with which Hennix works, and describe the way that Hennix is able to elaborate a sonic ontology, building on musicological work on tuning systems, her particular path through the history of mathematics, and recent developments in physics. I will briefly consider drones, i.e. compositions based on sustained sets of tones, and their relation to the concerns of thinkers associated with speculative realism -- in particular Laruelle's work on a nonconceptual real, and the various propositions that have been made regarding an object oriented ontology.

Marcus Boon is a writer, journalist and Professor of English at York University, Toronto.

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Sound, Speculation, Spectra: Aesthetic Speculation in Gérard Grisey's *Partiels* (1975)

Rose Subotnik's 1988 essay "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening" was of critical importance to the culture-focused New Musicology that has dominated much of music research from the 1990s onwards. Structural listening is an idealist approach that considers musical works as autonomous structures, thus suppressing the category of sound itself in order to stabilize structural meaning and leading Subotnik to advocate a stylistic listening that explores the effects of culture on the medium of sound. However, sound is not only that aspect of music mediated through cultural listening practices to form style but also that which lies outside of human experience - the trees falling in forests that we never hear. Central to my argument is Meillassoux's definition of correlationism in his book *After Finitude*. Meillassoux argues that, while correlationism insists that we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being and therefore never to the thing-in-itself, we can think what cannot be known through non-dogmatic, non-absolutist speculation.

The story about sound cannot end here for the lesson we learn from Meillassoux's arche-fossil is that that if sound is something older than our human engagement with it that exists outside of thought, it is still possible for us to know something about it. I put forward that music can speculate about the qualities of the borrowed tools of sound. Much thinking about the impact of Speculative Realism on aesthetics has focused on imagining an aesthetic encounter that avoids the hypostatization of human experience, often resulting in Object-Oriented art that avoids the relational aesthetics that have dominated curatorial practice for so long. However this construal of speculative aesthetics as concerning objects interacting outside of human perception does not do enough to account for the created nature of objects and encounters that differentiates the aesthetic from the everyday. I would counter that though a speculative aesthetics would start with the difference between Sellars's manifest and scientific images, the exposure of this gap would not be the final goal. Instead the aesthetic encounter is a stage where the scientific image ricochets back onto human experience, showing the natural ground from which human thought and affect emerges. Unlike Kant's sublime the goal is not to show the superiority of reason but its limits, dependency and contingency.

These factors are all at work in Gérard Grisey's *Partiels*, one of the best examples of the French spectral school of composition. Spectral music is based on Fourier's separation of the manifest image of tone from the scientific image of harmonic spectra, using the fast Fourier transform (FFT) technology developed in the late 1960s to provide detailed timbral structures that are then used as the building blocks of harmony, melody, and formal elements. *Partiels* shows how the goal of aesthetic speculation is not just to reveal the scientific image but to experiment with how new discoveries about how sound structures both itself and us can serve as basis for experimentation with new musical forms.

Matthew Toth is a Ph.D. student in musicology at Western University in London, Canada and holds previous degrees from Stony Brook and McGill. His work focuses on art music of the past 50 years with a particular interest in topics related to philosophy, listening, and queer theory. He is currently at work on a dissertation about the aesthetics of musical memorials, focusing on works by John Adams, Bob Ostertag, and Istvan Anhalt.

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Sonifying abstraction: A synthanalysis

The current work seeks to re-establish a bridge into the art of *abstraction as gesture*. The framing of this gesture is a pre-Kantian mode that preceded the break between synthetic and analytic, falsely mirrored in the division between art and science, phenomenology and positivism, but re-characterized in the post-Kantian contextualization that interprets it. That is, the abstractive gesture subsists at the intersection of these two domains, understood through the Gödelian deconstruction of a local or global unifying architecture.

Following Gödel, the abstractive gesture becomes inherently constructive. It is the interplay between a crystallization, commitment, or binding of a particular set of relations, immediately perceived as necessary, and a following of the implicative extensions, pluralities, or possibilities that define and demarcate the originating action. This is taken as creativity *par excellence*, unbound from the local commitments of a particular domain through its tautological recursion: the gesture itself participating in the act to which it defines; abstraction taken as necessary.

It is a pedagogical failing and prevalence of a cultural bias that the visual modality dominates. It is this preference that artificially constricts the abstractive gesture into a pseudo-necessary relation with this mode while, simultaneously, being indicative of the archaeological residuals that initiated this local-global binding. By following one possible rhizome of this a-temporal context, the Pythagorean mystics, one can achieve the necessary acceleration needed to violate this pseudo-necessary warping of conceptual space-time: the gravitational pull of a long-forgotten abstractive gesture.

The conceptual pivot occurs at the intersection of another false dichotomy, unknown to the Greek mind: the separation of geometry and sound. To the Pythagoreans, the universe itself was an eternal waveform, a monochord of comprehensible proportions. By emphasizing this insight, the *apparent* obviousness of the visual modality comes into sharp relief. Yet, the goal here is not to initiate a performance of the abstractive gesture in the sonic domain. This task has been conceptualized with better rigor by others. Instead, the goal is to invert this relation and sonify the act of abstraction.

In this frame, the interplay between crystallization and extension metamorphosizes. It becomes a *sounding* of the of the celestial manifold, through a violation in the undifferentiated waveforms of the continuum, followed by a *listening* for the re-sounding echoes whose plurality situates and defines the gesture. In this way, the abstractive gesture differentiates itself from the geometrical bias of the contemporary context and the sonic unbridles itself from a pseudo-necessary, anthro-centric audition. The abstractive gesture becomes the act by which the universe plays through humanity. Gravitational fields, quantum probability waves, and thermodynamics itself are as much a part of the harmony as the reverberation of the proverbial drum.

Mitchell Akiyama & Bethany Ides
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What Do Sounds Want? Speculations on Acoustic Autonomy

In his 1960 story, *The Sound-Sweep*, JG Ballard described a world overrun with sound, in which blue-collar workers armed with “sonovacs” suck up the residual acoustic energy of a world obsessed with silence. In Ballard’s world, that sound is a persistent nuisance—even in its apparent absence—speaks to a two thousand-year-old preoccupation with the supposed persistence—even indestructibility—of acoustic energy. Thinkers from the Greek philosopher Antiphanes through to Renaissance luminaries Rabelais and Castiglione and on into the recent past with Ballard have granted or imagined that sounds have lives of their own. But what is most profound about Ballard’s take on “non-dissipative sound” (to borrow Douglas Kahn’s phrase) is that it posits a world of sound that continues to act on the human world even in its imperceptibility via human sense organs. It seems reasonable then to transpose the wry, yet powerful, question asked by W.J.T. Mitchell into the acoustic domain, to pose another: what do sounds want? To do so, to treat sounds as agentic entities as Jane Bennett suggests, threatens to overturn the anthropocentric model of auditory perception, a tacit understanding of sonic reception in which sound and human hearing are bound up in a knot of solipsism and instrumentality. In this understanding, sound is manifest to humans via what Jonathan Sterne calls the “tympanic function.” According to Sterne, an epistemology of sound that treats acoustic energy as a power whose value lies in its ability to be transduced into both human modes of experience and scientific metrics instrumentalizes sound, reduces it to a force that “could be isolated, transposed, replicated, and put to use.”

We argue that not only is it problematic to think of sound as a phenomenon whose utility, whose very being is posited as an effect of its revelation to human beings, we also propose that such a move ignores a long and rich investigation into its autonomy and its ability to act on us, even in a form unavailable to our senses. Further, we suggest that unheard sonic energy has the power to both interact with and form an architecture whose bearing on sense and experience is very real. With this in mind, we turn to an array of artworks and experiments that investigate the limits of sonic reception and that bring worlds beyond the “normal” range of human sensation into aesthetic proximity, and that conjure or describe spaces existing outside of the immediate realms of experience. From Konstantin Raudive’s attempts to capture the voices of the dead to Christina Kubisch’s transposition of electromagnetic fields into the range of human hearing, sound has played an important role in experimental epistemology, in transforming theory into sensation and experience. We question whether or not these works have gone far enough in trying to assess the agency and desires of sounds as things that exist outside the realm of the human. In repositioning the tympanic listener as one variable among many, we must imagine other, non-anthropocentric systems of conception, apart from meaning-making.

Mitchell Akiyama is a Toronto based composer, artist, and scholar. Akiyama’s artwork questions received knowledge about the senses and perception. Grounded in his research on technological mediation and storage, his installations and multimedia work investigate the relationship between historical narrative and sensory experience. Akiyama is currently pursuing a PhD at McGill University in Communications. His dissertation examines “field recording” across a variety of disciplines, from biology to folklore to sound art.

Bethany Ides harps on conditions (text, presence, prescience, instability, irrevocability, implicature, dis-use) and this [work] manifests as performance, installation, publication, video, sound and/or curation. Ides holds an MFA from Bard College, where she also teaches in the Language & Thinking Program, in addition to teaching courses in art/design/critical/cultural/sacred/poetic theory, history and literature, at School of Visual Arts, Pratt and the New York School for Interior Design.

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Contrary to the often dominant narratives of interiority, immanence and immediacy that are used to describe sonic experience, much experimental practice explores differing forms of exteriority and alterity; examples of this are the idea of nature as organising principle in the work of Cage, Tudor and Lucier, the exploration of the psychoacoustical and synthetic conditions of auditory experience undertaken by Jacob Kierkegaard and Florian Hecker and an interest in the inaudible yet nonetheless acoustical that is evident in the work of artists as diverse as Mark Bain, Rolf Julius and Stephen Vitiello. To differing degrees the work of all of these artists can be understood to take a functional approach to sonic practice, wherein the aesthetic is treated as a necessary interface to the inaudible conditions of audition, a status which determines it as a one of a number of media providing potential epistemic openings onto exteriority, a perspective that undermines the phenomenological sufficiency of appearances that dominates much discourse on sonic practice and experience.

The term *infraaesthetics* is proposed in order to describe a prominent and 'reductive' domain of work that takes a functional approach to sound and signals wherein the aesthetic is understood to be a kind of residual congealing or crystallisation, an unavoidable byproduct of more fundamental and primarily functional processes. The 'lofi' aesthetics of much experimental practice is accordingly reframed in terms of an *autophagic aesthetics* that leads to exteriority by operating at the thresholds of perception and moving beyond.

Will Schrimshaw is an artist and researcher from Wakefield based in Liverpool. Often working with sound amidst a larger vibrational continuum, his work is broadly concerned with the subliminal influence of backgrounds, ambiances and atmospheres, with the often imperceptible determinants of space and place. In 2011 he completed a PhD in Philosophy and Architecture at Newcastle University, focusing upon ideas of acoustic space and auditory influence within architectural and artistic practice. He teaches courses on sonic interaction and sound design and has completed a number of residencies, solo and group exhibitions, performances and workshops across the globe.