EVERYONCE

Mitchell Akiyama

M presented a series of paintings depicting scenes from her upbringing in an extra-terrestrially-oriented cult. C showed a video of herself masturbating while she watched a video of herself masturbating. The title, I'm almost sure, was "Narcissos." I don't remember what work I shared, but evidently it was forgettable. And then D's turn came around. "I'm going to make an Aleph," he said, referring to the Jorge Luis Borges story, in which a pompous poet jealously guards a tiny portal in his basement through which the entire universe can be experienced simultaneously.

"Are you going to make an immersive video installation? Is this meant to be a representation of the ubiquity and speed of electronic media?"

"No. I'm going to build an Aleph."

It wasn't surprised by his recalcitrance. At a group show earlier that year, he'd installed a beautiful, transparent glass sphere, blown by his father, next to a sledge hammer and a pair of safety goggles. Not long into the opening, another student picked up the sledge hammer and smashed the sphere to pieces. I asked D if he had meant for this to happen, if he was upset that his father's beautiful vessel had been destroyed. From what I remember, D shrugged.

He never did build his Aleph. We lost touch after art school and then, a decade ago, he passed away suddenly, just days before his 30th birthday. Apparently, he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was living with his mother.

Years later, I decided to make a work in which a large group of people, spread out over a city block, would record the soundscape simultaneously. The recordings would then be played back in a room on a multichannel sound system, the speakers corresponding to their positions during the act of recording, only scaled down. This would create the effect of compressing sonic space while distending time, allowing one to hear with myriad ears spread impossibly far apart.

In the 1970s, Canadian composer, R. Murray Schafer, coined the term "schizophonia" to describe the dislocating, alienating effect caused by electroacoustic mediation in that it separates sounds from their sources, his presumption was that there was a time before recording—before wired and wireless connectivity, when all things were themselves, without imitations or echoes, without deception—and that we should strive to preserve or recapture this integrity. But the desire to experience all things at once, to let the entire universe rush in through every sense door, is every bit as primordial. D didn't build an Aleph in 1995, but neither did Alanus de Insulis, the 12th century French theologian, who believed God to be, in Borges's words, "an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere." There is no comprehending everything that is, not even through metaphor.

There's no there there. But there's now no there here either. Or is it the reverse?

Another Aural Architecture
Jonathan Sterne

Being serenaded by the dead has long been an everyday experience; increasingly, people who traverse Canada's urban centres live in a world that is listening to them. Sounds seep out of social life into ubiquitous microphones. Transformed into data, they flow away to distant centres for endless signal processing and tabulation in the service of capital.

Imagine a single change in this infrastructure: every wall is also a transducer that both receives and produces sound. Every solid surface that makes up an urban architecture now also contains a vibrating membrane coextensive with its length and width. Every wall has always effectively been a membrane, a surface already waiting to be transformed into both a speaker and a microphone. What is difficult, though, is imagining the point of transduction in media to speak, in which this would be possible. Putting the point of transduction in media and from media to speak, where sound moves from urban environments into media and from media to speak, environments—violates a host of design norms that are predicated on placing speakers just out of view. But look at the ubiquity of screens and lighting displays that call attention to their content, as well as their very presence and form—everywhere from waiting rooms to city corridors. Transposing transducers into the field of visual attention: another aural architecture is possible.

Sound reproduction is oriented around a point-source concept of audio. Speakers exist in a place in a room, configurable but directional. Stereo sound presupposes an idealized listening position and a coherent, two-eared body that has a standpoint in sound. When the building itself is a transducer, a different set of fictions obtains: subjects are positioned in sound. This is not simply a fantasy of immersion, implying uniformity and totality. Bigger and more obvious transducers can just as easily be ignored, and they can just as easily be used to surveil.

But making the apparatus more apparent offers people a chance to imagine space as a collective project. By design, malleable acoustic space becomes coextensive with malleable social space. Architecture is sonically transformed just as people change the lighting in their space throughout the day, opening shades in the morning or dropping them to dim the sun in the afternoon. In a world where all walls are transducers, sound is bigger than bodies: flexible and unindividuated.

MACHINE LISTENING
Lilian Radovac

I meet Dave at the front gate. We're here to see the smart city.

"You're late," he says.

"Sorry."

"No worries. Got a light?"

We're standing in a pink zone, a former industrial district that's been stripped of government regulations. There are sensors in the sidewalk that transmit the data they collect to different companies. One company measures environmental noise levels. Another tracks gunshots. Signs are posted that tell us what kind of information is being collected. I study a powder blue symbol that looks like a microphone.

That means the machines are listening. By staying, we consent.

"We used to go dancing here in the 90s. Remember?"

"Yeah… RPM! Where was it?"

"That way, a couple blocks west. It's condos now."

"Everything's condos now."

We edge deeper into the development, a prototype of a smart district built for international investors. As we walk, LED streetlights blink on a few steps ahead of us, illuminating an autonomous vehicle charging bay which gives off a low hum. I check the app you have to install on your phone to enter the area. 40 dB: acceptable ambient noise level.

Dave fishes around in his pocket and then lights a cigarette. I shoot him a look.

"I don't think you can smoke here"

"It's fine. We're outdoors."

"I'm pretty sure you can't even smoke outside here."

Our phones chime. I glance at my home screen: air quality alert, combustible tobacco smoke detected. The app informs me that a $50 fine will be automatically charged to our credit cards.

"Ah, shit!"

"I told you!"

"How does it know our credit card numbers?"

"I don't know. It must have synced with our cloud accounts."

"Fuck. That blows."

He stubs out the cigarette. We walk until we reach the district centre, which is part condominium development, part office park, and part high end shopping mall. A driverless train zips past on an elevated track. 50 dB: acceptable ambient noise level.

I think about what Toronto used to sound like. Streetcars. Sirens. Nightclubs. It sounded like a city. In the smart district, all the rough acoustic edges have been smoothed away. Nothing grates. It's weird.

A few feet away, a crowd has gathered around a public-private bench. Two security guards loom over a homeless man who has entered the district. They've been dispatched because he doesn't have a smartphone to register with.

"Sir, this is your final warning. You have to leave the premises."

The man bristles. "Why? I'm not doing anything."

"Sir, you can't be here without a data agreement."

"Yeah? Well, I've got a right to be here!" The man leans back against the metal armrest that bisects the bench and shouts, "FUCK YOU!"

90 dB. Intrusive. Monitor sound intensity and duration.

The crowd retreats, except for a tourist who's tweeting pictures of the scene. The tweets are geolocated and pushed to our Vigilance apps, which unleash a chorus of notifications that sound like Amber Alerts. The police arrive and lead the man away.

40 dB. The notifications stop.

NOTES ON JINGLES
Maria Murphy

made from cut metal circles including repurposed stuff — chewing tobacco cans — and flour tins — the jingle is like a bell — but without the hammer — without a hammer the jingle cannot make noise on its own — it needs others to make a sound — to connect — it recalls — body — water — creation — sort of — living — shaker — that — recalls — memory — of the womb — where each movement determines what can — pass through — frequency — and how the jingles will rise and fall — for each sound — each time — embody — harmony — and balance through movement — the good — life — Winnie McDougall lives in Henvey Inlet First Nation with her husband Chief Wayne McQuabbie — this site is descendant from Wausauksing Ongum in Northwestern Ontario and is a Anishinaabekwe — McDougall's father's mother, her paternal grandmother — Manigaasnosh Christina Shawnoo, nee Megwin, can be traced back to the first jingle dress dancer in her community —

SOUND BODIES: HARM REDUCTION IN THE MOMENT
Lilian and Syrus Marcus Ware

Thirteen years ago, Ultra-red staged two public listening sessions at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Both sessions occurred in the context of the Sixteenth International AIDS Conference. The convergence of art and listening in Toronto has changed dramatically since 2006 due to the hegemony of neoliberalism and a growing neoliberal resurgence. What do we hear? What do we hear in our whole bodies?

We can name two particular contemporary struggles. Toronto-based artist and educator Syrus Marcus Ware has participated in both struggles. The first space of resistance is the organizing of Black Lives Matter. The actions and analysis advanced by BLM have drawn out for public interrogation the racist state violence against poor Activists occupied police headquarters in 2016 to perform that interrogation of racist state violence in the present. and working-class black bodies. BLM activists also used the world stage of Toronto LGBT Pride in 2016 and 2017 to challenge the pinkwashing of police violence. In each of these interventions, immigrant communities, drug users, and black trans women used their voices to disrupt the status quo.

In the second front of popular resistance, drug users and harm reduction activists responded swiftly to the overdose epidemic sweeping across North America. While the state continues to perpetuate a pernicious genocidal fantasy that the poor deserve to die on the basis of being poor, harm reduction activists opened a renegade safe injection site. The site offered access to clean injection equipment, medical supervision, and a nonjudgmental environment where personal and community agency begins with the reduction of harm associated with drug use. The safe injection site became a catalyst for public awareness about overdose prevention, establishing new norms of knowledge and access to prevention tools, such as Naloxone.

The intersection of Black Lives Matter and harm reduction raises questions about where the movement goes from here in fighting against rightwing entrenchment while advancing our vision for a just world. The recent experience of cannabis legalization indicates what government officials have in store for this world. The legalization of all classified narcotics. Legalized cannabis has resulted in monopoly control over the market, often by the same individuals who profited from criminalization (e.g. former police chiefs Julian Fantino and Bill Blair). The poor who suffered the primary violence of punitive drug laws remain vulnerable to the life-long effects of criminalization and incarceration. At the same time, neighborhoods once subjected to the social cleansing effects of real estate re-investment. With gentrification comes more displacement, shattering community bonds that the poor have established for survival.

This is the conjuncture in which a listening session takes place in Toronto today. What did you hear? What does it mean? And how does what you heard resonate with your own experiences?