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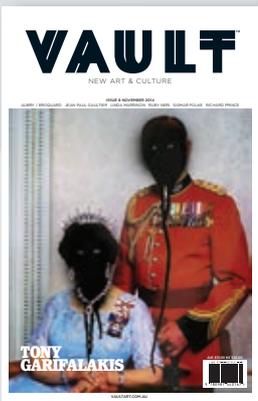
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Kusum Normoyle
Gain Game (amps), 2014
produced in Minecraft

BACK COVER

Kusum Normoyle
Gain Game, 2014 - detail
produced in Minecraft

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17 CONTRIBUTORS

19 FOREWORD: MATERIALS
CALEB KELLY

**22 UNCANNY
MICROELECTRONICS:
INTAGLIO & THE AESTHETICS
OF CIRCUIT BOARDS**
DENISA KERA

28 PACKING MY LIBRARY
HEATHER CONTANT

30 DON'T THINK ABOUT IT
DOUGLAS KAHN

33 GAIN GAME, 2014
KUSUM NORMOYLE

36 ON LANGUAGE AS MATERIAL
ASTRID LORANGE

**41 PALACE OF SCENT,
SOUND AND OBJECTS**
CONVERSATION:
VICKY BROWNE &
DAVID HAINES

46 NOTES ON TRANSLATION
TÉ (KYNAN TAN &
ANDREW BROOKS)

**50 TRUE COLOURS:
VIDEO ENDOSCOPY**
CONVERSATION:
PIA VAN GELDER
TALI HINKIS
KYLE LAPIDUS

**56 UNEXPLORED FUNCTIONS
/EVERYDAY OBJECTS**
CONVERSATION:
PETER BLAMEY &
TULLY ARNOT

**62 THE INSTRUMENT
BUILDERS PROJECT 2**
REVIEW: HELEN HUGHES

Contributors

TULLY ARNOT investigates the intangible relationships we have with objects, illuminating new, poetic ways of interacting with the world around us. He has recently completed an MFA at UNSW Art & Design.

PETER BLAMEY is an artist and musician who employs 'open electronics' to explore connectivity, variability and re-use. His current work re-deploys commonplace electronic components to produce sounds in performance, and as readymade materials for installation projects.

VICKY BROWNE produces sculptures that employ sound as a physical presence and as a concept. She works with materials such as sticks and glue, to produce handcrafted technologies that engage in dialogue with old and new media. Vicky is represented by Galerie pompom.

HEATHER CONTANT loves sound, stories and ideas. She mixes these interests together by undertaking vast, long-term research projects that result in a menagerie of artistic and scholarly objects. She is currently investigating instances of human and electromagnetic energies combining to form a particularly 'charged atmosphere'. Heather is a PhD candidate at UNSW Art & Design.

PIA VAN GELDER is an electronic artist, curator and teacher. She develops performances and installations by working with media machines, both custom-built heirloom technologies and common electronic devices that are hacked and opened up to perform in ways that negate their intended design. Pia is currently a PhD candidate at UNSW Art & Design.

DAVID HAINES is an artist who works across various media including gallery-based installation art, sound (both installed and as performance) and aroma. Since 2004 he has been developing an extensive library of aroma molecules and championing the possibilities of aroma in contemporary art. David is a lecturer at the Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

HELEN HUGHES is currently completing her PhD in Art History at the University of Melbourne. Her research concerns histories and theories of contemporary art, with a particular focus on installation art. Helen is co-founder and co-editor of the contemporary art journal *Discipline* and has recently been appointed curator at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne.

DOUGLAS KAHN is an historian and theorist of arts, media arts, and music. He is the author of *Earth Sound Earth Signal* (University of California Press) and *Noise Water Meat* (MIT Press). He is Professor at the National Institute for Experimental Arts, UNSW Art & Design, and is currently working on a book entitled *A Natural History of Media*.

CALEB KELLY is a writer, academic and event producer in the area of sound in art and music. He is the program director for the Bachelor of Art Theory at UNSW Art & Design and is currently writing his second book, entitled *Gallery Sound*.

DENISA KERA is a philosopher and a designer who uses prototypes to rethink the history of science and future scenarios related to emerging technologies. She is an Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore and Asia Research Institute fellow, where she brings together Science, Technology, and Society (STS) studies with Interactive Media Design.

ASTRID LORANGE is a writer, researcher, and lecturer. Her work studies relationships between language, performance and labour. Astrid recently joined UNSW Art & Design and her first book, *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein*, will be published by Wesleyan University Press in December 2014.

LOVID (Tali Hinkis & Kyle Lapidus) is a New York-based duo who explore the ways technology seeps into the evolution of human culture. Their practice includes performances, participatory public art, handmade technologies, textiles, prints, App-art, experimental video, and immersive installations. They interface between handmade engineering and traditional art and craft forms by using a DIY philosophy and aesthetic.

KUSUM NORMOYLE is an artist and musician working with voice, feedback and noise for both performance and installation. Intervention and feedback resound across her installation practice in explorations of the relationship of voice to space, materials, and media. Kusum is currently a PhD candidate at UNSW Art & Design.

TÉ is the interdisciplinary art duo of Andrew Brooks and Kynan Tan. Collaboratively they create works in the format of performances, installations, kinetic sculptures, recordings and thought experiments, each using sound as a departure point. These works question the ephemerality and physicality of sound, listening experience, improvisation, and audience/performer relationship.

•| Eric Demetriou,
Bunghole
Liquid Architecture, Sydney 2014
44 gallon drums, vacuum pump, scaffold
Photo: Aksana Hugo Anastas



Materials

Caleb Kelly

In the mid-1980s I vividly recall teaching myself Atari Basic from a fat manual. I wrote exceptionally basic code for my Atari 800XL, code that miraculously produced large pixels that moved across a screen, controlled by my joystick. These brightly coloured squares appeared, quite bizarrely, on the family TV set, and I was proud and excited that I could create this very simple 'painting' program.

The possibility of writing a simple program that was not all that far from more professional programming is very different to our present day situation. I cannot teach myself in a short time how to make a useful painting program, and why would I when we have very powerful applications available to us? In the '00s we got used to having applications such as Photoshop, Pro Tools or After Effects do the work for us and most of us have no real sense how they do this work – I have absolutely no idea of what is behind the interface of these applications.

In recent years there has been a tangible shift back to making simple electronics and writing code, and with it a return to handmade electronics. There is an abundance of hardware and software available that helps us to build electronics and code; from Arduino to littleBits, MaKey MaKey to Ototo, Scratch to Python. Even the kids are getting into it, shoved along by the adored and addictive Minecraft game. The maker movement is swiftly gaining momentum, opening spaces for people to meet and learn to hack, make, share and hang out in tool sheds and around tables filled with electronics components. Recently I heard about a board game scene in Sydney where people not only design games, they laser cut the board game's elements! This hands-on turn is pushing a return to material thinking after a decade of blankly staring at screens.

My specific area of research interest has, for a long time (20 odd years), been sound. Sound is not often thought of as material; it is after all created by wave-making events. Yet we often have a physical response to sound; we can feel it if it hits us hard enough.

Recently, at the faculty formally known as COFA, two very physical sound events occurred within the Liquid Architecture 2014 festival. The first was the installation *Bunghole*, erected by Eric Demetriou. The work is an installation in which metal drums implode, producing a loud short sharp bang. The sound hits the audience and yet it is produced by the inward crumpling of the drums. This explosion/implosion has a strange effect on the mind and body, which expects such a sound to have an outward result. The second physical sound occurrence was produced by Hard Hat, the band of Peter Blamey and Kusum Normoyle (both represented in this issue of *Das Superpaper*). Hard Hat utilised two mighty guitar amps and the courtyard PA to produce a violent and physical noise that could be heard blocks away. As is always the case, some of the audience protected their hearing from the outburst by plugging their ears, yet there was nothing we could do to plug our bodies from the palpable sound waves massaging our inner organs.

In this issue of *Das Superpaper* the authors have approached the theme of materials through an array of practices including art, media, music and text. The issues draws together a series of dialogues and conversations, short articles and page works that engage materials in a discourse that is multitudinous and far reaching. Most hail from Sydney and many are associated with the UNSW-based research group Sound and Materials. The group is focused on making and thinking about sound as a material component of arts practice. For the most part these researchers are producing sound not from within a 'digital studio' but rather through physical and material means.

Sound and Materials | UNSW Art & Design
soundandmaterials.com

• | Hard Hat (Kusum Normoyle)
Liquid Architecture, Sydney 2014
Live performance
Photo: Aksana Hugo Anasta





Uncanny Microelectronics: Intaglio & the Aesthetics of Circuit Boards

Denisa Kera

The wicked walk in a circle...

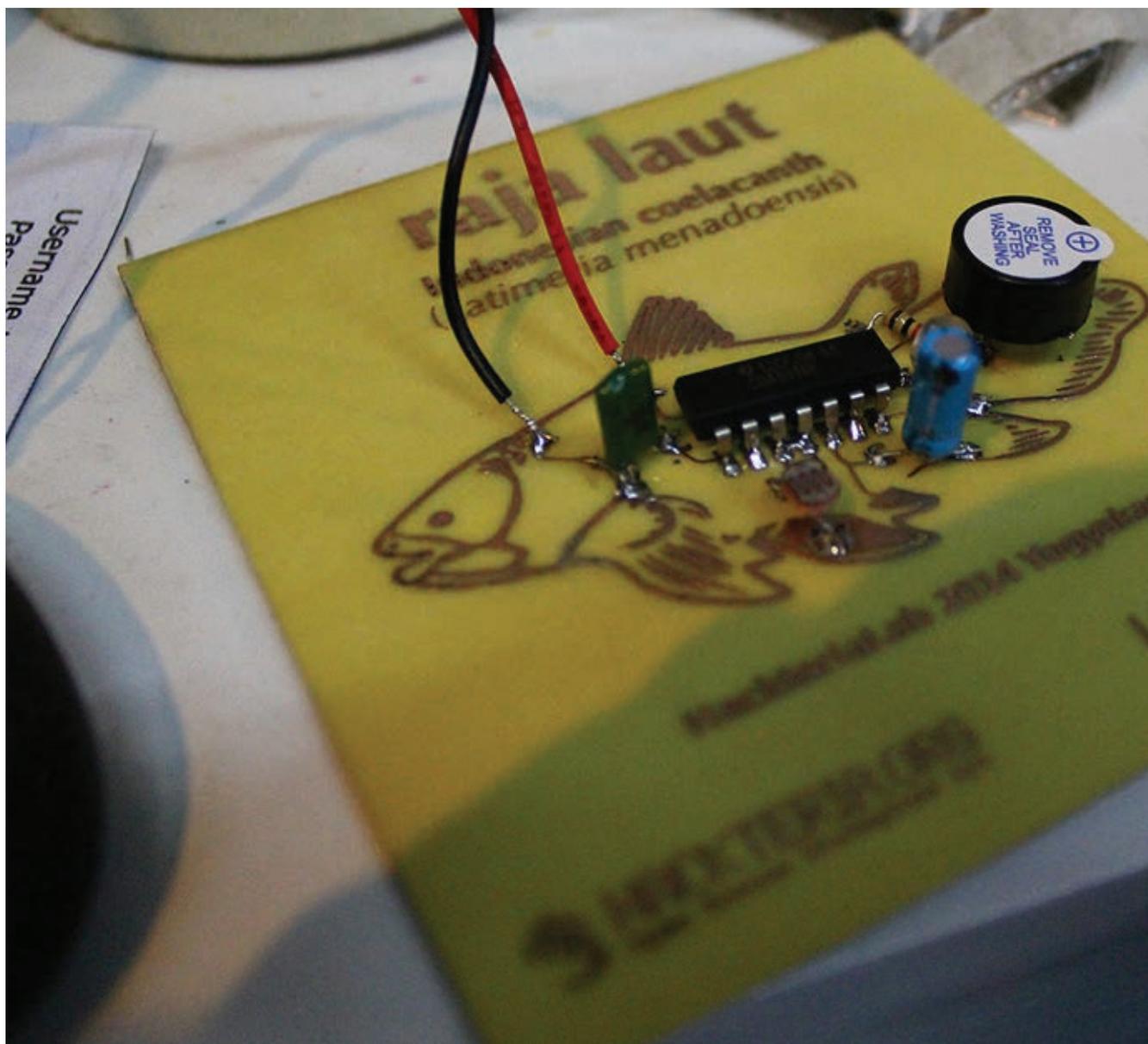
— Augustine's City of God, Book 12

The artisanal, often hand-made printed circuit boards (PCBs), which lie behind most open hardware experiments in art and design share something with the emergent nano- and microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) in the professional microelectronics industry. They both brought a paradoxical return of the traditional printing techniques of intaglio, such as etching and lithography. The Renaissance intaglio used copper or zinc plates (and sometimes iron), on which the image was scratched or etched with diluted acids and then pressed onto the paper with ink to show maps, works of graphic art and images in books. In the present, the traditional intaglio is used mainly as an anti-forgery prevention in banknotes, passports and other documents. Instead of dying off with the printing press, it is experiencing a strange comeback in the microelectronics industry. The present intaglio techniques etch circuits with acids, but also X-ray, ion beams, UV light, various light-sensitive chemical processes and even plasma. The lines are etched on various conductive materials, which serve as layers of complex circuits feeding all our digital technologies. While traditional prints experimented with perspective and representation, the present intaglio 'prints' make routes for the movements of electrons, direct and control current and resistance, and amplify, switch and transform energy in the transistors and light-emitting diodes (LEDs).

The various integrated circuits hidden in the black boxes of our electronics are all heirs of these old print techniques, which in the 16th century popularised the Renaissance worldview on the relation between man, the globe and the universe. The etched lines embodied the linear perspective of the single human viewpoint that became the measure of all things, while today they control inputs and outputs in the complex networks of machines exchanging 0 and 1. The uncanny aspect of this "return of the repressed" printing techniques in the age of the digital media are the military origins of both present and past intaglio techniques. The obsession with cannons and fortification back in the Renaissance leads directly to the cybernetic

- *Moist Sense installation*
Raja Laut in HackteriaLab, 2014
- A PCB artwork taking the Indonesian Coelacanth image as the line tracing

All images courtesy
lifepatch.org



- | *Moist Sense installation*
in *OK Video Festival*,
Jakarta 2013



dreams of the World War II advances in controlling military devices (eg, Wiener's work on anti-aircraft battery controllers) and the later 1950s interest in satellites and space wars. The circuit boards and the Renaissance prints share a history connecting innovation with military goals, where the aesthetic concerns are never far from the exploration of ways to kill and protect, and where the figure of the other, who comes as an enemy and a threat, forces us to invent new technologies and media.

This is clearly visible on one of the first etchings by Albrecht Dürer, *Landscape with a Cannon*. This, the last and the most ambitious of six etchings Dürer made at the turn of the 16th century, uses an iron plate, which was highly unusual and hard to work on, but amplified well the image of the cannon. The prints date 1518 and depict a Turk standing prominently in the foreground, symbolising the geopolitical threats, next to a large cannon on a four-wheeled gun carriage. The much admired landscape on his prints, which engulfs everything from mountains to villages and ports on the sea, performs the Renaissance perspective, but it also served as a test ground for his future work on fortification. In 1527 he published a famous treatise on fortifications, "Ettliche underricht zu Befestigung der Stett, Schloss und Flecken" (Several instructions for fortifying towns, castles and small cities), which displays on one of the last pages the same cannon along with a detailed proposal and drawings of permanent artillery fortification. He advocates the use of huge artillery towers called bastions as part of a design of an ideal city with wet moats, earth bulwarks and corner 'caponiers', covered tunnels, and other similar ideas – transforming the city into a war engine.

The etching technique, but also the iron as a material of choice, summarise and even predict the military fantasies behind all future intaglios. Dürer developed a whole vocabulary of marks, such as hard and swoopy lines and cross hatching, which served well in the art of mapmaking, another important military technology enabling colonial pursuits. Etching as a work with metals and acid was always closer to the armourer's trade and crafts than goldsmithing, which influenced engraving techniques of print. Teaching courses on fortification to young aristocrats was after all a common source of income for Renaissance scholars and artists, and we can speculate that Dürer's interest in cannons was part of this. Even Galileo taught such private courses on fortification in Padova between 1592 and 1609, where the practical science of machines, military architecture, geometry and drawing techniques revolved

• *Moist Sense installation*
in OK Video Festival,
Jakarta 2013

• *Moist Sense installation*
in Media Art Kitchen
Kuala Lumpur, 2013

around a special kit he developed for his students on the use of the military compass, another important reference to our present circuit boards.

Before the movements of electrons in our machines, the word 'circuits' referred to the movements of planets against the sky, but also explorers around the globe in search of new territories, that they were supposed to rule. Compassing around or circuiting was synonymous to words such as 'orbis' (orbit), sphaera, gyro or even to the instrument that enabled such activity on a planetary scale – the compass (also circinus, circinulus). In the corpus of 16th and 17th century texts available on Google Ngram, the early 'circuits' describe planetary paths or exotic geographical areas and territories (see the Henri de Feynes or Fernand Mendez Pinto travelogues), but also city walls and other urban structures, such as gardens and even elected bodies and councils, which rule these territories. In the most famous use of this word at the start of Sir Francis Drake's *The World Encompassed* (1628) we read that finding the "true circuit" of earth is God's command and mandate, which some obey with their reason and others with their instinct to explore, survey and measure the globe (the whole and every part in it): "Ever since Almighty God commanded Adam to subdue the earth, there have not wanted in all ages some heroicall spirits which, in obedience to that high mandate, either from manifest reason alluring them, or by secret instinct inforcing them thereunto, have expended their wealth, employed their times, and aduentered their persons, to finde out the true circuit thereof."

The etched cannon and the art of fortification, together with the compass and the map, basically gave birth to our modern engineering and circuit boards, which are now used in



artistic experiments to explore these hidden histories. The fortification and guns are responsible for the relatively modern idea of states and nations, which, like most powerful technologies, enable further centralisation and increasingly global forms of governance. Improved cannons forced the feudal lords to invest more in fortification and get money from the centralised power (the monarch) – in this sense all modern nation states are just the unintended consequence of more efficient guns and cannons. The guns and cannons caused the feudal lords to lose autonomy over their defence (private fortification) and accept the so called 'bastioned systems', a more complex defence structure explored by



Albrecht Dürer, in turn enabling the modern state and professional armies. What happened later with the compass and the integrated circuits are just uncanny returns and echoes of these origins in intaglio, printing and various ideas of what it means to 'circuit'. With the present artistic boards and attempts to democratise hardware with printed circuit boards gradually acquiring aesthetic ambitions, we are just starting to reflect on these complex genealogies, which we want to see as abandoned and long-forgotten technology.

Our present circuits are made from electrical components such as transistors, resistors, capacitors and diodes, but the original

- | *Moist Sense installation*
in *Media Art Kitchen*
Kuala Lumpur, 2013



electrical use of the word 'circuit', in 1746, refers to very unexpected components like water, gun barrels and humans connected to perform the characteristics of electricity: "Several experiments show that the electric force always describes a circuit... electrical power darts rectissimo cursu between the gun-barrel and the vial." The first circuit ever described is between a person and a gun barrel, after which Watson is just adding more persons to perform the circuit so that the bodies become part of different circuits in the chapter 40 (XL). "If any number of persons communicate by piece of wire, and if any of them brings together the ends of the two pieces of wire in his hands, upon the gun-barrel's being touched he will perceive no stroke. But if the ends of the wires are but a quarter of an inch asunder (?); he will be shook in both his arms because then his body will become part of the circuit." On p.67 he describes this as his main discovery: "That the electricity always describes a circuit between the electrified water and the gun-barrel". Making circuits, just like making compasses, maps and cannons, performs the connection between innovation, technology and war. This is something we need to question, and a possible start could be this small attempt for a PCB art manifest, with which we wish to conclude:

Computing and electronics are material and political, but also increasingly aesthetic expressions of our cosmological insights into the structure of the universe and our place in it. With hardware, electronic parts, printed, integrated and electronic circuits and boards, we are constantly probing our relations to the microworld and its particles, trying to make them relevant, useful and meaningful on the macroscale. With modern electronics we resigned on the phenomenological "being in the world" with horizons. Instead of the line where the sky meets the earth, we embraced the depths and impossibilities of the lines connecting infinite worlds across infinite scales. Our universe is neither close nor familiar and cosy, but a place for connecting scales, testing and interpreting signals and managing data in a type of a pancosmic circuit. We are such circuits of star stuff and our boards are just temples in which we worship these new gods, particles and molecules. We need to design our circuits in the ways we used to paint religious paintings, write poems celebrating love, make sculptures commemorating heroes, or simply deconstruct everything in a modernist search for abstraction and authenticity. We have to start reading our circuits in a similar way to how we read the

- *Moist Sense installation*
Raja Laut in HackteriaLab, 2014
 - A PCB artwork taking the Indonesian Coelacanth image as the line tracing

sky, by projecting mythologies in its constellations, making this randomness of our fantasy worth pursuing again. The PCB artists of tomorrow are asking questions: Can a famous circuit become a self-portrait? Can we use circuits as media and interfaces for exploring different forms of personal interaction with the world of minerals in the components? Can handmade and crafted hardware, aesthetical circuits and various new materials explore further the creativity behind our fascination with a force that connects us all – electricity?

Denisa Kera is leading a workshop at the Openhere festival in Dublin in November entitled UNCANNY, SUBVERSIVE, SUBLIME & ALL OTHER CIRCUIT BOARDS.

openhere.data.ie

All books referenced are available in Google Books



Packing My Library

Heather Contant

On April 27, 1931, from 6:15 to 6:40 in the evening, Walter Benjamin unpacked his library for the radio listeners in Southwest Germany.¹ As he sorted through “roughly 2,000 books”,² he marvelled at the feelings brought up by being materially reunited with his collection.

Join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with wood dust, the floor covered with torn paper, [...] the spring tide of memories which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions.³

In a Brooklyn apartment on February 18, 2014, I packed my library, as I was moving overseas. It's expensive to ship things to Australia, and you can't do research on the history and theory of radio without a few heavy books. I figured the library could help me, but I had acquired a rather sizable collection of texts. Which ones would I need?

Radio Drama Theory and Practice Tim Crook
The Audible Past Jonathan Stern
Transmission arts Galen Joseph-Hunter
Current of Music Theodore Adorno
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Quicksand Robert Ashley
Making Noise Halal Schwartz

I put all the books that I might possibly need into one of six boxes. Unlike Benjamin, I have never really bothered to organise my library – piles not files, I say! However, “if there is a counterpart to the confusion of the library, it is the order of its catalogue”. I generated my catalogue using the speech-recognition function on my smartphone by declaring the title and author of each book as I packed it away. This worked for the most part, although it might take a cryptologist to decipher some of the things that my phone *thought* I said.

Uncollected poems Rainer Maria broke
Allegories of Reading Called the man
Decolonizing the Mind I'm Googie Wauseon go
The Meet Me on the Bounty Srdjan Berro
A Memoir Little League victim Stein
I thousand plateaus The losing Katari
Radio Error and MoveOn Advertent Michael Shift

For Benjamin, it is the book's thing-ness that holds the most power. “The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership – for a true collector, the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia.” This attention to the materiality of a book helps to explain the frequent “nonreading of books”⁴ in a collection. For the *true collector*, the content of a book – what it says – is secondary to the inherent history of the pages, cardboard and ink that carry this content. In this sense, I am not a true collector. My highly sophisticated system of angry marginalia and post-it note sticking significantly deteriorates the quality of a book. Because of this, my methods of acquisition are also quite different from those of Benjamin. I don't waste my time with auctions or special orders from Thuringia. Not when I can find perfectly good books on the street, like one of my absolute favourites, *Radio Eriwan Antwortet* by Michael Schiff. This little red paperback about a fictional radio station in Soviet Armenia entered my collection when I discovered it on my neighbour's stoop. Putting your old stuff out on the street is somewhat of a tradition in New York and many books have come to me this way.

How to get more business by telephone
On Revolution Honda aren't
Bertolus Breakfast Berlin a scrapbook of the 20s
Water pray and game birds of North America
I seem to be a verb Buckminsterfullerene
A treasury of witchcraft Harry that deck
Pop over all the sacred book of the Myers quiche
Remembrance of Things Past: Combray Marcel Proust
 and Stephane Heuet

I bought this comic book version of Proust when I arrived in New York over a decade ago. I remember a second-story comic book store where I felt sorely out of place. Flipping through stacks that were clearly not geared towards my demographic, I stumbled upon this graphic reinterpretation of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. “Proust, summing up, says that the past is ‘somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object...’”⁵ Benjamin's reiteration rang true. The book still smelled like mint condition and it transported me back to that store, between its fluorescent lights and industrial

carpet. I put the book back in the plastic envelope that had protected it for all these years, packed it away, moved onto another book and another memory.

Fear he of the Subject Alain but do you
The Soundscape Armory Schaeffer
Discipline and punishment Foucault
if not winter Ann Carson
The poems of the pearl manuscript
The necessary Angel Wallace Stevens
Moby Dick Melville
Anthology of text scores Pallino Lavarò's
Watercolors for the poems of Thomas Gray
 William Blake

In "Unpacking My Library", Benjamin finds an old album that his mother made him when he was a child and reminisces on the "booklike creations from fringe areas"⁶ that lie at the heart of a person's library. Here, I recognised my own behaviour as a collector.⁷ The only book that I unpacked when I arrived in Sydney was also an album. A strange collection of objects and memories bound together in a golden flowery cover. Pictures of my parents, cats, and friends. An illustration of a mean boss. The contact info for a fellow collector that I should have gotten to know better before I said goodbye. These are the material fragments of a life that I just couldn't pack away.

- 1 This lecture aired on *Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, a regional station in the national broadcasting network based in Frankfurt am Main. We no longer possess the actual script of this broadcast, but we can piece together its general structure by looking at the subsequent essays published under the same title in *Die Literarische Welt* in July of 1931. See Sabine Schiller-Lerg, *Walter Benjamin und der Rundfunk: Programmarbeit zwischen Theorie und Praxis*, München: KG Saur, 1984. pp. 336-339.
- 2 Joseph D. Lewandowski, "Unpacking: Walter Benjamin and His Library," *Libraries & Culture* 34, no. 2 (1999):151-157. p. 151.
- 3 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927-1934, trans. by Harry Zohn. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. p. 486.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 488.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire", *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968. p. 158.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library", *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927-1934, trans. by Harry Zohn. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. p. 491.
- 7 Schiller-Lerg, p. 339.

Don't think about it

Douglas
Kahn

It is hard for me not to think of Leo Tolstoy when asked not to think. Which happens more than you might imagine. Not long ago I was asked to write about sound art theory. It had been awhile since I took a good look and I was surprised to find that a certain school of thought asks you not to think. Not constantly, just at certain moments. Of course, moments of not thinking happen all the time; it is just hard to know when they are happening let alone determine when they are supposed to happen. Thinking that 'now I am not thinking' is self-defeating and thinking 'I was just not thinking' takes off some of the lustre. Looking more closely it looked like the problem was what was thought to be thought, meaning, representation and the like was simply too simple. It would never bring to mind what would go through the mind of someone freely associating or anyone at the edges who sensed they were making sense. Are not thinking and not thinking inextricably bound up with one another even where thinking is most resolute?

Being urged not to think echoes older ideas about how non-musical sounds relate or don't to music, whatever music was at the particular time and place. Non-musical sounds were thought to urge people to think too much about meanings out in the world. These meanings were like an open door letting sounds in from outside the concert hall but, again, too simply. It was usually just one door open and the street it was opened onto was not a particularly interesting street. Open several doors on a couple of really good streets and it might be more interesting than what is going on inside. The hall might empty out onto the streets to join in, like recess.

So this oldschool proscription against non-musical sounds was self-fulfilling. Constricted meanings coming through this one door were not interesting enough to compete with the sanctity of the hall or the music inside and, by extension, inside the inner sanctum of a person listening to the innermost sanctum of the music itself, like Russian dolls or an onion, perhaps an artichoke. There was something in the inner sanctum of music that had nothing to do with meaning and there was no use thinking otherwise. I saw a brain scan of Tim Minchin listening to F-sharp that proves it. I found it appealing.

When it comes to music we are often asked not to think about it. Thinking is associated with words and words can never do justice to music, it is said, or so the lyrics go. Music journalism: that has got to be one tough profession. It is hard enough to write about them let alone be them. So many words squandered doing what they can never do: succeed in doing justice to music. Music journalists can never succeed and their unavoidable lack of success in doing justice to the music does nothing but spread injustice in the world. The only success that music journalists have is in wrapping failure and cruelty up into one. Everything needs a package.

And they cannot be trusted. You see them listening to music and they appear to be feeling the music. Other people listening have the unsung courage to really feel the feeling of feeling the music, but music journalists are instead thinking about what to write. You think they might be feeling but they are plotting about how to violently inflict injustice upon the music in which everyone else finds pleasure. Are they ignorant of the sensitivity of the sensitives? Yes they are. So failure, cruelty, deceit and ignorance wrapped up into one. And what for? Simply to get between you and the music, right where pleasure should be. Music journalists steal your pleasure: lascivious thieves.

People may have been too busy listening to music to hear that there are debates about sound art. There are a few schools of thought. By schools I don't mean anything the size of a public high school or a collection of university departments. Something much smaller. Too much smaller and a school becomes a club. By thought in a school of thought I mean that people actually think about these things. One school of thought by students of sound art

theory, by student I mean someone who studies sound art theory and thinks about it, not just the students who are assigned to read the theory, and by theory I mean I would like to explain but it would become too theoretical.

One school of thought of sound art theory says that there is nothing to think about, not entirely of course because they are thinking about the theory, but at certain moments of the sound art are they not thinking about the theory and not thinking about other things, especially not the sound art. And that is their way to think and not think about sound art. So this school of thought is a matter of scheduling, not unlike schools where people study. So sound art theory can be like a school where it is hard to tell when you're at recess.

Schedules happen within school sessions within what used to be seasons and, yet, the sessions still happen on schedule. And yet these timings happen between minute oscillations and the oscillations of minutes counted off from one second to the next to the next. And more recently: geological time frames. But it is hard to get the timing right when you don't think the piece is any good. Not thinking it is good even before you are supposed to start to not think about it is not good. This school of thought doesn't think you can think it is no good until you have not thought about it for quite some time yet.

You never know when a school of thought is still in session. It is also difficult to determine enrolment figures of this school or that, but it doesn't matter because there is no testing regime, only self-examination. Since you never know when school is in session self-examination may already be too late. One question on the make-up test: name how 'self' finds its way as a species of thought? Please refer to self-annihilation and annihilation of the

self. For a self-improvement that is never too late, see self-annihilation once session is over. Apply yourself to not applying yourself. Get between you and all your means of a feeling for meanings.

Luckily, there is a way to pass but then the school would be a club. That is what Leo Tolstoy did. You have been sitting in a room thinking silently about Tolstoy, have you not? Tolstoy belonged to a club as a boy where members were admitted only after sitting quietly in a corner while not thinking of a bear. An actual bear in the sanctity of the club would be unthinkable so it was best not to think about it. Best not to leave a door open through which a bear might enter. Think about Tolstoy sitting in the club not thinking about a bear that was not there, or Tolstoy thinking about others not thinking as they too were initiated.

This was before he wrote *War and Peace* and long before he wrote the novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Imagine how difficult it would be to sit in a concert hall listening to *The Kreutzer Sonata* and not think of Beethoven. You may not always think of Beethoven; you may think of Tolstoy. When is a concert a club? Everyone there so busy not thinking about Beethoven that they will not know whether or not you were thinking of a bear. No smoking may be a condition of admission to the concert hall but thinking of a bear? There are so many things in a concert not to think about; you would be allowed to remain. You can still belong.

So many things to think about even when there is no music. No music is different to silence. There are silences between movements in certain types of music that are part of the music, the parts where people clap by mistake. What were they thinking? They were thinking that the music was over when it was still music, when the music was still in session. By clapping

they admitted they had not been initiated. If they thought about clapping no one would have noticed that they did not belong. Who let them through the door? Did they just walk off the street?

There are certain types of music where you are supposed to clap during the music but not *The Kreutzer Sonata*. In Steve Reich's *Clapping Music* the performers clap before the audience is supposed to clap. Yet in this and other types of music there is a silence before you are supposed to clap. You have to know when the end is, what the silence sounds like that means the silence is not the music anymore. There are times to know when silence is music and when silence is not music. Knowing means knowing the right time to begin to schedule when to think and when not to think.

When silence is not thinking about sound that is music then you are at a concert of 4'33", John Cage's silent piece, in three movements. It is hard to sit in a concert hall for nearly five minutes of silence and not think of Cage. Even three minutes. Maybe less. Are the silences between movements of *The Kreutzer Sonata* long enough? For Cage sounds must first become sounds-in-themselves and only then by being themselves become music. Sounds must identify themselves as themselves before self-annihilating into music. Yet, with all sound being music there is so much more not to think about, many more ways to not do justice to the music. It is hard enough not to think about music but not thinking about sounds so they can then be music

means not thinking twice. On schedule, in a minute oscillation. Once is not enough. Cage's music is more musical than music because it has a double-layered failure mode. Not bear. Bears.

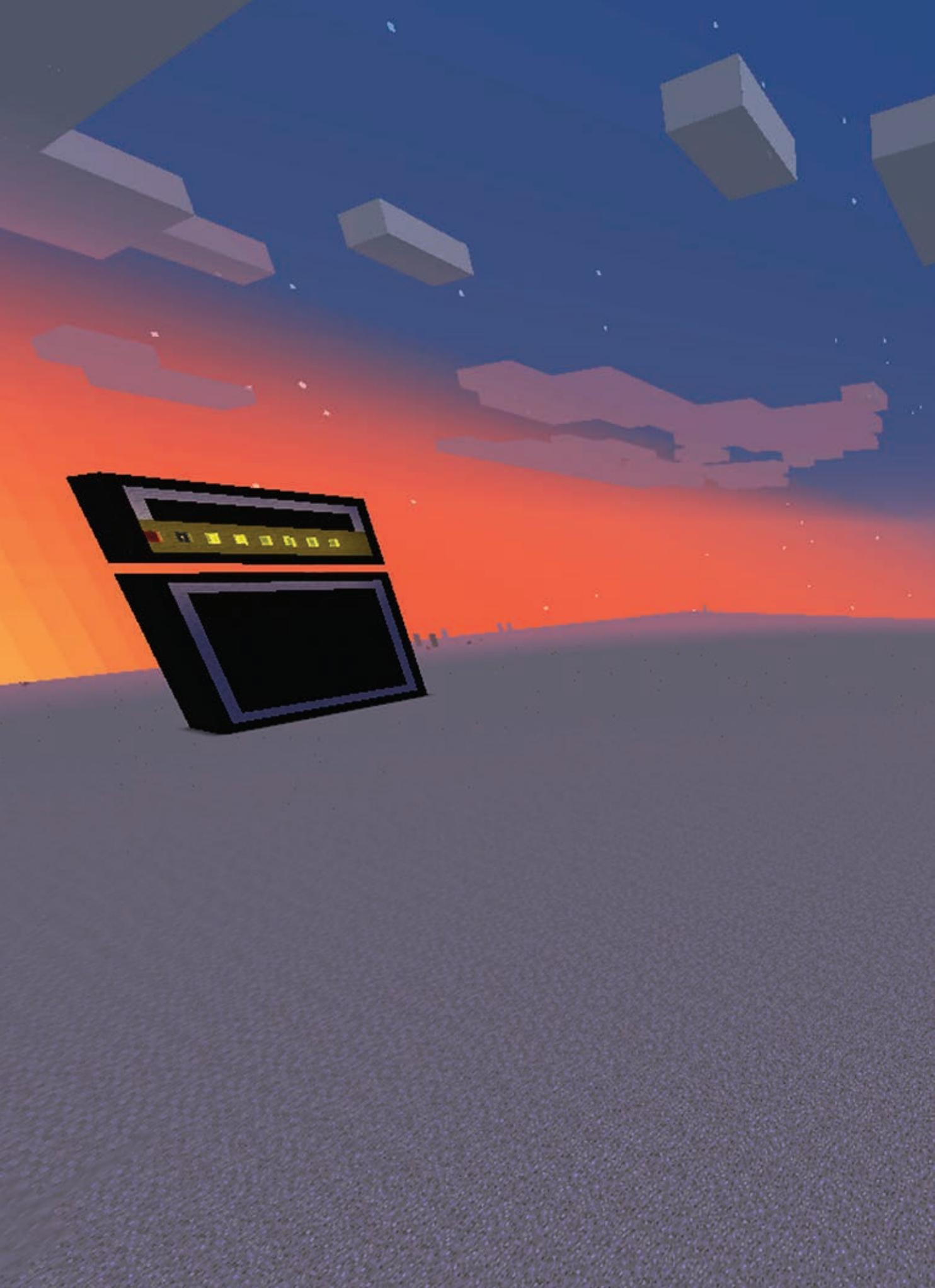
You know it is a certain type of music because you are not supposed to clap between movements and because it is not the type of music you can clap all the way through. Just as all sounds can be music all silences can be music except for the silence starting at 4'34" when the movements have stopped moving. But it is hard to know when that is without watching your stopwatch when you should be listening to music because the silences between the movements sound like the movements of silence. For Cage, it is not so much that there is no such thing as silence as that there is no such thing as a silence-in-itself.

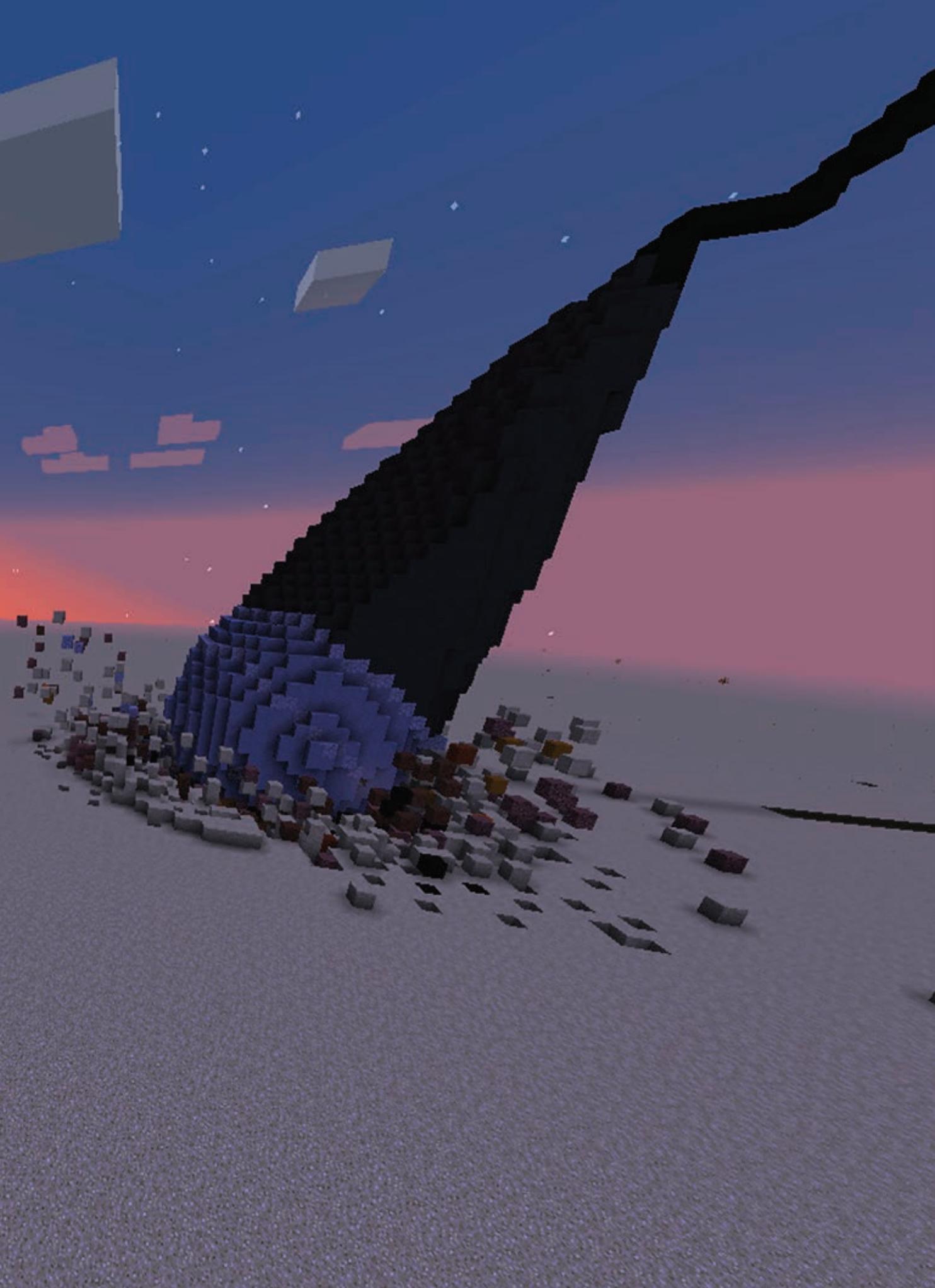
You know it hasn't ended because no one is clapping and you don't want to clap until the end because you have been initiated. It is like a club. It is only like one type of a club and not other types of a club because there are clubs where music is played and you can clap whenever you like. A certain type of a club is a special place where you can clap when you feel like it. The music makes you feel like clapping and if you are not clapping then people know you are a music journalist. And if all sounds can be music and the silences that are not silences of 4'33" do not end at 4'34" then it doesn't end there, 4'35", and what would be unbearable, 4'36".



Kusum Normoyle

Gain Game, 2014
produced in Minecraft |





On Language as Material

Astrid Lorange

*'I'll side with the rottenness of an object
I might one day love'*

– Wayne Koestenbaum, 'Notes on Affinity'

That language is material is an uncontroversial claim. Many before me have made such a claim – language as embodied practice, social reality; language as organismic, dynamic, emergent. I appeal to language's materiality when I want to de-emphasise, for whatever reason, the habituated and settled significations for which language often gets mistaken. Language as material is a reminder that there is a specificity to certain meanings, a time and a place, a history and a future, a trace and a vector, a chance of being otherwise.

As often as I make this appeal, I question its assumptions: if language is material, what kind of material is it? I want to attempt to answer this by positing the materiality of language not as substance but as passage: in other words, language happens in and as material – its movements and relations occasion new objects. Poetry, a minor art that tends to the scene of language's happenings, is particularly interested in such new objects. Aware of the artifice of materiality (a sense of madeness), poetry points to language as it does some small thing. I like poetry for this reason – it has a little but lovely gig.

For Julia Kristeva, perceiving the materiality of language means engaging with language apart from its normative social significance – that is, engaging with language as a stranger (for Kristeva, a careful and critical reader of Lacan, this meant anyone outside the strictures of a male-exclusive symbolic order). To be a stranger to language's conventions is to question the manner in which such conventions are legislated, mandated, regulated. Thus, a stranger is a threat to language's claim to facticity, its tendency to assert itself as law. Poets, as we have seen, make language artificial and therefore not a natural fact. This is perhaps why poets make good strangers and strangers good poets. Being strange to and with language is a kind of politics and, paradoxically, a mode of linguistic intimacy.

For Judith Butler, perceiving the materiality of language means engaging with language as inextricable to its signifying pursuits. Language as material and language as signification are not opposed, she argues, but part of the same dialectical process: language cannot be separated from meaning and so cannot be conceived in terms of 'pure' materiality, and yet (or and also), meaning is always material insofar as it is known phenomenally. For Butler, the materiality of the signifier and the signification of material co-constitute language and its use by and between bodies: human and non-human bodies, technological bodies, social and political bodies, the bodies of literature and architecture. Poetry too is a kind of body; a body-network of ghostlike citations and reiterations, a body of smaller bodies, a body among others.

For Sianne Ngai, the materiality of language is (or can be) apparent in the aesthetics of composition – literally, the way writing is written. A dead-on reader of Stein and a leading scholar on the sublimely boring affect of repetition, Ngai argues that Stein's work materialises via agglutination, a gluggy collection of words that thicken rather than transcend their syntactical becoming. Stein's writing is hard work for the reader who must endure the endless pile-on of language in almost-exact repetitions. A plot-keen reader will diagnose the tiny differences between sentences to track a narrative meaning; a reader keen on aesthetics will apprehend the differences between sentences as the dynamics of rhythm. Both face the material labour of handling language that exceeds its functionality – language as machine gone wrong, loop skip, off button jammed. Stein's non-poem works are best read as poems, where 'poem' refers to the act of pointing to the way language happens at a given time or place.

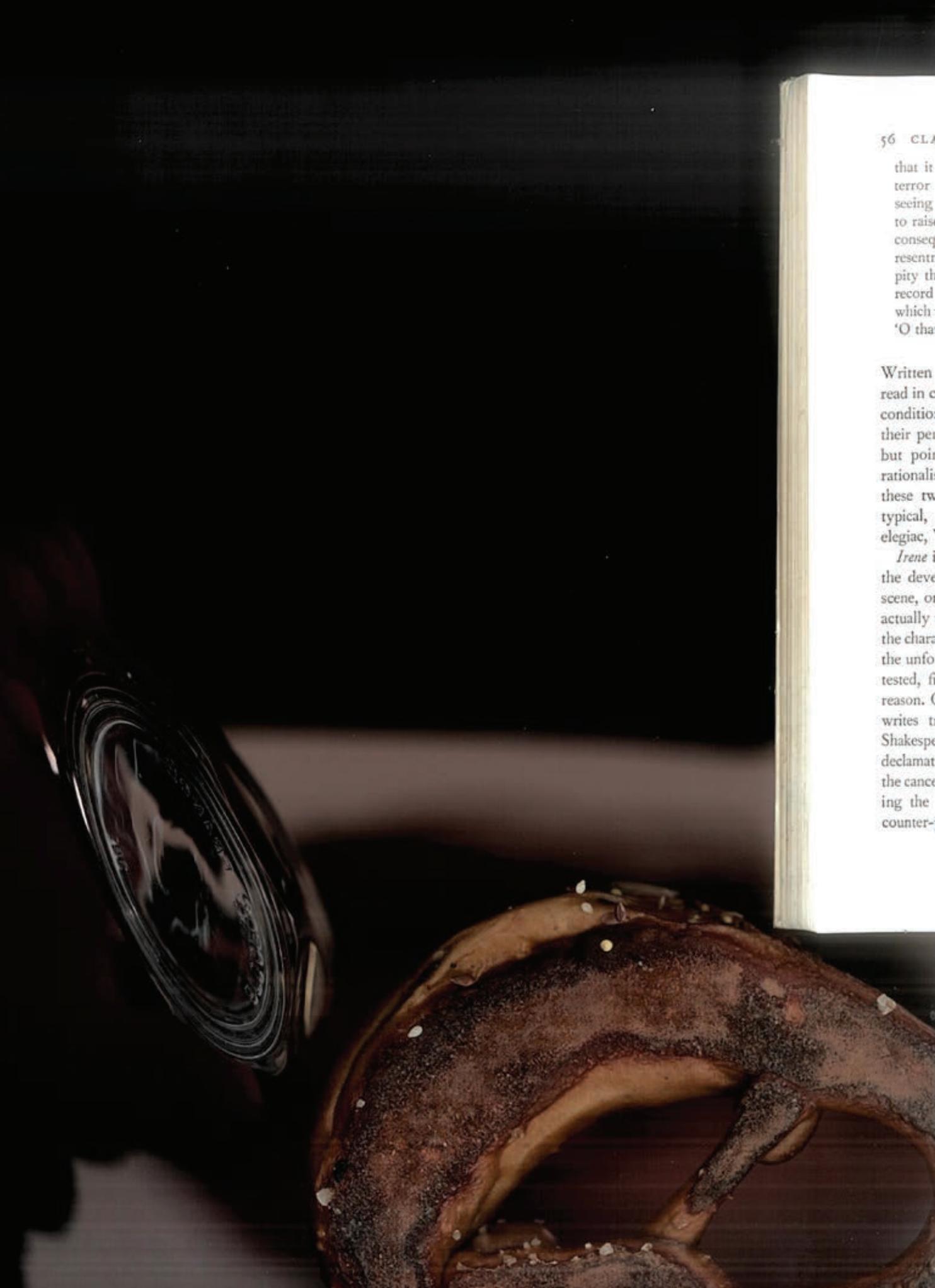
Of course, language is not only written; it is also spoken. Speaking is a different kind of composing, one in which the material of language is connected to the complex functions of cognition, memory, voice, register and vocabulary (vernacular, repertoire). The material of speech is emphatically social, cleaving (in the wonderfully contradictory senses of both bringing together and driving apart) relations through the interrelated processes



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\• **Tom Melick**
Colophon, 2014
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Frontispiece, 2014
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Imprint, 2014
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that make vocality possible. Some poetry engages the voice, a poetics of speaking and listening. Other poetry exists without an easy vocalisation, a poetics of page or image. The relationship between a poem's writtenness and spokenness is often overdetermined: to read a poem aloud is to imagine, in fact, something utterly different (a volatile, promiscuous translation).

For Wayne Koestenbaum, the word 'affinity' refers to an ambivalent relationship felt towards an object – or, more exactly, a feeling towards a vague set of objects. Affinity, as he writes, cannot be sure of its exact destination: what the object is that is felt for is not known until the affinity turns into something else (love, fear, disgust). Affinities are tuggings that turn up in the middle of an odd event. To have an affinity is to feel the absence of a definite kind of relation; affinities defer judgement in favour of a far less certain kind of feeling or action. Similarly, Ngai theorises 'interestingness' as an aesthetic category in lieu of definite judgement, a kind of holding-off from making a call while nevertheless remaining engaged with an object or experience. (To call something interesting is to stake a claim either way: this is and is not of value.) Affinities and interests, then, name the ambiguous affects that circulate in and as economies of intimacy. Coming into contact with objects, bodies, events or concepts means coming into new relations of proximity. Affinities are social gatherings with indistinct rules of exchange.

I want to imagine the materialisation of language (as speech, in writing, through image, with the body, as the passage of a concept's itinerancy) as an affinitive act; an act that brings things into contact with each other. This is a vague idea, but happily so – language is the coming into relation of entities with material consequences: the odd social scene of a complex of microprocesses and shapeless, extensive concepts. Thicket of moss, loose knit of pups, sound from a different room (filtered and granulated), the space of a gesture, shopping list, theorem, errant entry, title page, copy streak, shoulder strain, chemicality, springtime libido, database, chew toy, secret, linebreak, stress dream, joke template, meal chat, index card. Some or more things make an affinitive scrum, come to be, make like a sentence, shape out an argument. If affinities tug us towards something before that thing is legible, and if language is an affinitive act, a movement towards material via materialisation, then language's affinitive tendencies are by definition experimental. What language does is determined by language happening (which is why, when we speak, we are often surprised or embarrassed by what is said, or why, when we write, our writing goes on to betray our best intentions or poorly guarded secrets, or why, when we are analysed, our desires are found to be neat little inversions of what we claim by speaking aloud, or why, when we read, we register the change occasioned by reading in our body and its modes of thought).

A politics of language inevitably includes a critique of the way words and things tend to come together to produce ideology. Knowing that language could always be otherwise (and indeed, that it must change) is a kind of knowing that knowledge itself must be challenged at every turn. Queering, to use a word that in its broadest sense denotes a kind of critique of conventionality and normativity (insofar as those things legislate and regulate social and political experience), can refer to a mode of inquiry that looks to language in order to understand the regulatory patterns of power as well as to mount a critique of power. Poetry, of course, has a thoroughly queer history; poetry is one way of examining the possibility of major disruption through minor forms. Here, then, the material of language refers to a particular instance of such formation, in all its minoriness: one askew letter, a tab space, an error, a wonky line, a bit of noise.

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Palace of Scent, Sound and Objects

Conversation: Vicky Browne & David Haines

//• David Haines

Slow Fast Mountain (earth aroma), 2014
Custom tables, mineral specimens (coal), aroma crafted by the artist, custom electronic aroma delivery system. stereo sound.

•// Vicky Browne &

Darren Seltmann
Black Mountain, 2013
Mixed media
Photo: Silversalt photography

Vicky Browne and David Haines share an interest in the multi-sensory. They work with the visual in addition to sound, scent and touch. Of particular interest for this issue of *Das Superpaper* is the relationship of scent, sound and materials via the object.

David's installations include aromas. Audiences move with caution towards black spherical objects, for example in the work *A disassembled flower* (2012), interested in yet untrusting of the smell they are about to receive. Like Vicky's work there is something very unexpected in the experience; the audience is not prepared to find the gallery filled with the aroma of damp earth that emanates from large lumps of coal in *Slow Fast Mountain (earth aroma)* (2014).

We are well aware of the sound and scent in our daily lives. The materiality of such senses is however less well known. In a similar fashion to David's aroma works, Vicky has built a practice around materialising sound through objects. At times sound is manifest through its concept rather than its actuality. Sound is imagined but not actually present. Other times sound is present but it is not what we expect, perhaps we find ourselves inside a handmade dome listening to the sound of plants in conversation (*The Sound of Plants and Music* (2012)).

No act of perception is pure or unmediated

Low states and high states of entropy

Nietzsche – "You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star"

Clo
n

Palace
Sound a

Islands of stability within chaos

The audible object is everywhere

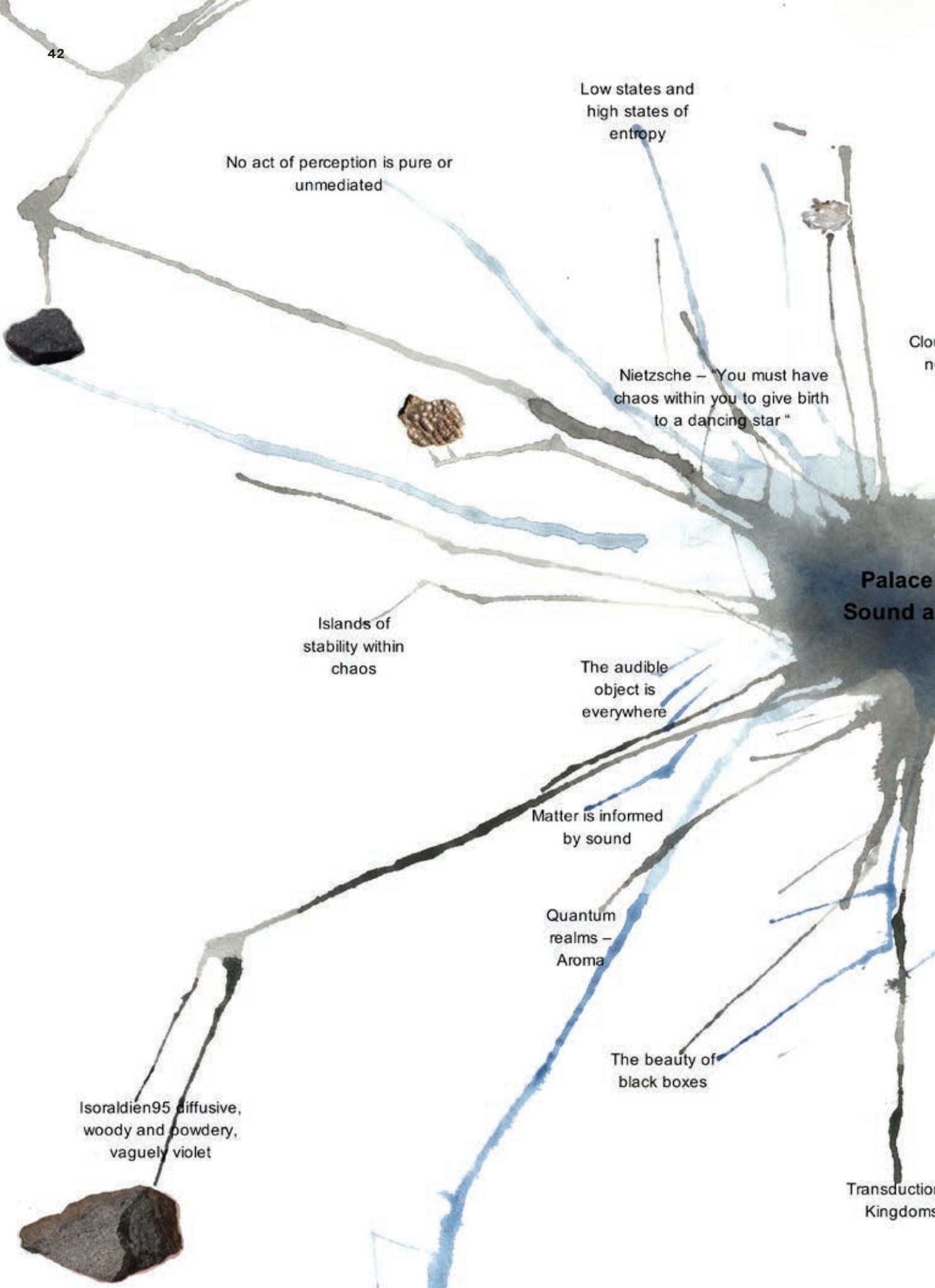
Matter is informed by sound

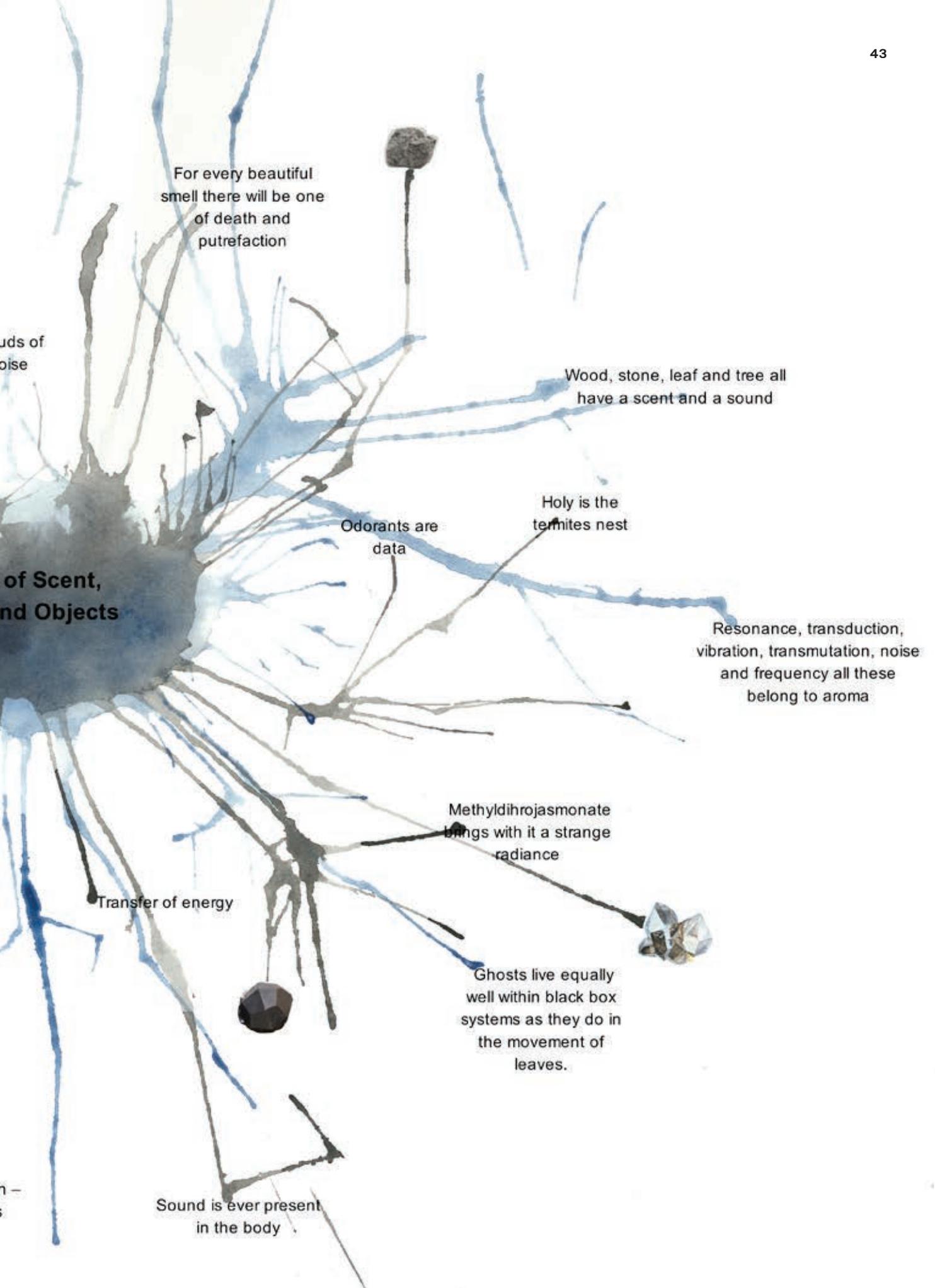
Quantum realms – Aroma

The beauty of black boxes

Isoraldien95 diffusive, woody and powdery, vaguely violet

Transduction
Kingdoms





For every beautiful smell there will be one of death and putrefaction

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oise

Wood, stone, leaf and tree all have a scent and a sound

of Scent,
and Objects

Odorants are data

Holy is the termites nest

Resonance, transduction, vibration, transmutation, noise and frequency all these belong to aroma

Methylidihrojasmonate brings with it a strange radiance

Transfer of energy

Ghosts live equally well within black box systems as they do in the movement of leaves.

Sound is ever present in the body





Notes on Translation

Té (Kynan Tan & Andrew Brooks)

A murmur, seizing me, I can't master its source, its increase is out of my control. The noise, the background noise, that incessant hubbub, our signals, our messages, our speech and our words are but a fleeting high surf, over its perpetual swell.

– Michel Serres ¹

We might think of translation as a shuttling back and forth between perception and understanding; a never-ending process of transduction between the sensorial and the semiotic; an attempt to reconcile the material and the immaterial through a crude coding of things experienced into a sign-based system of things grasped.² Translation is both necessary and impossible. It is always an approximation, and in approximating, produces something new.

We are attempting to make visible and sensory an invisible entity that exists undetected beyond our limits of perception. To make seen (if only for an instant), the malleable and shapeshifting nature of electrical energy. A swarm of hidden actors and connections, translated into a mass of pure sensorial experience. A momentary return to a pre-linguistic state where these invisible forces are inscribed upon the body through the synaesthetic experience. Electrical energy is vibration and vibration is simultaneously translated into sound and light.

John Cage said that there is no such thing as silence and drew our attention to the sound, the noise and the vibration all around us. Most famously demonstrated in his composition 4'33" Cage's thesis was that a musical reality was inescapable, and he legitimated this claim with his oft-recounted anechoic chamber epiphany.³ Cage both opened music up to the noise of the everyday and loosened sound from the shackles of Western art music. Treating sound as acoustic energy – as vibrations – and accepting that there is no such thing as silence, we can deduce, as Robert Barry did in the 1960s, that "There is not anything that is not energy."⁴

The noise. A sea encompassing the visible and the invisible, a multiple from which our signals, messages and meanings momentarily emerge as "a fleeting high surf, over its perpetual swell".⁵ Perhaps we can apply Serres' metaphysics of noise to thinking about energy. Energy is an omnipresent force, limitless and unending. We may tap into this invisible phenomena, harness it as a malleable material, and translate it into perceptible forms. And yet it has itself no background. Cage's assertion that there is no silence poetically reminds us of the energy around us. Sound and energy dissolve into one as we attempt to make sense of a continuous and complex environment of vibrating audibility. And so we return to translation, that of concepts and materials into compositional forms. In doing so, we ask how might energy be understood as a multiple? As a physical force and a metaphor? A concept and a material?

"Water, the sea. Perceptual bursts, inner and outer, how can they be told apart?"

— Michel Serres⁶

We are interested in a synaesthetic translation, one that involves a joining of the senses, a momentary return to a pre-linguistic state, a somatic understanding of experience. Patterns of invisible energy are translated into multiple forms, connecting sound, light and movement at a singular branching point. The electrical signal enables a symbiotic relationship between these forms, in which causality is replaced by multiplicity. Neither sound, light nor movement comes first in the chain of activity; rather they are simultaneously materialised from the invisible force of electrical energy. Perhaps, as the artist Robin Fox notes, synaesthetic experiences take us back to a state of "neural recklessness where everything is thrown in without deference to the emergent synaptic bureaucracy that parses our senses into organised and functional blocks."⁷

We can read the reception of these multisensory experiences as a form of synaesthesia, a cross-modal neural perception. The brain does not perceive these as of the same source. The tactile, sonic and visual each adhere to different physical properties and are observed by our senses through differentiation. Each individual sense generates different meanings, as sensorial experience is translated into thoughts and understanding. Yet the brain is adept at linking these together, in branching meaning across these separate entities. The process of differentiating, approximating, dividing and recombining this mass of experience into functional blocks for the brain to process necessarily creates something that did not exist, something unique to the viewer's perception.

There is a friction between these differences and in these relations. Frictions between how the energy around us becomes sensory by this process of approximation, and frictions between how the difference in senses creates different forms of meaning. The work evolves over time, while at each moment in time we ourselves have changed from the moment before, constantly parsing input, changing how we perceive, an unending feedback loop of re-adjusting ourselves. A continuous process of seeking stabilisation and never quite finding it.

Between our sensory experience and thought, is something lost? What happens when that which is drawn from the senses is translated – added to, subtracted from, rounded or adjusted to match the completely *other* space of thought and language? The way that we observe the world around us, our making sense of things, and our own internal dialogue are all necessarily different, and that friction is what we are constantly observing, making sense of and coming to terms with.

The process is repeated here in these pages, in trying to translate the idea of the work somehow into another format that can be sensorially and cognitively processed, from sound and light into a snapshot, an image. Concepts and thoughts into text, still pages for processing at other timescales using other modes of perception.

Here the mind returns to solipsism. Because of the unknowability of thoughts, that which cannot be transferred or proven to be true, knowledge that is unable to be defined, thinking only of oneself and the movements of one's thoughts and senses. How everything forms connections, *is* everything else, draws a web of one-dimensional lines, a point reaching to a point, but the connection itself has no area, no mass, no definable reality.

- 1 Michel Serres, *Genesis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
- 2 This definition of translation is informed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Translation as Culture'. For Spivak, translation is a political act of simultaneously understanding the 'other' and the self. It is the notion that meaning arises from the process of translation that has informed our thinking here.
- 3 In 1951, Cage visited an anechoic chamber (a room designed to completely absorb reflections of either sound or electromagnetic waves. i.e. designed to be silent) at Harvard. Expecting to hear silence, he heard two sounds: one high and one low, which the sound engineer informed him were the sounds of his nervous system and his blood circulating. It is a story that Cage told for the rest of his life and one that underpinned his aesthetic philosophy: that sounds are everywhere and that all sounds are musical.
- 4 Ursula Meyer, "Conversation with Robert Barry, 12 October 1969", in *Conceptual Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972).
- 5 Michel Serres, *Genesis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
- 6 Michel Serres, *Genesis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
- 7 Robin Fox, "The exploded infant" (2014) <http://monablog.net/2014/07/14/the-exploded-infant/>





True Colours: Video Endoscopy

Conversation:
Pia van Gelder
Tali Hinkis
Kyle Lapidus

Video is a material, embedded in machines, often perceived as ethereal and immaterial, as if its electronic nature subverts or circumvents the material world. The face of video is often a screen of light – a cathode ray tube, an LCD or plasma screen or perhaps a projection screen. What we see of video is essentially light. But what makes up the rest of the body that is video – the arms, the legs, the intestines?

We hold the box but we cannot hold the signal.

The materials are:

- 1 The physicality of the instrument which we expand and embellish as sculptures.
- 2 The signal – the performer simulates interacting with the material of electrons.

In this sense, performing with hardware is performing a metaphor for intangible experiences.

I am thinking metaphor here as inspired by Hank Rudolph – I thought before of the video signal as a metaphor but not the actual system.

We find ways to translate, materialise, illustrate. Transfer experiences. The sense of being in sync with the instrument, pulsing, skin to knobs – in sync with the signal. The material of the body and that of the machine.

There are wave-particle dualities, not just of the photons in the cathode ray tube, but also the equally antiquated VHF transmissions. These allow seemingly instantaneous information transfer hyperlocally (in space with a tightly contained vacuum) or at great distances (space with asteroid belts, comet clouds and moons). Even though the instantaneous voltage shifts are imperceptible, the afterimage persists.

You can't hold it but you can caress it. Can't stem the tide but can go for a swim or splash a friend. And the wave-machine is also a friend for collaborative experience-sharing. This friend likes to make up new rules, if we're lucky.

- **LoVid**
SyncAvisions, 2009
Digital photograph



•| **LoVid**

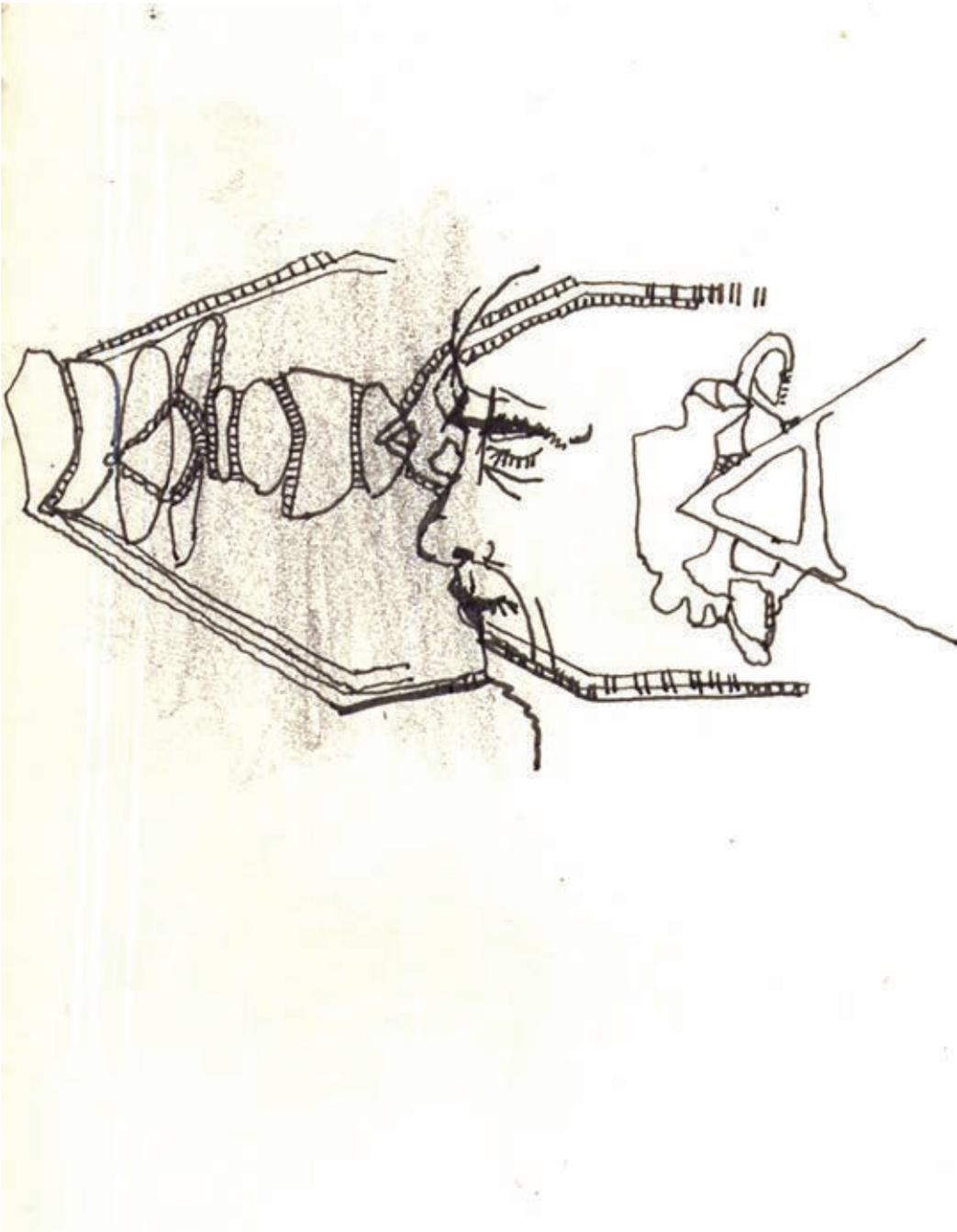
Dissection2, 2009

Pen on paper

•/• **Pia van Gelder**

Eyes Without A Face, 2012

analogue modular audio-video
synthesizer, pin-hole CCTV
camera, Sony Trinitron CRT
monitor, powered speaker



These machines are indeed friends. Our dialogue with them, through the gentle suggestions of caresses and twiddles, shapes and modulates lively vibrant waveforms, changing shapes and colours.

But we make these machines. We conceive them through appropriated circuitry and made-up designs. These friends start out as parts slowly soldered and plugged into boards, embedded in boxes, and in threaded and woven softness. Their metamorphosis takes place here in the formation of something separate and whole. They become our collaborators. They commune with us as connected bodies, expanding our senses to communicate in living colour. And sometimes their expressions are entirely unexpected and independent from our own, and we wonder, who are you?

Like a lesson in anatomy, if we are discussing *Material* and *Video* we can think philosophically but also, it is good to be very specific regarding what precisely is happening even if only on a microscopic level.

Endoscopy actually means “looking inside”. Strangely, endoscopies today are often performed with a small video camera in the form of a capsule or a tiny camera on a cable. Literally thinking, a video endoscopy of video is a kind of strange feedback loop, using video to look at video. We might imagine an endoscopy of video as a non-invasive procedure involving a tiny anti-matter capsule that we send through from the beginning of our chain of video machines, to the end where we see the final image on a screen. This endoscopic capsule can sense the electronic signals and each part in each machine is like an important organ of a larger anatomy.

There's an electron's eye view. swooping through the copper trace tunnels, liberated from fossils, looking for somewhere to land – touch ground. Some might hit a roadblock but some laze about, letting 10 others jump each time they shrug or wink. It's a long trek from pin to pin but the medium is only viscous when it's thin and hot.

These are the cells and organs, the genotype, but there's also the phenotype, and those may not be as lucky. Stuffed into a clown-car for focus, and then shot by the gun as an inhuman cannonball, and flying free for a moment, only to be pushed about again – the magnet makes a tamed lion.

But what machines are we looking at? What parts make up this chain we're calling a body? Perhaps our familiar friends: a screen – RCA cable – video encoder – video sync generator – video oscillator.

This is a jack-of-all-trades. A circulatory system that's also digestive, and visuo-motor, burning a lactate phosphor afterimage, definitely anaerobic. But the signal driving the consumption is reproductive, duplicated worldwide as it's transmitted – antennae and cables throbbing. This signal starts out nervous, counting and defining, deciding when to fire. There are symbiotics here, bodies within bodies. Dig deep and enjoy it viscerally...

Dissection.

Another body might be made up of camera – RCA cable – screen. Perhaps the camera apparatus is the more familiar to you and the most simple body to deconstruct. Looking through the lens of a video camera we see an

image of what stands before the camera. This image is light. In this apparatus, light is where video begins, and where it ends. The camera captures an image of light and converts it into an electronic signal. To do this it uses its “charge-coupled device”, or CCD image sensor. Made up of an orchestral grid of photoactive capacitors, storing and then letting go in a complex rhythm that makes up the image we see before us. These drum beats create a series of voltages which are then fed out through a single thread of fibre to a display circuit, a cathode ray tube. This tube is a vacuum which uses a red, a green and a blue electron gun to convert these electronic voltages back into light, shooting beams of electrons onto a surface of thick glass with a phosphor coating. This thick glass holds it all inside, creating a tiny window to look into video's beautiful face. But be careful, if it breaks, it will all implode/explode into a glistening, glittery cloud of phosphor and light with a BOOM!

Everyone knows you can talk to the repairman for more details. But they want to caress the nothingness that is something. To drink the mirage. Let's propose a toast! To the flow that isn't liquid, the light that isn't reflected, the emptiness that fills, to crystals that dance!





Unexplored Functions /Everyday Objects

Conversation: Peter Blamey & Tully Arnot

Peter Blamey So, I've been thinking about the common ground between our practices, and for want of a better term the word vivification keeps coming to mind – or maybe animation is more what I mean. Either way, it seems that in our own ways we're both intent on imparting, implying, amplifying or enhancing some sense of liveliness to the general everyday stuff in the world. Obviously we do this by different means and across a range of materials and contexts, but there's this idea of conveying liveliness as a way of asking questions about the function of objects and our and relationships with them.

Tully Arnot Definitely. The issue of function and this kind of human-object relationship is an essential part of my practice. I think coming from a design background, the function of objects has been really important to me, or rather the unexplored functions, the new ways that things can be used or perceived. The design approach though is too rational, like untapping potential in objects. I guess what I want to uncover is just an 'otherness' – not a more efficient alternative, just an alternative.

PB Yeah, I'd say that's a big motivation for me, too – it's certainly a big part of why I've been drawn to using discarded materials. Sometimes I feel like the decision to throw something out is really a lack of imagination, as though you just couldn't think of anything else that could possibly be done with that object. For me objects aren't suddenly 'dead' or useless just because one person thinks its

functionality is exhausted or whatever, even if they're broken. There's always a great sense of 'what else', and I guess that's why a concept like animation comes to mind, although it's a bit of a difficult term.

TA The way I approach animation is something that I try to be quite conscious of; in some ways it can be a bit too theatrical for me. In my work I think about the Uncanny a lot, but I guess privately in the studio where it's controlled and means something specifically to me. I'm not really into the original Unheimlich, things like animated dolls and so on, to me I'm interested in something more subtle and less human-based. I think the Uncanny Valley is something that's increasingly relevant as technologies develop, but then I feel like human-object relationships are so complex; I'm interested in how an animated or simulated object can have the same kind of feeling as interacting with a robot or prosthetic form. Then there's always the question of how far to push it.

PB How much activity is enough? One of things I really like about your *Nervous Plants* is their subtlety. There's something covert about their movements, as though maybe it's something you weren't necessarily meant to see it doing, or that it may not even want you to see.

TA Using everyday objects in art is valuable as it allows you to tap into an audience's existing relationships, and I guess their future relationships with those objects. The plant work took

something really familiar and moved it in a way that could appear normal, the branches responding to a breeze or something. But then it's not familiar, it's a quite digital and controlled movement. I see you working with materials in a similar way, but you deal with more complex technologies – which I guess is expressed in the outcomes of your work.

PB Sure, some of the technology might be complex but I tend to work with it in some pretty simple ways! I've worked a lot with audio feedback both in performance and in installation works, mostly because I'm fascinated with the way it so quickly imparts something to me about the materials I'm working with. However, it's not that I'm in pursuit of some kind of self-referentialism, but instead it's aimed at inducing a kind of responsiveness to environmental changes (things like voltage, temperature, physical vibration and so on), coupled with something bordering on instability or unpredictability, that brings about something I couldn't design. But with that said, I'm happy with very little – sometimes just a small pulsing noise is enough.

TA Yes, well chatting at coffee the other day I was really excited by the way you explained your role in the artwork, kind of arranging components and then carefully manipulating them in the most subtle way.

PB But it's something other than straightforward manipulation, which isn't all that interesting to me. Modification is, but only to a degree,

• **Peter Blamey**

Cache, 2012

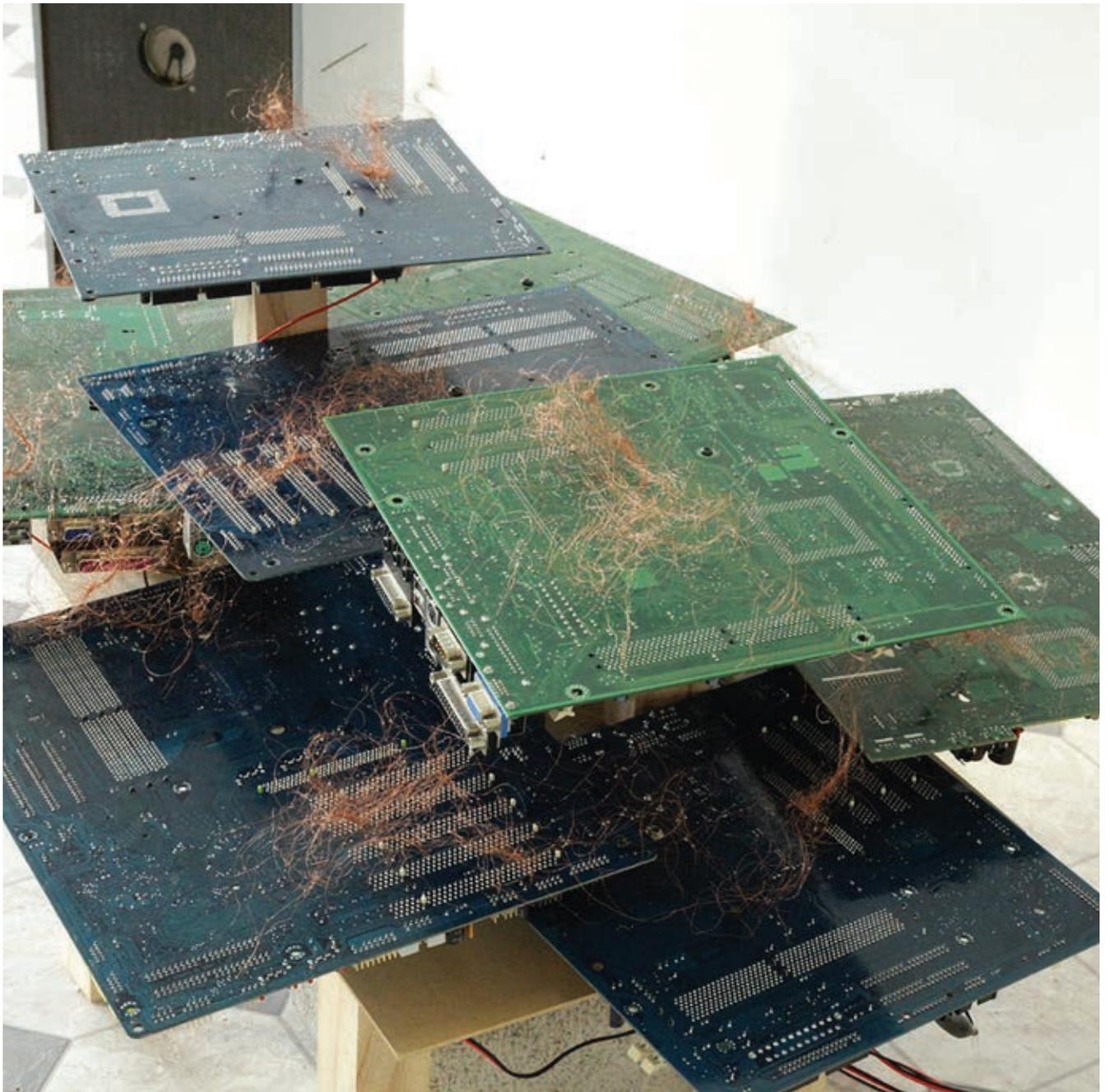
motherboards, copper wire,
electronics

Photo: Peter Blamey



•| **Peter Blamey***Island, 2011*Motherboards, copper wire,
amplifiers, solar panels, speaker

Photo: Kusum Normoyle

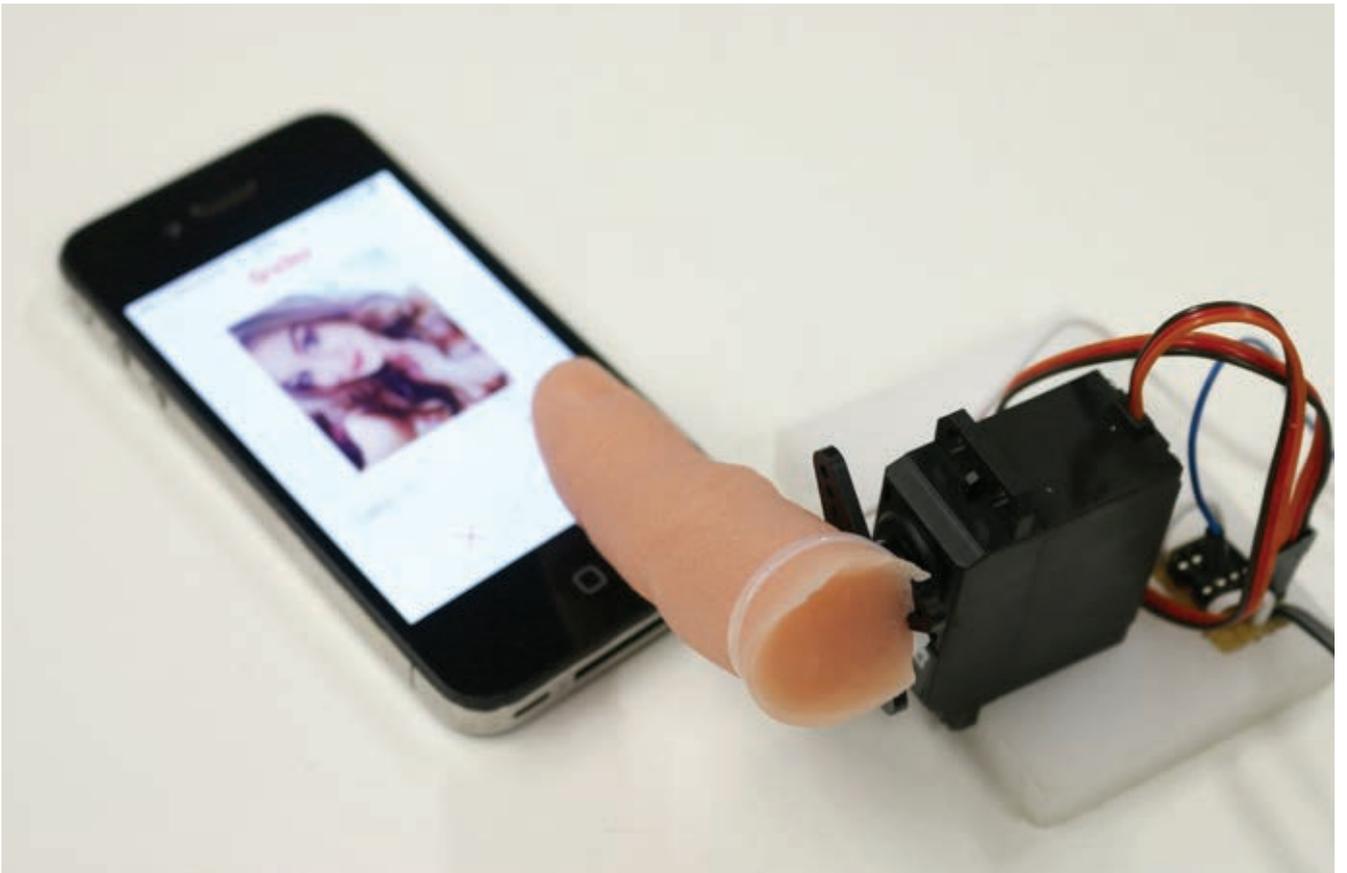


- **Tully Arnot**

Nervous Plant, 2014

Artificial plant, servo motors, microcontroller,
metal, electronics, light sensor, motion.





•| **Tully Arnot**

Lonely Sculpture, 2014

Cast silicone, servo motor, microcontroller,
iphone, tinder app.

as I'm concerned with not losing, or getting in the way of, anyone's ability to understand the history of the materials in the work and whatever humour or absurdity that goes with it: I like for people to know that I use components from trashed computers, or other electrical junk I find in the street.

TA With technology you have such multifaceted existences, maybe taking the cathode ray TV as an example, the guts of it is something you would be familiar with seeing dumped in the street, it's something we all know, but then really, I would have no idea what the individual parts do.

I feel like this tension between the unknown and a maybe 'ad hoc' exploration is something that drives your practice, is that how you see what you do?

PB That sounds about right! It's sometimes surprising to me how some things have changed, but are really just an extension of an underlying methodology (if that's what it is). Out of what used to be for me a relatively simple question about producing sounds in order to make music (albeit music heavily grounded in experimentalism) has developed a practice where sound has become an indicator of energies either existing in or passing through my work. Which isn't to say that it's all about the sound – a bunch of old motherboards covered in tangles of copper wire looks as noisy as it sounds, and represents the convoluted exchanges of voltage and pathways of electrons as much as it actually produces them. And just like the sound, it's a parody of connectivity as much as it is any kind of example, and yet it functions, which questions the imperatives behind the myriad social and technological protocols behind so many contemporary displays of connectivity.

TA But when it doesn't function, if you create a circuit that doesn't connect, then is that still valid as a silent sculptural piece?

PB Yeah, totally – I figure I have to accept whatever the outcomes are. After all, it seems a bit churlish to provoke a chaotic, unstable situation, but then get upset when it doesn't do exactly what you want! Disconnection, misconnection or interconnection – they're just as significant for me.

TA Connectivity is something I think about a lot – reading people like Sherry Turkle it's interesting to look at a more technological perspective on new methods of connection, and how the proliferation of multiple simultaneous connections in a way destroys any form of real deep connection. I think connecting with objects, encouraging an awareness

of how we interact with the inanimate, is interesting because it encourages an awareness of connection but at the same time is disconnected. Do you think this human-object connection is part of your work?

PB I'm big on the idea of reimagining or at the very least reinterpreting the things I come across. I can't recall ever having made a conscious decision to work so much with electronics per se, but it's as much the problems I have with the world of consumer electronics that keeps me interested in maintaining some kind of conversation with it. I suppose that makes my work a series of unsolicited responses!

TA Ha, well yeah as a child I reckon I made a number of unsolicited explorations of the inside of old electronics – which I'm sure you did too! I guess I wanted to understand how things are deconstructed, but could never figure out how they went back together.

PB Me either. Still, there's something about the fiction implicit in the 'sealed', monolithic, functional veneer that the technological artefacts we deal with everyday present us with that I find a bit irksome: the way they project conceptions of technology as more or less impenetrable and obtuse – useful perhaps, but deeply unknowable in any but the most general way. Instead I feel like my practice is in part about realising notions of variability within a very different context to that of the consumer electronics marketplace, one where technology is subject to both social forces and the fragility of existence, rather than apart from them (or something).

TA Well, our relationship with technology is all about interface now, about simplifying our understanding of how things work. If your iPad breaks, do you open it up to try figure out how to fix it? There's a completely different relationship with technological artefacts, I often think about how our generation's approach to tinkering is in a way outdated. Obviously there is tinkering with code or things like that which are still relevant, but the relationship that we have with consumer electronics is very one-dimensional now...

PB You're right on both counts – maybe the sooner it reaches zero dimensions the better!

The Instrument Builders Project 2

Review:
Helen Hughes
15 March –
9 April 2014

Many art institutions now actively encourage multi- and cross-disciplinary practices. The National Gallery of Victoria's recent and epic *Melbourne Now* exhibition declared that contemporary visual art at once is and depends on contemporary dance, architecture, music and design to exist. Held alongside this exhibition in Melbourne last December, the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand held its annual conference on the theme of 'Interdiscipline', asking its participants: 'What does it mean to work between, under, through and without discipline?'¹ The production of that which is truly interdisciplinary, as Roland Barthes has argued, is not merely a matter of "confronting already constituted disciplines", it requires more than to just "choose a 'subject'" (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences." True interdisciplinarity, rather, "consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one".²

Though it broadly concerns sonic art, the Instrument Builders Project (IBP) adopts interdisciplinarity as its fundamental, constitutive principle, choosing the term 'instrument' deliberately to refer to the many different uses of the word – musical, scientific, technical, pedagogical – simultaneously. IBP is a shared studio residency for Indonesian and Australian instrument builders organised by curators Kristi Monfries (based in Jogjakarta) and Joel Stern (in Melbourne). The first residency, held in Jogjakarta at Indonesian Contemporary Art Network (ICAN) in June–July of 2013 brought together musical instrument makers (such as the karanding craftsman Asep Nata and the instrument inventor Rod Cooper) and more squarely visual artists (like the public interventionist Michael Candy, or the relational artist Ardi Gunawan). The second was also held at ICAN, in March–April of 2014; in November 2014, a third iteration will take place at the National Gallery of Victoria Studio at the Ian Potter Centre in Melbourne.

The second iteration of the IBP made an even bigger departure from the traditional concept of a musical instrument than did the first. IBP2 created a shared studio environment in which traditional instrument builders (like the gamelan maker Mas Wibowo) and visual artists with little in the way of a musical background (such as the Brisbane-based artist Caitlin Franzmann) produced new work. The product of integrating musical instrument makers with post-conceptual visual artists was, at a philosophical level, a radicalised understanding of the questions, what is an instrument? What is music? What is sound? At a practical level, the outcome was a series of complex collaborations, not only across cultural backgrounds (Australian, Indonesian) but across artistic disciplines (acoustic, visual) too.

Some of the works produced in this year's workshop made no or barely any sound at all, and thus operated as a musical instrument in the most conceptual of terms – producing what Seth Kim-Cohen might term 'non-cochlear sound'.³ Jompet Kuswidananto's *A Model for Mass and Explosion* (2014), for instance, was a mechanised hanging sculpture comprising two plaster-cast hands at one end and two rusty saws rigged with electricity from a mosquito zapper at the other, both of which were automated to clap at protracted metronomic intervals. Both pairs – of hands and saws – moved at an incredibly slow pace, building up anticipation for the moment of contact. When the two parts finally did meet, they barely touched. Thus the plaster hands did not



'clap' sonically, and when the saws met only the tiniest blue spark and faintest buzzing sound were produced. In its slow build up, *A Model for Mass and Explosion* functioned like a joke, the punch line being the distinct lack of a sound.

Franzmann's *Between two trees, between two ears* (2014), made in collaboration with Dale Gorfinkel, Wibowo and Rully Shabara from the band Senyawa, utilised sound as a material in a different way. Elaborating on earlier works of hers in which viewers are sonically isolated from one another in the exhibition space by wearing helmets each fitted out with different audio tracks, Franzmann's *Between two trees* was a series of custom-made leather eye-and-earmasks that simultaneously blindfolded the viewer and provided them with a unique soundtrack. There were three different models of masks: one had FM radio transmitters lodged over either ear, another had headphones playing a binaural recording embedded on either side, and the third had two large conical funnels that functioned as ear trumpets – that is, extensions of the human ear. As such, the sonic experiences were totally different from mask to mask: the radio masks entreated the wearer to walk in whatever direction would make the transmission clearer (that is, towards the transmitter); the headphone masks, with a sumptuous recording of Shabara doing vocal improvisations over Bowo's gamelan playing, encouraged the wearer to retreat into an inner world in order to listen fully, immobilising them to some extent; the ear trumpet mask, by contrast, disoriented the viewer as the

distance of the sounds around them were amplified and distorted. The idea to create blindfolds was prompted by a specific ritual that occurs at Alun Alun Kidul, the southern city square in Jogjakarta through which members of the IBP had to walk each day to get to the workshop. Here at the Alun Alun, visitors blindfold themselves and try to walk from one end of the square to the other, passing through the two large banyan trees in the square's centre. The belief goes that only the 'pure of heart' make it through unassisted, so while it is a social exercise – usually friends are seen accompanying other blindfolded friends, ensuring that they don't step into oncoming traffic – it is also a highly introspective and personal experience steeped in concentration.

Tintin Wulia's work engaged with the aforementioned oncoming traffic specifically. *Odong Danding Prototype* (2014) was a modified *odong odong* – a type of Indonesian pedicab that has strong associations with Alun Alun Kidul, where visitors ride *odong odong* covered with brightly coloured twinkling lights around and around the square at night for fun. Wulia purchased the *odong odong* and thus took it out of circulation from the Alun Alun circuit for the month while she, with the help of IBP's technicians (namely Dholy Husada and Iqbal Lubis, and studio manager Stufvani Gendhis) and participating artists (Bagus Pandega and Wukir Suryadi) fitted the roof of the structure with an electrically powered *angklung*, a tuned percussive instrument made of interlocking bamboo pipes that play multiple resonating notes with each hit. Wulia

affixed a music box roll to the back bumper of the *odong odong* which then powered the *angklung* through the raised bumps on the roll, which switched on, held, and then turned off the motors powering the *angklung* at different lengths and intervals. (A future iteration of *Odong Danding Prototype* at the NGV in November 2014 will also allow the *angklung* to play patches provided by other members of the IBP.) *Odong Danding Prototype* was then released back into circulation at Alun Alun Kidul as part of the IBP exhibition's opening celebrations. The entire exhibition party rode from ICAN to Alun Alun either on Wulia's modified *odong odong* or in one long procession of *betchaks* behind it.

As the above descriptions intimate, musical instruments were utilised by IBP2 participants as tools that shape social situations – whether encouraging congregation, as in Wulia's modified *odong odong*, which came from and was returned to an entertaining social outing for many of Jogjakarta's local residents and visitors, or Franzmann's more introspective suite of masks, which largely inoculated the viewer from the site's sociality and turned their thoughts inwards instead. This attention to the social function of music may have been the product of the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaborations that characterised the IBP's shared studio format – the studio's sociality. In the studio, every artwork is made in close consultation with other participants, and most of the participants rely, at some point or another, on borrowing the different technical or conceptual skills of other participants to execute a work. Put more simply, all the

\• **Tintin Wulia &
Lintang Radittya**

Odong dangding
prototype, 2014
odong odong vehicle, bamboo
angklong, music box cylinder,
motor, car battery, electrical
switches, LEDs

•/• **Caitlin Franzmann**

*Between two trees,
between two ears*, 2014
leather, wood, transistor radios,
media players, headphones,
electronic sensors

artworks in the IBP are the product of a discursive process, and it was as if this discursivity finally manifested itself in many of the formal structures of the works themselves (rather than merely manifesting in the process of their being made). Suryadi's enormous installation *Ecology Gong* (2014) exemplified this idea. *Ecology Gong* was a multi-part instrument that began in the driveway of ICAN where Suryadi built a large windmill that harvested wind energy outside the building to power a 'sonic ecosystem' within it. At the centre of the installation inside was an inflatable children's pool with several goldfish swimming around a large metal gong. Running water passed through different bamboo levers and cantilevers, which, in a suspense-building, Fischli & Weiss-style game of dominos, finally caused a large bamboo shoot to strike the centre of the gong. *Ecology Gong* transferred different forms of energy throughout the sprawling structure – from outside ICAN to inside, then throughout the various intricacies of the fishpond-gong ecosystem itself. In this way, like Peter Blamey and Gorfinkel's *Swayamvara*, in which a projector shone a beam of light through a glass *kropek* container, in turn hitting a solar panel that powered a small motor, causing a suspended shadow puppet to spin around at high speed, its arms rising upwards and spinning at such a rate so as to appear like a three-dimensional image, *Ecology Gong* became a metaphor for the mutual interdependency of the other artists and the artworks produced in the space.

focus on the production of experimental sound instruments made during IBP1 – such as Dylan Martorell's *Drum Plough* (made with Asep Nata and Wukir Suryadi), an analogue drum machine made of a repurposed old wooden plough, a computer, MIDI samples, found beer cans, drum sticks, and broken terracotta pots (amongst many other found objects), or Suryadi's *Akar Mahoni* (Mahogany Root), a multi-part instrument that could be played by several people simultaneously, which was carved out of a single piece of mahogany root and included a theremin, a step-sequence synthesiser, and a moveable guitar neck – to the creation of spatial and sonic instruments in IBP2, evidenced by Franzmann and Wulia's aforementioned projects. The funding structure of the project, largely hingeing on the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs as part of the Australian-Indonesian cultural festival 'Oz Fest' (a much needed exercise in diplomacy in the wake of the Australia-Indonesia spyfest revealed by *The Guardian* in November 2013), seemed to recognise, confirm and then instrumentalise the curatorial framing of sound as a material with rich social, cultural and political potentialities.⁴

The third iteration of The Instrument Builders Project will take place at the National Gallery of Victoria Studio, The Ian Potter Centre, Federation Square, Melbourne: 1-23 November 2014.

- 1 'Interdiscipline', AAANZ, <http://aaanz.info/aaanz-home/conferences/2013-conference/>; accessed 2 October 2014.
- 2 Roland Barthes, quoted in James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, California: University of California Press, 1986, p. 1.
- 3 'Non-cochlear' sound is Kim-Cohen's acoustic extrapolation of Marcel Duchamp's notion of 'non-retinal' visual art. See Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the blink of an ear: Toward a non-cochlear sonic art*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
- 4 Ewan MacAskill, 'Australia's spy agencies targeted Indonesian president's mobile phone', *The Guardian*, Monday 18 November 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/18/australia-tried-to-monitor-indonesian-presidents-phone>; accessed Saturday 20 September 2014.

The biggest departure from the first iteration of the IBP to the second was the shift from the





