Esemplasticism:
The Truth is a Compromise

The Truth

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The essays compiled in this part of the catalogue accompany the exhibition *Esemplasticism: The Truth is a Compromise.* An exhibition initiated and produced by TAG in cooperation with DISK/CTM - Club Transmediale held from 29 January till 27 February 2010 at Spandauerstrasse 2, Berlin-Mitte, Germany.

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Esemplasticity and The Performative Gaps of Perception

by Christopher Salter

In his notorious 1967 *Artforum* polemic "Art and Objecthood" the modernist critic Michael Fried argued that the survival of the arts increasingly would depend on their ability to defeat theater. For Fried, the artistic landscape's move away from strict painting towards minimalist (described as "literalist") art with its emphasis on the position of the observer (beholder) in relation to the work not only threatened the autonomy of the self-sufficient art object but also set it on its path of "degeneration" with the introduction of variability and temporality. In his crucial distinction between work "that is fundamentally theatrical and work that is not," Fried invokes an entire series of characteristics by which he saw the creeping theatricality of literalist art: the experience of the observer, the presence effects of the work and its variability in time and most explicitly, the importance of the *situation* that the observer finds herself in.[1]

Throughout his argument, Fried discusses a coterie of "literalist" artists, using their own statements about a new variability in art as fodder for his attack. In citing sculptor Robert Morris, for example, Fried notes that "in the best new work, the beholder is made aware that 'he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial contexts." [2] Later in the essay, Fried fires at Donald Judd for arguing for the "specificity" and "objectivity" of ordinary materials in Judd's and other artists' "literalist" sculpture. Yet, Fried reserves his largest salvo for the sculptor Tony Smith who had the audacity to claim that a nighttime car journey on the New Jersey Turnpike would trump the experience of an artwork explicitly because it aimed at experience itself as the subject/object.

> "*This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial and yet, it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.*" [3]

Of course, Fried was not only referring to minimalist artists whose practice was falling between the cracks of discrete artistic categories like painting and sculpture but also more explicitly to the work of John Cage who claimed that "all music approaches theater" because "theater takes place all the time wherever one is."[4] In a similar manner to Tony Smith's declaration of his experience of the Turnpike where "you just have to experience it as it happens, as it merely is," Cage's desire was to remove the intentionality of the artist from the work in the process of composition (using chance procedures).[5] More importantly, his aim to break down intentionality among listeners, composer and musical object *during* the real time act of performance signified a striking belief in a kind of pure experience of the observer's own heightened listening and awareness of a situation; a process which Branden Joseph has labeled "a production of the aesthetics of immanence." Through the insertion of indeterminacy in both the production and reception of sound, "Cage's goal, in all such endeavors," writes Joseph, "was to eliminate as much as possible from the acoustical experience the creation of any abstract form that could be received as existing on a level above, beyond, or outside the immanent realm." [6]

Around the same time as Fried's essay, the activities of the so-called California Light Space artists including James Turrell, Douglas Wheeler and most importantly, Robert Irwin, went even further than their New York counterparts in attempting to make the observer's experience a key element of the artwork itself. In a series of phases starting in 1960 and ending with the direct dismantling of his studio practice in 1970, Irwin, who was trained initially as a painter, engaged in a radical phenomenological reduction of the conventions and conditions of painting, by which he gradually suspended any superfluous image or gesture that brought on the baggage of re-presentation of imagery over "phenomenal presence." Distancing himself from his early Abstract Expressionist tendencies, Irwin moved first from his so-called line paintings, works which sought to reduce any extraneous gesture and thus resulted in a series of experiments in which the observer's attention became central in discerning almost invisible geometric horizontal lines suspended in a color field, to his later disks—a series of "non objects" in which "perception itself, independent of any object, was the true art act." [7] In fact, Irwin's self-induced phenomenological *epoché*, the Greek term Husserl used to describe a suspension of the "natural attitude" to reveal the manner in which things presented themselves in their own reality and presence to the observer, aimed to achieve what the artist later labeled "a first order of presence" in which painting would no longer "begin and end at the edge" but instead become the room, the environment itself. In his 10 year process of bracketing off the unnecessary stroke, image and gesture, Irwin went far beyond Fried's attack on minimalist theatricality by not only implicating the observer but, more critically, the action, the direct *performance* or enaction of the observer's perception and their subsequent experience as a result in the construction of the art work itself.

That perception can be seen not as a re-presentation of a pre-given world of discrete objects and subjects but as a performative act in time

is not a particularly new concept. Already in his 1901 treatise *Matter and Memory* (1901), Henri Bergson declared that the body is a "center of action" which "cannot give birth to a representation." [8] The body, according to Bergson, is one "image" among countless other images and perception consists in the manner in which those images affect the body and "afford" potential action or movement with them. We shift around in space thus causing other "images" to recede from our vision or grow in scale, whether these images are auditory, tactile, and visual or any other sensory modality. "The more I narrow this horizon, the more the objects which it circumscribes space themselves out distinctly according to the greater or lesser ease with which my body can touch and move them. They send back, then, to my body, as would a mirror, its eventual influence."[9]

More recent theories of enactive cognition reinforce Bergson's thesis of perception as a bodily affective act. "Perception," writes philosopher Alva Noë "is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do."[10] Perception is a performance—an "acting out." For Noë as well as Bergson, perception begins with the sensorimotor relations of the body and world. The eyes scan the field before them; the ear searches out the position and distance in a sudden burst of sound; the hand brushes across a surface in its quest for the tactile qualities of roughness and sharpness. The experiential qualities of the world are brought forwards or, as Noë claims, "acquire content" through bodily knowing and skill yet, the fact that perception construes and alters Bergson's fluctuating world of "images" is not by happenstance. Rather, it is the very structure of what Noë labels our *sensorimotor dependencies*, the direct effects that organs of sight, listening and locomotion have on the structure of sensory stimulation that we encounter.

Perception, however, is not only based on the perceiver's mastery of the patterns of their sensorimotor dependencies but also on the fact that "the perceiver *knows* that his or her relation to the environment is mediated by such knowledge."[11] Likewise, the ideal image of a world in the head, a perfect re-presentation over the "first order presence" of the phenomenally given tactile, auditory, environment, is equally problematic. Perception is not a process that represents the whole visual world in consciousness as an ideal photographic "picture" delivered from the retina to the interior of the brain. Instead, according to Noë, vision is akin to touching–to selectively enacting visual content by visual probing or "skillful looking."

Invented in the 19th century by Samuel Taylor Coleridge to describe flights of the imagination, the curious word "esemplastic" that partially

constitutes this exhibition's title derives from the Greek words *es* (into) and *em* (one) and signifies "having the power to shape disparate things into a coherent, synthetic whole" as well as "conveying a new sense."[12] The works that make up "Esemplasticism: The Truth is a Compromise" similarly ask of the observer/perceiver for such acts of skillful looking, listening, touching and experiencing; to bring together disparate experiences in order that new perceptions might come about. Moreover, these works are concerned with situations where the performance of perception takes place between human actors and non-human apparatuses: a spurting fountain (Anne Ekhardt's *!*) that mysteriously pauses and then suddenly erupts leaving a trail of ink stains and blotches around its perimeter, rotating rubber planes that look straight and then just as suddenly, change their form (Bram Vreven's *Rays*) or a mysterious machine that seems to not quite imitate the movement of its observers (Pascal Petzinger's *H2audiO*).

As much as esemplastic suggests synthesis, the challenging works in the exhibition also, however, expose the gaps, disjunctions, failures, suspensions and disruptions of perceptual acts. Similar to the manner in which the assumed total field of vision actually reveals blind spots due to what Noë terms "experiential blindness," a blindness caused not by physiological defects but instead by the inability of someone to make sense of visual information in the exercising of sensorimotor skills, many of the projects in the exhibition focus on the misinterpretation of various sense modalities and the complexities of forging a complete multimodal formation of the world.[13]

Katarina Zdjelar's video *Shoum*, for example, exposes the disjunction between the act of writing and the performative utterance as a young Serbian man struggles to enunciate in English the lyrics he has written down to the Tears For Fears song *Shout*; to perform in a language which he does not possess. In a different vein, the young Dutch artist Edwin Deen's *Terra Incognita* strews a strange set of hybrid natural/cultural objects across the space that appear at first, as normal appliances but upon more intensive observation, reveal strange discrepancies and alterations in their shape, form, function and meaning in juxtaposition with each other.

Other works serve to activate perception in ways that the observer becomes aware of the processes of seeing. The visual twists of Terence Haggerty's *Untitled* wall drawing play with an oscillation between the planimetric view and the edge of the frame, forcing the work to appear to hover at its edges and producing a disquieting 3-D effect that takes place at the periphery of the eye and the work itself. The Dutch artist

Bram Vreven's work *Rays* deliciously replays the tension between two central artistic movements of the 1960s: Op (Optical) art's setting into motion the static material image through the act of visual perception and Kinetic art's actual physical movement of objects. At first suggesting the dizzying ocular work of Bridget Riley, the observer at a distance comes upon a series of six black lines that appear to be suspended in space. Yet, unlike Riley's work in which the act of observation brings forward the unstable relationship between figure/ground, the lines suddenly lurch into movement. Twisting in a seemingly unending series of ways, *Rays* confounds the viewer's vision through the object's own performative dynamics meeting the dynamics of the observer's process of seeing.

This performative dynamics of technical apparatuses is also exemplified in several light and projection-based projects dealing with gaps in perceptual phenomena. Described by the Dutch artists Mike Rijnierse and Willem Marijs as "the impact of walking around in a projector," the kinetic light installation *Lumokinese* (literally translated as "moving light"), involves a series of slowly moving kinetic shaders in front of RGB neon tubes which gradually and almost imperceptibly change the quality of light on the wall surfaces surrounding the installation, making it almost impossible to grasp the entire work in the mythic "total field of vision." H.C. Gilje's 2009 *Blink* installation also plays with the blind spots of vision by constructing a kind of moving sundial: a circular system of 24 LED's mounted in a circle above the viewer's head that rapidly switch on and off in clockwise motion, creating an accelerated set of shadows on the floor and speeding up the perception of the passing of time and its visual traces.

The emerging creators exhibited in *Esemplasticism: The Truth is a Compromise* thus map out a journey into a perceptual scape of affects marked by jumps, juxtaposition, gaps, suspensions and disorientations that seeks to achieve what John Dewey, in describing the necessity of focusing on experience in art labeled a "heightened vitality." It is this heightened vitality, the possibility of sensation and perception transforming to *felt experience* [14] that *Esemplasticism*, in its whirlwind of sense impressions, attempts to newly synthesize and leave its trace on us.

References

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Against the Stage

by Francisco López

I often find myself struggling with show organizers and technicians over all the 'complications' brought forth by my persistent refusal to play on stage. This can happen in any kind of space, from obscure clubs to concert halls; across the whole range of 'scenes' and communities, from classical / contemporary music to rock / techno environments, or even 'experimental' events. Worldwide. The stage is everywhere. It is inextricably attached to the performance of live music.

While this seems to be the natural order of things for most musicians, it is a serious problem for me. Furthermore, I believe it is also a serious problem for music itself; at least for a certain conception / appreciation of music involving a strong absolute sense, which not only does not require the stage but is also fundamentally affected by it. I am talking about the dissipative action of the stage on the sonic material itself and, consequently, on all the potential levels of experience and transformation sparked by the latter, from the perceptual to the spiritual.

This is a complex and variegated story that started long ago and I will just refer here to some of its more recent consequences. Rock / pop culture has inherited – or has accepted – the stage as an essential feature of its public realization directly from the traditions of opera, concert halls and variety shows (these being, in turn, transpositions to music of the more ancient strand of theater), which developed and constituted its dominance over a period of more than two hundred years prior to the appearance of rock. In this tradition, the dedicated contemplation of the vocal / instrumental performance is a key element of the music event. Besides the obvious differences, a rock / pop show shares this devoted contemplation of the music-making on stage. In rock / pop it takes a variety of forms, from appreciation of musicianship (as also happens so fiercely in jazz) to idolization to pure mega-spectacle. These combine in different ways and are sometimes all present and all intensified in a synergistic manner, as in heavy metal (which in many respects is a modern form of intense opera).

Now, I don't have anything against this form of contemplation *per se* (besides my personal lack of interest in it) and I do understand its appeal and cultural significance. Nor I am referring to issues of power / dominance, which I find misleading and irrelevant for this discussion. The situation becomes more problematic when we look at what could be considered as the more recent qualitative transposition of the stage: that from rock / pop to electronic music. By electronic music I refer here to music manifestations that have electronic means of production, transformation and diffusion of sound in the *foreground* of its practice and its aesthetics, from classical electroacoustic to underground 'experimental' music to electronica. It seems that both artists and audience of electronic music have also inertly accepted this inherited tradition in the live presentation of the music. Even to perplexing situations on stage such as symbolically substituting performers with speakers, manipulating a bunch of analog electronics on a table, sitting in front of a laptop or upgrading the DJ to on-stage status.

What rock / pop shares in this respect with classical music is the visible intricacy of instrument playing. The degree of appreciation of a violin soloist or an electric guitar solo are on common ground for both the classic music and the rock / pop aficionado, and this actually indicates a relevant shared area in the system of values in music for both of them. Masterful skills resulting from years of practice, discipline, knowledge of the instrument and, in the best case, a touch of genius for its control and 'expression'.

From my perspective, electronic music doesn't need this. Of course it can have it, it can develop its own versions of it (as indeed it does). But it's not inherent to it, it's not a natural consequence of the practices and essential manners of the operations of electronic music, but rather a symbolic acceptance of a tradition of a very different nature (in this regard, probably an opposite nature). What is more important, I believe, is that by blindly following this tradition it wastes the potential for strengthening a most important breakthrough in music of perhaps historical proportions.

One of the better and most significant qualities of the practice of today's electronic music (especially after the aesthetic and technological liberation that occurred during the 80s and 90s) is the forceful absence of the mastery of the instrument. This is due to two main reasons: (1) the disembodied electronic instrument of today (collections of variable electronic modules connected in all sorts of combinations, pieces of software, etc.) mutates constantly, (2) access to each one of these mutations by sound creators (that is, anyone willing to be such a thing) is virtually instantaneous. I'm not talking about the degree of accessibility of the technological means, which is obviously different in diverse regions of the world and for different groups of individuals, but rather about the fact that, given a certain mutation of the electronic instrument (say, a piece of basic free-downloadable sound software) in the hands of a person, the time needed to start creating with it (to a thrilling extent in many cases) is outrageously minimal, if not zero. Needless to say, this doesn't necessarily mean that the instant creation is of 'quality' (this is a whole other issue), but it doesn't mean the opposite either. What I'm saying is that I believe that the mastery (if any) is spiritual and personal,

not technical. More so than ever before in the practice of music.

While in the previous tradition of instrumental music each kind of sound corresponds to a certain gesture and to a specific physical instrument, in electronic music every possible sound is produced with the same click of a mouse, pushing of a button or turning of a knob. I don't find anything interesting in showing / contemplating these actions (if they are visible at all). But what is more relevant is that by doing so -– by sticking to this scenic tradition – one is unnecessarily assuming the constraints and pitfalls of the somewhat absurd schizophrenic split in space and into separate individual people between the generative action and the actual control of sound, which happened historically as a consequence of the application of electricity in live music.

The electronic amplification of instruments in rock / pop (and also jazz) has naturally created two strangely separated areas of sonic experience and control in the space where the live music takes place. What the musicians on stage hear, through the monitors, and what the audience hears, through the main PA, are two different things; quite different things. Not only in terms of volume (the musicians can be unknowingly blasting the audience, or the contrary, which in most cases they would consider even worse), but also with regards to any other imaginable property of the sonic matter in the audience area. It is the sound technician in the back of the room who is really creating that (by mixing, EQ-ing, panning, routing, balancing of speakers, etc.). In a way, from the position of the audience, the musicians have control over the generative part of the process, but the sound technician has the control over the final phenomenological part of it, with all its consequences. Of course the bands take pains at hiring good, akin sound technicians but, because of the stage, they have to keep this sonic splitting anyway.

One of the beautiful advantages of electronic music is that it allows the reunification of these two sonic spaces and of these two personas. Turning the spatial electronic separation between generative action and sound source into an advantage instead of a constraint. Because the sound radiates from his / her position, the player of an acoustic instrument cannot be the generative actor and the *receptor-as-audience* at the same time. For three different reasons the electronic musician can. First, because of the previously mentioned electronic separation, which allows him / her to be in the audience area hearing what the audience is hearing. Second, because of the possibility of simultaneous control over generative and phenomenological aspects of sound (that is, 'playing' and 'making the sound' at the same time). While the rock lead guitar could hardly EQ his / her sound while doing the tricky solo, the

electronic musician is normally doing it as he / she tweaks a myriad of other things. And third, because of a much smaller scale gear set-up (instead of a large area with drumkit, space for microphones, guitars, etc.), which makes possible a closer approximation to the r*eceptor-as-audience* situation and also to minimize the portion of the 'hot spot' area not available for the public. (There are other obvious reasons why a rock band wouldn't like to be in the middle of the audience and at their same level, but these have nothing to do with the issues here).

Having nothing to contemplate visually in the traditional sense makes possible the departure from frontal sound. As opposed to the directionality of visual elements, sound is perceived coming from every direction. Even the panorama solution implies instant directionality of the perception. Sound perception is simultaneously multi-directional. In a live event this allows immersion, intensified phenomenological experience, to 'be inside' the sound instead of listening to it, achievable by very simple and widely available technical means: An array of speakers around the audience controlled from the center of the space.

Now, obviously such an array alone doesn't solve the main 'contemplation' issue. In fact, it is even commonly used to intensify the visual focus on the musician in the center of the space by means of spotlights, regardless of the sound having been dislocated from that visual source (as it happens in show arenas). This comes as no surprise, given our tradition of habituation and conditioning – from film and amplified speech – to the automatic connection between seen source and dislocated sound. So even though there's neither an elevated platform nor a frontal sound system, the core essence of the stage for contemplation is there, as strong as it could possibly be.

This brings us to another core problem: the dissipative action of visual elements on the sonic material. There are indeed possible integrations of sound and image (and this is also another whole issue), even to the point of not making sense to separate them. But this doesn't mean we need to have some 'visuals' or reinforce the performance aspects of music-making to make the live presentation more appealing. It really gets tiring to see so many instances of this in the electronic scene. It is a kind of slavishness to mainstream media culture. Multimedia is a possibility – it has always been a possibility – but considering it a step forward in a sequence of technological developments and social aesthetics shows an ignorance of history of gigantic proportions. The lack of interest in the performance aspect of electronic music is an advantage, not the contrary, as a lot of people seem to think. It is indeed an immense advantage, because it naturally leads to an intense focus on

the sound itself. It is a shame to waste this quality.

As any other category of perceptual material, sonic matter *per se* has its own phenomenological realm. It can obviously be attached, combined, mixed, associated and merged with other kinds of perceptual and conceptual material, even to the point of getting reinforced synergistic 'combinations'. But the more we do this, the more we weaken and diminish its own substance. And this is a powerful substance. It's not 'sound for the sake of sound'. I do not defend sonic matter as an aesthetic or conceptual category, but as a *gate* to different worlds of perception, experience and creation. Sound is a fiercely powerful *medium*, in the original sense. This raw primordial quality is easily lost in the mud of contemplation.

That's why I always do all my live shows in complete darkness. Even after having all the lights off and all the doors and windows blocked to exclude light, the only way to really attain this (emergency exit signs, LED lights from the equipment, etc. become as present as stars in the night) is by providing blindfolds for the audience. I use a variable surround multi-channel system of speakers around the audience, who are either sitting or laying down on the floor, facing outwards from the center, where I set up my gear in as small a spot as possible. Whenever I can, I even additionally cover my equipment and myself by means of a tent-like structure, so the music-making is absolutely hidden for the audience when they're entering or leaving the room. All this is done with relatively simple, and widely available, technical means. Something that can be easily set up in most spaces, as far as they are not stagnant with their stereotyped stage-based performance set up, as happens in many rock clubs and concert halls.

What I struggle for with this arrangement is not an extravaganza, or a theatrical instance, but a natural consequence of an intense dedication to sonic matter as *medium*. I've done this kind of set up in hundreds of shows all over the world. The proportion of people from the audience that felt it as a rich, transformative experience, with ungraspable specific content but imbued with the strongest presence and power of sound, is overwhelmingly high. Not that I'm aiming at doing something popular, but I can feel I'm tapping some of the universal powers of sonic matter in an intensified way. I actually feel that most of these powers are out of my control. And that's a truly fascinating path. I personally feel transformed by the experience in the live shows. There I enter a world I cannot reach in any other way I know of. This is my main and best reason for doing live shows.

Visual darkness lights up regions of the mindscape and the spirit that are normally dormant and darkened by visual light. The ear not only hears but also decisively influences our spatio-temporal perceptions. The combination of visual darkness and being 'inside' the sound (instead of listening to it) creates a strong feeling of immersion where your own body moves into the perceptual background. As a live operator I want to become as audible as possible (which doesn't mean being loud) and as operationally invisible as possible. Disappearing as performer, felt present as *medium operator*, felt as such in the sound.

The real dis-apparition of the stage, in all its manifestations, and the consequent intensification of the possibilities of sound as an absolute entity, would be a breakthrough for a new experience of music. I know there will always be stages, and that's fine for many endeavours, but it can also be the destruction of some others. There are other possible worlds; don't let them get stuck and dissipated in the same, single, universal, omnipresent contemplation paradigm. With sound we can do much better than that.

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About the author

Francisco López is internationally recognized as one of the major figures of the sound art and experimental music scene. Over the past 30 years he has developed an astonishing sonic universe, absolutely personal and iconoclastic, based on a profound listening of the world. He has realized hundreds of concerts, projects with field recordings, workshops and sound installations in 60 countries. His extensive catalog of sound pieces (with live and studio collaborations with over 100 international artists) has been released by more than 200 record labels worldwide, and he has been awarded three honorary mentions at the Ars Electronica Festival.

Listening And Other Accidents In Time

by Jens Maier-Rothe

Noiselessly, believe me again

French composer Erik Satie famously took performance instructions profoundly seriously. No matter how odd some of his directions would seem even to his greatest admirers, he forbade them to be read aloud during performances. It follows that he may not have been delighted to see them misused as titles here. That they form part of a critical engagement with the notion of audiovisual time could have had a conciliatory effect on him though, for throughout his astonishing variety of work Satie aspired to open up the minds of performers and audiences alike to discover the subjective perception of time. In his later years, he would even refer to himself as a *phonometrician*, meaning a 'sound measurer', rather than a composer or musician. In the widely known and to date controversially received piece, *Vexations*, rumored to have been composed as early as 1893, *Satie* suggests playing its theme 840 times in succession. This led to a 'marathon' of almost nineteen hours when the piece was posthumously performed for the first time in 1963 by a team of pianists including John Cage, David Tudor and others. *Vexations* is known as the longest musical piece in history. The shortest record song ever, written and performed in usually 1.316 seconds by the British grindcore band Napalm Death, sounds almost like a response: *You suffer*. In this spirit, Satie's inter-titles are meant to indicate how time-less his work still is to this date.

With your hand on your conscience

"We make perception out of things perceived."[1]
Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Epistemological knowledge is a consensus about the state of the world and how to perceive it. A growing commodification of this knowledge comes with an extended circulation and synchronisation of information; any ambiguity of sensorial experience is resolved in truth claims about the world, which then in turn supposedly constitute our perception of it – a scheme that is essentially grounded on the idea that reflection follows perception, that sensation comes first. Merleau-Ponty, along with other major phenomenologists, contested this hierarchy and its inherent fabrication of a temporal dimension in particular. For time is what allows us to think of successively unfolding events in the first place. Not only phenomenologists, but also other thinkers have made attempts to link perception and reflection more directly in their theories, and the concept of them being one and the same process has been proposed. As Rudolf Arnheim argues, *"perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined"*[2] and it is of essential importance that we reconsider the split between sense and thought as expressed in the various divisions of psychology, philosophy, the arts and the sciences.

Our 'capacity' to perceive the world *esemplastically* is not only guided but also fabricated by prevalent systems of representation, knowledge production and circulation of information. What in fact rather acts like a *kludge*, as philosopher Sarat Maharaj aptly termed the co-workings of the sense faculties, is impelled to crystalize unitary truths from what it receives.[3] The more technological advancements spur us into modes of multisensory and simultaneous perception, the more flexible the diverse synchronisation processes have to be to close any gaps that may emerge from an imbalance between directed consumption and undirected embezzlement of floating material and intellectual property. The command over these modes of perception relies to a large extent on the reification of time, which in turn is structured by the common sense of synchrony. In short, sensorial experience is preconceived in a way that matches certain knowledge paradigms. But as much as it is used to reaffirm these preconceptions, it may also be used to contest them. Critical art practice therefore must not only question the theoretical and material manifestations of these systems, but also directly challenge the perceptive models and modes that adhere to them. In fact, we can only talk about such a thing as an *esemplastic mind* by questioning and interrupting it in its operation. It is only through the revelation of its blind spots that it can become a case for investigation. Taken from this perspective, questioning the truth claims of phenomenological experience always carries a potential for critique.

However, the history of illusory techniques in visual arts does not tally with a history of critique, of course. From the ancient Greek legend of Zeuxis and Parrhasius[4] and the famous fly on the *Portrait of a Carthusian* to Op Art, the aesthetic form which focused on perception itself as key subject always suffered from the reputation that it sought to merely beguile the senses, never going beyond the representational surface to deal with 'real' and more urgent matters. The spectator, entranced in rapture by the *trompe l'oeils*, illusions and tricks would only find herself trapped in a passive and idle state of mind. Contemporary daily life however is dominated by such an excessive use of media that the notion of trompe l'oeil is worn out. We are surrounded by *trompe l'oeils* and *trompe l'oreilles* or, to redraw the map-territory relationship, the real and its illusion cannot be distinguished from each other anymore. The one is engendered by the other and vice versa, which leads to a state of infinite progress: Since the illusion exceeds its referent while at the same time being contingent on it, there is nothing but illusion.[5]

The spectacle has become the rule while, at the same time, we cannot escape the realm of representation. Yet, this is precisely why calling our perceptive modes into question is more necessary than ever before. When the distinction between real and mimesis is obsolescent, the perceptual trick gains new potential as a possible form of critique. Misperception and alienation lie very close to each other. In the 1920s Bertolt Brecht brought the distancing or alienation effect literally into play as a means to interfere with the illusion. According to Brecht, the ordinary becomes perceivable through the alienated, which *effect-ively* shows that things are not as unchangeable as they appear to be. His concepts have been prominently employed by artists such as Jean-Luc Godard, Yvonne Rainer, Silvia Kolbowski, as well as in theory and practice by the Situationists International. In order to take issue with the spectacle one cannot but also address the processes which foster the reification of time as commodity. Which means, the social and political dimensions of listening and seeing can only be examined by challenging the temporal dimension of our perceptual habits. That is, above all the audiovisual *uni-verse* we are so well versed in.

Be an hour late

"Power is articulated directly onto time, it assures its control and guarantees its use." [6] Michel Foucault

During the early 19th century the rise of the railway as means of transportation made synchronised clocks and measured travel durations increasingly important, simply to prevent train collisions, and our perception of time has never been the same. The coordination of simultaneous events played a key role in industrial capitalism and its need to control and master the forthcoming dimension of production: circulation. The notion of time underwent constant changes with every step of mechanical and technological progress. Yet, these were small changes compared to the groundbreaking effect which the information revolution – supposedly the greatest shift since industrialisation – would have on it from the late 20th century on. During the first decade of the new millenium in particular, our notion of time experienced a tremendous shift. The popularity of gadgets like the smartphone hurled everyday life into a new dimension of synchronized events, real-time circulation and omni-accessible information.

Assuming that these devices brought contemporary culture closer to any dream of democratic media was a fallacy. While promising democratic use and access for all, they in fact helped to incorporate tactical media concepts into neoliberal networks and the commercialisation of

knowledge and information.[7] With digital information as the upcoming commodity form, we are facing endless circulation at lightning speed. We navigate toward a modus of maximized synchronisation until finally the perception of time – as we think of it now – might be abolished completely. Writers like those from the collective Tiqqun have indicated, intricately, that this may be the case as the various control processes shift from industrial to cybernetic capitalism.[8]

However, our perception of time remains highly subjective. Regardless of how much our everyday life is contingent on synchronizing mechanisms we seem to be able to stay aware of our inner clock. As a dimension, if indeed it is a dimension, time is to a large extent experienced as a tension between a 'certain' time and our sense of it. Above all, time is framed by death, by the end of that certain amount of time which we say we own. In *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike*[9], Alexander Kluge's nine-hour comment on Eisenstein's cinematographic vision of Marx's Capital, Boris Groys describes biopolitical visions in Russia at the turn of the century: Only eternal life could release us from the last form of private property as key logic of capitalism. He who cannot die does not own a life, therefore no one can take it away. Only if the ownership of this certain amount of time could be abandoned would there be a way to make everyone participate in a socialist future. Should immortality thus become the right to claim in the next revolution? From a scientific perspective, such a proposal seems unrealistic, at least for the moment, let alone a hundred years ago. But the question of ownership might be rightfully posed once we think that this life-time is, to think along the lines of Foucault, essentially governed by a power-knowledge nexus. Even more so in times of a globally thriving neoliberalism.

Foucault's writings shed crucial light on the mutual inherence of power and knowledge and furthermore disclosed how the ordering of the visible and the invisible through architecture is dominated by power and control. His examinations of perceptual visibles and invisibles however, I want to argue, can be applied to the audiovisual as well. More prescisely to a synchronized and unsynchronized temporal relation of sound and image. For only what is put in order is worth the time it occupies. A blurred audiovisual does not make sense. It becomes invisible and inaudible, empty of audiovisual time. Power, as Foucault argues, is able to manifest itself positively in the fabrication of discursive knowledge that *empowers* people to govern themselves. Nowadays almost every communication device allows users to create audiovisual situations of more or less complexity. Thus, technical gadgets become the readily available means to reproduce the audiovisual world of representation, at home, in school, or elsewhere.

Be visible for a moment

"What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be." [10] Walter Benjamin

One particular instance, or rather accident, often comes to my mind when I think about sound in film. In a fairly old movie theatre the scheduled film began, but the technician had forgotten to turn on the sound. With every second of complete silence in the room my enthusiasm was growing for the experimental, almost radical, soundtrack. When the accidental nature of this 'soundtrack' was revealed I felt foolish at first, but apparently I wasn't the only one who felt that way. What is even more remarkable, was that it had been (only) the absence of sound that left the audience dumbstruck for nearly thirty nine seconds.

Although Roland Barthes clearly states that his Reflections on *Photography* [11] are not applicable to film, I would like to argue that his final account for '*mad*' photography at the end of his book, could, by the same token be extended to an entreaty to interfere with the '*tame*' and synchronised audiovisual joint. Barthes' *punctum* in a way is related to Benjamin's aura. When mapping out his notion of aura, Benjamin in turn engages Freud's notion of the uncanny to describe the psychoanalytic grounds of the phenomenon. Freud defines the uncanny as the recurrence of something that existed before but which has been repressed.[12] The synchronisation of audiovisual relations, propelled by circulation, reproduction and the reification of time as commodity, can be understood to 'repress' alternative forms of temporal and spatial experience.

What reveals those relations most directly then is a dislocation of their elements, a diffusion of the lens, a refraction of the line that leads from sensorial experience to a subject's consciousness. For in the moment of rupture we are able to experience what Barthes marks out in a photograph apart from the detail as a second punctum, "*which is no longer of form but of intensity, [...] Time, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme, its pure representation."* Such an interpretation is deliberately going far from Barthes' original point of reference, which is the essence, or noeme as he calls it, of photography. But this noeme does not exist anymore. New technologies have rendered one of Barthes' main ontological conditions completely obsolete, that photography always carries a relationship between sign and referent that points to the real. However, does not the Lacanian Real staring back at us precisely point to this noeme? And is this not exactly what the production and reproduction

of images and their circulation is haunting and at once hunting for by pretending to recreate it? A far-fetched yet great example may be the acoustic resurrection of the never recorded voice of eighteenth-century castrato singer Farinelli. The voice that we actually hear in the Belgian film of the same title *"is generated by engineers at IRCAM [...], following an intricate computerized splicing of two contemporary singers"*.[13]

Taking a photograph, in the same way as recording a sound, is about transforming temporality and thus about the reification of time as commodity. That is, it replaces the act of looking now with the possibility to look at a later time. As an attempt to counter the loss of time, the act itself is also linked to the fear of death. Millions of images are taken by readily available devices at every moment, above all other moments in which one could not participate, continually construct an ever-growing feeling of loss. They signify an accumulation of lost moments. Barthes refers to the image of a hunter who brings home more game than he needs for himself which encourages him to use it in exchange for other goods. In reaction to the increasing reification of time in capitalism the picture taking tourist, like the hunter, wants to prove to himself that he is producing exhange value and not only use value. Hence, even if people know that they probably have access to a better image of an object somewhere online, they want to take a picture themselves. Only the act of doing it by oneself renders the notion of presence real. It sets the actual moment in relation to a possible future and inscribes it into one's personal life time. Consequently, recording is a form of consumption; recording means not only consuming the technical devices with their latest features, but above all consuming a certain temporal dimension. A moment becomes 'unforgettable' when time is assumed to be consumable in its true nature, in the present, past and future simultaneously – or simply when the right soundtrack is at hand.

On that account, any critical art practice that sets out to create phenomenological breaks should as well take the affect of time into consideration. Time being structured and commodified as a relation of (non-) simultaneity, and thereby appearing chiefly as *audiovisual time*.

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Knowing Art / Transcending Science: Perception, Consciousness, Synchronicity and Transgnosis

by Edward A. Shanken

Nature as described by our scientists is indeed an artifact built in collaboration with a Being sufficiently complex to mock and, perhaps, punish materialists by responding to them in a crudely materialistic way. – Paul Feyerabend [1]

The divisive nature of western epistemology's into oppositions (on/off; interior/exterior; good/bad) is no more disconcerting than science's disavowal of all phenomena that cannot logically and empirically be measured and replicated. From this perspective, if science cannot explain something, either that thing does not really exist, or it is not worth exploring because it cannot be studied. A science that can explain phenomena that are incommensurable with the scientific method will be, necessarily and by definition, substantively and paradigmatically different from the mainstream western model. It might be closer to art.

Due to the limitations of science, phenomena are systematically ignored or misconstrued as attention is focused on those that are amenable to the methods scientists have developed in order to make sense of empirical data. In his classic discussion of scientific revolutions, Thomas Kuhn argued that, because under certain circumstances nature was found to deviate from Newton's laws of physics, those laws began to buckle under the pressure of empirical counter-evidence. Eventually, Einstein's Theory of Relativity – which explained what Newton's laws explained, plus some behaviors Newton could not – became the new paradigm. [1] In other words, phenomena systematically have their proverbial toes cut off so they can fit one of the glass slippers of science, which periodically develop too many cracks and must be replaced by a new model. Pushing this line of reasoning a step further, one might suggest that science is getting to the point at which paradigmatic revisions will no longer suffice. As Jack Burnham suggested over four decades ago in *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968), the underlying philosophical assumptions of science itself are being called into question and a radical re-invention of what science fundamentally is could become a pressing matter, if not for the health of science, then for the health of the Earth. Replacing the glass slippers of science may no longer be viable because it is becoming glaringly obvious that phenomena do not behave like feet, particularly at nano- and endo-scales.

It appears that there are a range of phenomena, the size and importance of which can only be a matter of speculation, that resist rational, scientific explanation. While science may offer useful insights into them, it is not clear that it will be able to explain everything. The philosopher Paul Feyerabend quote that opened this essay suggests that the belief that science can explain everything is based on nothing more substantial than idealism, hubris, and tradition.

Alternative ways of knowing that are not strictly rational, that accept multiplicity and embrace contradiction, may offer important insights into those areas that science has most difficulty explaining. Feyerabend proposed that science could benefit from the arts, whose subtle understanding and appreciation of paradox and absurdity, to say nothing of its embrace of artifice – literally, the constructedness of systems of knowledge and representation – might offer useful points of entry into what he called the "'objective artifact' *nature*." Although the credibility of art as a system of knowledge has diminished over the last several centuries as the cultural capital of science has ascended, it must be noted that the line separating science from art and mysticism is blurry at best and is subject to constant renegotiation. Indeed, what is now known as parapsychology was accepted as a *bona-fide* area of scientific inquiry well into the 19th century.

With regard to understanding consciousness, the choice to subscribe to a rational, scientific, materialistic account can only be based on what amount to aesthetic considerations. One's preference for a particular method of understanding the world is not based on it being superior *a priori* to another method. One method is not right and another wrong. Each arguably has different domains of applicability and utility, and appeals more to some people than to others. That appeal is its only authority and such an appeal can only be understood as fundamentally aesthetic, a matter of taste. Similarly, the domain of aesthetics – and, in particular, the creation of artworks that activate and challenge our perceptions, or that demand a meta-critical awareness of perceptual processes, of consciousness itself – may offer profound insights into how we come to experience, know, and construct the world. The works in *Esemplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise* raise these sorts of issues. In the manner of Heinz von Foerster's radical constructivism, they provoke a heightened awareness of the ontological status of an observer as an embodied being systemically linked to the observed phenomena. [3] This awareness has significant implications for our understanding of how knowledge is constructed and of what it consists of, demanding a rethinking of the epistemological underpinnings of art and science.

A Para-Rational Model

Within the discourses of the philosophy of mind, debate concerning consciousness is primarily confined to materialist explanations in which mind/consciousness (here used interchangeably) is interpreted to be an epiphenomenon of the material workings of a biological organ.

According to this reasoning, the brain, simply by its physical nature, gives rise to the human experience of awareness known as consciousness. The mind-brain problem that makes materialist philosophers so uneasy is a false dualism, for the mind and the brain need not be construed as discrete, incommensurable elements, but can be conceived of as complementary aspects of consciousness. As for the binary opposition between subject and object, I and thou, in relation to consciousness, Krishnamurti writes:

> *"One's consciousness is not personal to oneself. This is very difficult to accept because we have been so conditioned, so educated, that we resist the actual fact that we are not individuals at all, we are the whole of mankind."* [4]

Krishnamurti is not typically quoted in the context of Western academic philosophy and science. I introduce his thinking here in order to derail that tradition, to insert into the mix a *par*allel mode of knowledge formation. If a Western philosopher is dismayed by the apparently illogical paradoxes of Eastern philosophy, s/he should take note of the fact that the Eastern philosopher is not equally dismayed by the preoccupation with the West's logic of binary oppositions, because s/he accepts them as a necessary part – but only a part – of a unity. I propose a parallel, para-rational position that can accommodate both the rational and the irrational and that is self-reflexive about its application of both ways of knowing. Indeed, only such a position could formulate a logical argument, as I hope to be doing, that also leaps into the metaphysical realms that Krishnamurti and other like-minded thinkers address.

Alternate Forms of Consciousness: Transgnosis

American psychiatrist, Arthur Deikman theorizes consciousness as the physical and mental complements (embodied in human beings) of cosmic organization (the formal, structural order of the universe). Such forms of consciousness may radically transcend the human experience of time and space. That such great variations in consciousness could exist offers a humbling perspective on the importance of debating the limited range of human consciousness and the constrictions it imposes on science and other forms of knowledge production.

For Deikman, life is the physical dimension of cosmic organization, while awareness is its mental dimension. Organization itself is a unified concept that runs through everything in the cosmos, so it is the limits of our perceptual apparatus that erroneously dichotomize aspects of our experience. Phenomena exist as mental awareness while being observed

by non-sensory 'faculties' (memory, thought, imagery, intuition.) However, once they are observed by the sense (vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste) they become part of physical experience. Consciousness is not the experience of organization; rather, it is its complementary aspect. Thus consciousness is comprised of the mental and physical dimensions of cosmic organization. [5]

While Deikman collapses all consciousness into mental and physical aspects of cosmic organization, it may be useful to add another category, which I shall call 'transgnosis', that differentiates among various fields of awareness and ways of knowing. The transgnostic aspect of consciousness is not limited, however, to the physical and mental dimensions proposed by Diekman. Similar to but diverging from the awareness associated with physical and mental faculties, it is related to intuition in the sense that it is a form of consciousness not dependent on reason and logic. Unlike intuition, the Latin root of which, *intueri*, means 'to look at or towards, to contemplate', transgnosis cannot be experienced as a propositional form that can be sought after and cogitated. Derived from the Greek *γνῶσις*, gnosis connotes a form of knowledge particular to a mystically enlightened person. But following Krishnamurti, it transcends the individual and is "not personal to oneself." Transgnosis suggests an ethereal, universal omnipresence, the experience of which is manifest but is all but ineffable by rational means. It neither resides within the human subject, nor can it be the object of contemplation. Rather, it flows through everything, including human subjects and their physical and mental faculties.

Psi Phenomena & Synchronicity

Psi phenomena include processes such as telepathy, the physical and biological mechanisms of which currently remain unexplained. Are these phenomena commensurable with the type of explanations science is capable of rendering? Are psi phenomena an occurrence of the para-rational, an instance of the spiritu-cosmic that suggests forms of para-consciousness? What are the ramifications for the philosophy of mind?

There is much empirical scientific data, including meta-analyses by Daryl Bem and Charles Honorton, published in the prestigious *Psychological Bulletin*, which strongly supports the belief that psi exist. [6] The mechanism by which psi purportedly functions remains unclear, though materialist accounts, such as those of Roger Penrose, might attempt to explain some of them in terms of quantum effects in neuron microtubules. While such explanations may be sustainable for certain psi phenomena, such as the receipt of real-time telepathic information,

their ability to interpret other psi phenomena – especially on a macro scale, such as telekinesis, and in a non-linear time frame, such as if the receiver makes predictions prior to the sender's transmission, or over a great distance.

Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung developed his thesis on synchronicity in part to explain how psi phenomena transcend space-time causality. The work of J.B. Rhine at Duke University has shown experimentally that certain individuals can predict the outcome of a sequence of cards prior to their being drawn with significantly greater accuracy than can be attributed to chance (400,000 : 1 probability). Building on Rhine's research, though apparently without his blessing, Jung defined synchronicity as the *acausal* complement of causality, a system of explanation equal to causality but differing from it in its understanding of space and time as elastic with regard to the psyche. Synchronicity refers to the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally related events. Together causality and synchronicity form an explanatory unity. [8] In a related vein, Stephen Jay Gould has written that "tension and multiplicity have pervaded...Western views of time.... [S]omething deep in our tradition requires, for intelligibility itself, both [9] the arrow of historical uniqueness and the cycle of timeless immanence – and nature says yes to both." If we accept Jung's theory of synchronicity and Gould's theory of deep time, then the scientific method employed in Bem and Honorton's work (despite the powerful evidence it has provided) cannot capture or evaluate those aspects of psi phenomena that do not correspond to causal models of behavior and a unidirectional flow of temporal unfolding.

The parapsychological research in question is based on the assumption that psi should behave according to traditional models of perception (involving material stimulus, physical sender and receptor organs, and the like.) Though Bem and Honorton provide empirical evidence that the functioning of psi phenomena can be at least partially attributed to causal relations, there is also evidence that suggests that a significant part cannot. They, themselves, recognize this as the "the conundrum that makes psi phenomena anomalous in the first place: their presumed incompatibility with our current conceptual model of physical reality." (p.16) As they note, parapsychological research has empirically confirmed Bell's theorem, which states that

> *"...any model of reality that is compatible with quantum mechanisms must be nonlocal: It must allow for the possibility that the results of observations at two arbitrarily distant locations can be correlated in ways that are incompatible with any physically permissible causal mechanism."* (p.16)

Such an assertion resonates in tune with Jung's notion of synchronicity and with notions of the para-rational and transgnostic forms of knowing. Since most materialist explanations of consciousness and psi rest strictly on "physically permissible causal mechanisms," they fail to account for the scientifically paradoxical correlation of observations at remote locations. An explanation along the lines of Penrose seems a desperately far-fetched attempt to salvage materialist science, and remains unconvincing because it lacks substantial empirical evidence to support its claim scientifically. In effect, it merely replaces one enigma with another. Admittedly, such notions as transgnosis are susceptible to the same critique, though they do offer an alternative strategy for approaching paradoxical phenomena that resist scientific explanations.

The artworks in *Esemplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise* provoke ways of knowing that cannot be reduced to facts or limited to screen-based representations. They seem to shun virtualization and insist on the concrete materiality of actualization. They equally insist on the phenomenological richness of human perception as an amalgam of sensory information and cultural formation, as an experience that occupies and activates physical space. As such they demand the corporeal, embodied presence of the viewer but also transcend the individual viewer. The viewer, in their midst, becomes acted upon physically by these works, which initiate affective experiences and heighten perception. The works demand self-awareness of one's own consciousness as a living, perceiving being and also suggest a larger field of consciousness of which individual and collective human perception are but one component.

Edwin Deen's *Terra Incognita* (2009) joins the physical and the metaphysical. The curious elements of this installation serve as technical props that trigger a train of mental associations in the viewer. One element can be interpreted as an ironic, small-scale homage to David Smithson. Harnessing the force of entropy, a frozen multicolored confection in a zip-loc bag melts into a shapeless quantity of uniformly colored liquid, the remaining popsicle stick being the only suggestion of its prior actualization as a solid form. An untitled work from 2007 hearkens the work of Thomas Hirshhorn and Hans Haacke. A freezer has been stripped down to its bare shell, revealing the cooling coils. Like Haacke's Ice Stick (1966), Deen's freezer transforms moisture in the air (gas) into ice (solid), which melts (water). The work generates a stream of consciousness (and H20) that flows in no particular direction but draws one into a purposeful purposelessness that simultaneously

challenges and reifies conventional notions of cause and effect. Much of the work is witnessed as physical evidence of these transformations, from which the viewer must construct in his/her own mind a physical and metaphysical archaeology.

Terry Haggerty's wall drawings play on the tradition of op artist Bridget Riley and the minimalist wall drawings of Sol Lewitt. Compared with recent reconsiderations of these precursors by Casey Reas using digital media to algorithmically generate screen-based images or prints, Haggerty's work is designed for, and actually applied to, the surfaces of a particular physical space. Its illusory optical phenomena alter one's perception of the environment, making the walls appear to curve, bulge, and recede. In so doing, they also force the viewer to focus attention on the phenomenological process of seeing, on the fallibility of perception, and on the relationship of consciousness to embodied experience.

Human perception is inclined to make connections between various forms of sensory phenomena on its own. As Brian Massumi has noted, ganzfeld experiments demonstrate that individual senses do not exist in isolation from one another; rather, vision is dependent on hearing and other sense modalities, and vice-versa. [10] Yolande Harris's *The Pink Noise of Pleasure Yachts in Turquoise Sea* (2009) explores the relationship between sound and image, making audible the inaudible while simultaneously presenting a visual corollary. "Pink noise" is a technical term for a type of sound commonly found in both electronic devices and in the statistical structure of all images of nature. Harris uses the term as a pun in the ironically saccharine title of her sound and video installation, which suggests a dark side of yachting. While the sun refracts brilliant pink light that dances on the gentle, turquoise waves, high-powered marine engines under this elysian surface generate piercing otherworldly sounds (including pink noise) that are known to wreak havoc with navigation and communication among sea mammals, such as whales and dolphins. The viewer of Harris's work is placed in a perceptual enigma: Are the dancing pink sun and turquoise sea in the video projection responding to the yacht noises? Or has one's consciousness performed the act of synchronization on them? Although the sound waves generated by marine engines are literally present in the sea shown in the video (sadly, a national marine sanctuary in Spain), they cannot be heard without an underwater microphone (hydrophone) with which the artist recorded them and a sound system to amplify and reproduce them. Harris cleverly reveals the inaudible sounds of leisurely excess that permeate the sea, juxtaposing their haunting noise pollution with the natural beauty of the surface. In so doing, the artist not only questions the boundary between sound and image but expands our multisensory perceptual domain to include human and non-human perspectives. In *Pink Noise* we simultaneously see the sea as it visible to our own eyes from above it while we hear what dolphins hear beneath it, including our sonic impact on that aqueous environment.

Esemplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise demands forms of embodied perception of physical and multisensory phenomena and provokes enigmatic quandaries that push the limits of consciousness as a phenomenological experience. The works demand a reconsideration of both what it means to perceive and how knowledge is constructed through perception. They defy a univocal, fixed, and rational reading. Rather, they seem to suggest that phenomena and our experience of them are fluid, shifting, polymorphous, and illusory. They heighten our awareness of perception as an embodied form of knowledge production that consists of transgnosis, a form of awareness that is not directed at anything but flows through all things, that is unknowable by reason yet ubiquitously manifest. To return to an earlier metaphor, they demonstrate that phenomena cannot be conceived of as feet to be sheathed in glass slippers. This demands a model of knowledge that expands beyond the limits of scientific rationality. Moreover, the illusory quality of our understanding of things is not a negative value to be avoided. To the contrary, it is embraced as an inevitable quality at the intersection of sensory experience and reason. The illusion to be avoided is, instead, the mistake of imagining that knowledge could be anything other than that.

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This One And That One

by Clara Meister

Synchronisation can be defined as a contemporaneous meeting of two intrinsically independent events in a common time frame. Because these incidents could be independent from each other and because they have the ability to create a new sense during their encounter, synchronisation occurs in various nuances. Different stories can be created when two sounds meet, when a tune flirts with an image or noise bedazzles space. One nuance is the *occurred togetherness,* a relationship in which two join in serendipity but don't morph into one inextricable unity.

The classical definition of Synchronicity describes a simultaneous and time-shared analogy that can even occur in several spaces. It describes rapidly sequential events, which are not bound to cause-and-effect but nevertheless are perceived as rationally associated.

In 1938, one day before Halloween, Orson Welles directed his radio play version of H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds", a broadcast in which fiction mingled with reality. Listeners heard their evening music programme interrupted by a news bulletin reporting that a "huge flaming object" had dropped to Earth. The news report was supported by interviews with eyewitnesses and scientists, who described the landing of an invasion force from Mars. With these voices and stories, which were accompanied by sound effects and theatrical sound staging, Welles created a nationwide mass panic. The fictional game overwrote reality; it made associations with and synchronized in listener's minds their growing fear of invasion during that time. It was a sign of the emerging power of the media, which can create deceptive simulations by playing with parallel worlds, expectations and synchrony. Although Welles may not have intended to create such chaos and fear, it was a viciously orchestrated arrangement of happenings in a single time flow.

Besides the synchronicity of fiction and reality, another synchronism exists: the post-production synchronisation of image and sound set up to create meaning. It is match- making, an arranged togetherness which is supposed to morph and not to resist against each other. "Singin' in the Rain" (1952) is one of the most well-known stories to explore the early technology of sound and image synchronisation. The plot follows a much-celebrated silent movie couple making the difficult transition to 'talkies'. It was revealed that the silent diva had an awful voice. She could neither hold a note while singing nor talk without mangling the words nor handle a microphone. Image and sound are finally unified in Kathy, a cheerful dancer with a beautiful face and a soft voice with whom Don finally falls in love.

Mickey-Mousing, a synchronising film technique (named after the

character) which describes mirrored or parallel music scoring where music is used to underscore or emphasise actions. When, for example, Mickey is fleeing from a thunderstorm into a haunted house, and is then asked to amuse a ghost and his bony friends by playing the organ, the skeletons start using their bodies (or what is left of them) as instruments. They play on their femurs and drum on their ribcages. Without their tintinnabular vertebrae and their clipping and clapping skulls there would be no music. It is a total synchronisation of image and sound, a kiss between music and dance.

But even in synchronized moments, one event can be predominant over another, or can create more meaning than another, which is what happens when Alice is lost in the woods of Wonderland. She is looking for the white rabbit, or at least for some kind of sense amid all the nonsense. Standing on a crossroad she hears a singing voice. What seems to be the voice of the smiling moon floating over a branch is the Cheshire Cat. Although synchronized with its movements the voice is independent of its appearance. It is always the voice or catty footprints in the sand that betray his presence, but not necessarily his physical appearance. The Cheshire cat can puzzle around its body and disappear, liberating itself from his visual appearance.

But sometimes sound and vision, as a concept, refuse to be synchronized. A battle provoked by the goddess Hera's jealousy is recorded as a warlike event between the senses. Hera created Panoptes, an all-seeing giant covered with eyes to monitor the flirtatiousness of her spouse Zeus. The king of gods disapproved this surveillance and ordered the musician Hermes to kill the giant. Hermes tried to find the giant's blind spot so he could kill it using the element of surprise. But the closing of one eye meant the opening of another, there was no back of the head, no moment of opacity. But as Panoptes is the ruler of the visual sense to locate and define surroundings, Hermes is the ruler of sounds; touching and space-filling tunes. Moved by the sound of the flute, Panoptes' eyes filled with tears before stories lulled him into a sleep that would be deadly. Sound prevailed over sight in this episode of bewitchment.

Filmic synchronisation is dependent on the perception that sound and image are bound together and in accord one another. Although film music, in order to affect or influence moving images, does not need the punctuality of the *foley follies*, it unconditionally comes with an ability to synchronize our emotions to the narrative. In the film '*Une Femme Est Une Femme'* Jean-Luc Godard prevents the viewer from falling into such profits of 'synchronisation' by suddenly shifting formats. A parallel film emerges within the film when the actors start to behave as if they are being supported by theatrical music. Before their act they bow to the audience, represented by a mirror. Relentlessly jumping from classical to suspense music to pathetic sounds, the score plants the seed for a series of standard synchronisation rewards. But then, before reaping the benefits, Godard shifts format to tease the audience's expectations. Even the main character's best friend, Belmondo, wonders if it is a tragedy or a comedy.

About the author

Clara Meister is a PhD candidate at Berlin's Humboldt University. In addition to working in the arts and writing on contemporary art, she is co-founder of SOUNDFAIR a project collecting and exhibiting sound.

Sound as Hinge

by Brandon LaBelle

I'm interested to take seriously the challenging and enriching verve of sonic materiality and the diverse experiences of auditory phenomena. To do so, I hope to follow sound as it comes to impart meaningful exchanges against the singular body, and further, how it locates such a body within a greater social weave. From my perspective, sound operates as an emergent community, stitching together bodies that do not necessarily search for each other, and forcing them into proximity. Such movements in turn come to build out a spatiality that is both coherent and divergent – acoustic spatiality is a lesson in negotiation, for it splits apart while also mending; it disrupts the lines between an inside and outside, pulling into its thrust the private and the public to ultimately remake notions of difference and commonality. All these sonic movements and behaviours must be taken as indicating a particular and unique paradigmatic structure: sound is thus an epistemic matrix generating specific spatial coordinates, social mixes, and bodily perceptions.

Following the details of this paradigmatic structure, what kind of language might begin to surface, as means to describe or to think through where we are in the throes of sonic events?

Sound may be appreciated to act as a *hinge*, bringing into contact particular contradictory forces or conditions. The operations of the voice may begin to highlight this unique ontology of sound, for the voice both gives presence to an individual body, figuring as an identifiable sound of personhood, while at the very same instant, it leaves the body behind, separating from its origin to ultimately circulate outside the self. The voice, as a special kind of sound, embodies the contradictory and dramatic force of sound to compose forms of tension: the voice hinges together self and surroundings in a seeming paradox – I am myself at the moment my voice travels beyond me. Sound in general can be heard to function similarly, creating a space that is both here and there, concrete and ephemeral; it delivers the world in all its materiality while already disappearing into the ether. Sound brings into conversation the unnameable with the nameable, the representational with the non-represented. In this way, I take sound as the very means by which we come to negotiate the challenges of presence and absence, of the real and the virtual, as they interweave into an unsteady flow of information, sensuality, energy.

The hinge of sound may come to teach us how to be present within the surges of the temporal, to locate ourselves in relation to all that disappears, or threatens to overwhelm. It could be understood as a particular form of politics, giving entry to the excluded, the repressed, the silenced through an ever-present flow of challenging noise.

To expose further this paradigmatic structure of sonic materiality, I'd like to further map out, in the form of a glossary, a set of themes or sonic figures. These may function as points of departure for travelling further into sound's particular discourse. It is my feeling that these sonic figures function as micro-epistemologies, each giving way to specific perspectives onto the world, whether in the differentiating break of the echo or the challenges found at the heart of silence. To write about sound, to house it within words, is to welcome hearing into language, as a force that brings rupture and order together, to dissolve the strict duality of rationality in favor of the work of the imagination – that, as Arjun Appadurai suggests, may act as a form of new labor by which the intensities of contemporary culture are managed.

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Echo – multiplication and repetition of a given sound; it breaks the temporal vector of sound, folding back on itself to appear as if from an unseen source: *who's there?* the echo speaks, giving shape to an unseen, acousmatic body. The echo brings forward a disorienting multiplication, shattering the clear arc of sound to give us the experience of difference: the echo, as an acousmatic body, a voice coming back from over there, from out of the dark, haunts the listener; it returns our own voice as if from another's, performing as an alter-ego, a shape-shifting sonority that replaces the single sound with a differentiating repetition.

Silence and Noise – the imaginary edges to auditory experience; they provide physical as well as phantasmic points against which sounds are measured, fantasized, conveyed; they gather the intensities of auditory experience, locating sound on a philosophical and an ethical scale, making volume a community issue and audition a political process. Silence and noise are an oppositional antagonism, with noise rending the system open and silence allowing all things to find their place.

Rhythm – the making of a particular order; it rivets together time and space according to certain energy expenditures, defining a relation amongst bodies and things; it is a field (the percussive) in which different orders meet, regimenting bodies while also affording acts of modulation and breakage (*to dance the night away…*); the beat is a territorial dispute, an argument; it is a violence bringing pain and pleasure together, teaching us how to find place and also how to redefine, reorganize or disrupt existing patterns.

Vibration – energetic materialization of an auditory event; it moves through given objects and bodies, shifting the particular borders of

given architectures, and reconfiguring how things meet through an emphasis on contact; a tactility of sound from which we learn the sensual delight of the skin; vibration extends the sensing body, unfolds the skin toward a geographic field, putting into physical contact self and surrounding. As an undulation of pressures, vibration brings things together, giving us an experience of commonality: whereas the echo breaks sound into a differentiating repetition, a rupture, vibration creates links and bonds, togetherness.

Feedback – passing of energy between an input and an output; a communicational link between self and surrounding, feedback makes possible forms of participation within given environments; it creates a sensitive loop through which information, exchange, and transference occur. The loop of feedback importantly performs as a social-sonic field, continually shifting and modulating according to external influence, shared space, and other pressures; it makes communication a nuanced process of engagement as well as distraction.

Transmission – the transference of sound from one place to another; it charges the already propagating verve of sound with electronic energy, sculpting and contouring a given sound according to the ontology of the signal (alien communication, utopian collectivity, magic); it supplies the imagination with the very potential of flight, disembodiment, aerial dissolution. Transmission is an invisible transgression and molecular reconfiguration of the body; it constructs a new version of space by connecting multiple points, giving potential to acts of agitation and propaganda, creating community out of the air.

About the author

Brandon LaBelle (US) is an artist and writer working with sound and the specifics of location. He is the author of Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art (Continuum 2006) and Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life (Continuum 2010). He lives in Berlin.

Esemplastic 'truths' as seen through William C. Seitz' six categories of perceptual art

by Janet Leyton-Grant

William Seitz, curator at New York's MoMA from 1960-70, staged the first comprehensive survey of what he called perceptual art (and what thereafter was referred to as Op Art) in 1965, calling it The Responsive Eye. In the catalogue Seitz divided the more than one hundred featured works into six categories including 'Black and White Painting' and 'Invisible Painting', establishing classifications that from today's perspective seem utterly arbitrary. Seitz presented the categories as a focusing filter through which to view the works. To overlay the perceptual works of *Esemplasticism: The Truth is a Compromise*, with the same focusing filter reveals a shifting, unstable moiré pattern of interference that causes signifiers, categorisations and labels to lose definition, slip and reveal their subjective, compromised nature.

'Perceptualism', the other filter in Seitz' kit, is a blurry word that was not just in vogue, but dominant to the point of hegemony in the 60s as both a theory of art experience and a term to describe art that was generally concerned with sense data, abstraction and meaning. The term 'perceptual art' first appeared in relation to discussions of impressionism, but didn't gain real traction until the mid-20th century when Earnst Gombrich set forth his theories in the late 1950s – the formative years of the most significant modern post-war movements in the visual arts: Hard Edge Abstraction, Minimalism, Process Art, Pop Art and Op Art, Performance and Conceptual Art. Illuminatingly for the purposes of *Esemeplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise*, it was Gombrich's experiences during the Second World War and an adaption of Karl Popper's falsification hypothesis rather than 'modern art' that led Gombrich to formulate his perceptualist doctrine of *schema* and *correction*.

Gombrich discovered the phenomenon of perceptual 'filling in' while working for the British Broadcasting Corporation in their Monitoring Services division where his job was to listen to and translate all radio transmissions coming out of Germany for the six years of the war. The transmissions were often poor quality – faint or garbled – and Gombrich and his colleagues became skilled at 'filling in the gaps'.

> *"Some of the transmissions which interested us most were often barely audible, and it became quite an art, or even a sport, to interpret the few whiffs of speech sounds . . . It was then we learned to what an extent our knowledge and expectations influence our hearing. You had to know what might be said in order to hear what was said."* [1]

Seitz warns us in The Responsive Eye catalogue not to be reductive or to oversimplify the ideas in perceptual art, stating that, "The 'eye'

referred to in the title cannot (…) be assumed to be identical with the anatomical orb or an inert optical instrument. In the light of present knowledge the 'eye' that responds seems almost as difficult to delimit as is the eye of the conisseur." But still 'Perceptualism' as a term and a concept have since become maligned, notably by Norman Bryson who lumps it in with Husserl's 'natural attitude' to dismiss it as merely 'gullible'.

> *"PERCEPTUALISM: A notion appearing in the writings of Norman Bryson describing the uncritical reception of realism as optical (i.e., perceptual) truth."* [1]

Nevertheless, the terms perceptual art and perceptualism are indeed useful filters when looking at the contemporary works in *Esemplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise*, if only to see the delicious patterns that flare up with their use.

> Seitz' categories of perceptual art as a filter for the works in *Esemplasticsim – The Truth is a Compromise*

I. The Colour Image:
The richly coloured 2D paintings on paper and canvas in The Responsive Eye have been replaced by four video works that present people and objects in disorienting (and disoriented) situations. The first two, Lucinda Dayhew's *Disco on my Mind* and Daniël Dennis de Wit's *The Elevator* present recognisable situations in a locked groove, time-suspended repetitions of actions that, while concrete and real, flip increasingly between meaning and meaninglessness the longer we watch them.

The second two use concrete 'real' image sequences as well, but combine the footage with sound elements that generate further layers of meaning for each piece. Yolande Harris amplifies normally inaudible underwater sounds in her *Pink Noise* installation, and in *Shoum*, Katarina Zdjelar makes listening/mishearing the main focus.

II. 'Invisible Painting'
The light installations, *Blink* (HC Gilje) and *Lumokinese* (Mike Rijnierse & Willem Marijs) replace the subtle colour-field canvases of The Responsive Eye in implicit acknowledgement of the encroachment of electronic and digital technology into gallery spaces.

III. 'Optical Paintings'
Perhaps the only work that slots into a Seitz category without any appearance of friction or distortion is Terence Haggerty's wall painting. Using the classic Op Art tropes of minimalism and *trompe l'oeil*, Haggerty's work would have been a perfect fit for Seitz' Responsive Eye exhibition in 1965, except that this wall painting is a new work, specially created for *Esemplasticism – The Truth is a Compromise* in 2010. The disorienting effect of time on a 'period' piece like this should not be underestimated – the formalism Haggerty uses is not naively employed and carries the weight of history on its thin, smooth surface.

IV. Black and White
Seitz' original 'Black and White' category included warping, shifting picture plane works from Bridget Riley and others exploring the disorienting effects of distorting optical illusion. The works of Anke Eckardt and Bram Vreven both engage with reductive language of 60s minimalism to beautiful effect – Eckardt takes advantage of the observer's skill of 'filling-in' and connecting dots while exploring the relatively new tropes of 'sound art'; Vreven's work transforms the 'flatness' of Op Art and makes it three dimensional, expanding the language in the process.

V. Moiré Pattern
The delicate and complex moiré pattern pieces in Seitz' exhibition are here supplanted by the seven essays. Each writer draws layers of differently grained, gauzy filter across the exhibition in the form of text, providing visitors with dazzling new patterns and unexpected arrays of interference.

VI. Reliefs and Constructions
The reliefs and constructions in the Responsive Eye were solid 3D sculptures employing mostly abstract visual elements with only limited extension into space. The works of Edwin Deen, Alexis O'Hara and Pascal Petzinger are dynamically spatial and interactive, having obvious continuities with the 'Reliefs and Constructions' label. Yet the classification becomes flimsy in the face of the variety of work in *Esemplasticism*. Deen's play on perception and meaning engages directly with cultural signs in a way very different to Op artists, but approaches similar territory in an (anti)engagement with rationalism and technology and the revelation of perceptual 'blind spots'. O'Hara's acoustic dome manipulates the observer into the position of creator, reversing artist-viewer roles in a disorienting flip (flips paralleling the 'performative' aspects of some large Op installations from Alberto Biasi (Gruppo N) and the like. Petzinger's H2audiO installation also places the observer in a disorienting, though less obviously engaged role.

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Colofon

Esemplasticism:
The Truth is a Compromise

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