

This Civic Life!



Contents

Fred Dewey /
"What is Sound, We Ask?"

Lucia Farinati & Claudia Firth /
"Towards a Manifesto for Collective Listening"

Brandon LaBelle /
"Rehearsal for a People's Microphone"

Joaquín Gutiérrez Hadid /
"Pirámide" (image works)

Jeremy Woodruff /
"Not listening to music and sound interventions as
agonistic freedom in civic space: Prelude to the
embodied city"

paracaidistas collective /
"Open Letter"

Produced by Sporobole
as part of Espace[IM]Média
Sherbrooke - Québec, 2013

thanks to the Sporobole team,
and the contributors (friends
in the fight for a conscientious,
creative & radical life!)

and immigrant clouds
that are placeless.
And life here
wonders:
How do we bring it back to life!

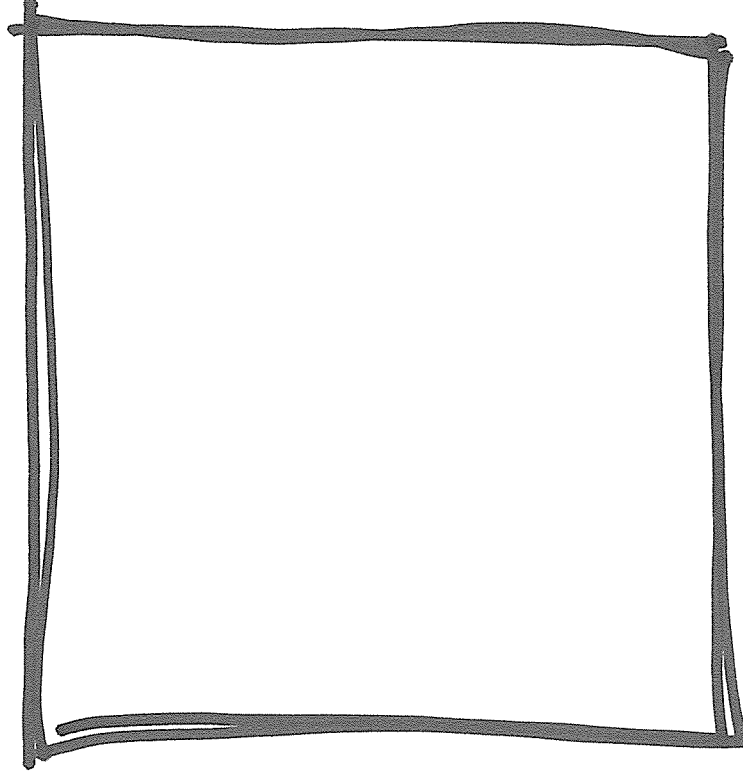
Mahmoud Darwish, translated by Fady Joudah

We hope others will write open letters. The aim of our writing is to participate in critical dialogue involving a multiplicity of voices—that is, to engage and expand the cacophony that already exists. This letter is gratefully informed by many textual and visual documents, including *disoccupy*, *Racialicious*, *POOR Magazine* and the *Occupy Wall Street Journal*. We are ready to listen, curious to learn, and eager to continue finding creative ways to articulate our thinking.

We are not joining any movement; we are a movement and everything we do—whether we're at Los Angeles City Hall, in Freedom Plaza, at the grocery store or taking our children to the park—constitutes a collective effort to re-claim the commons through a radical re-thinking and re-imagination of relations between humans and the world.

Love and solidarity,

paracaidistas collective



What is Sound, We Ask? by Fred Dewey

*Let our words be such as we may unblushingly behold
sculptured in granite on the walls—to the least syllable.*

Henry David Thoreau, *Diary*, February 11, 1853

After spending Christmas afternoon last winter at the artist Barbara Smith's home in Marina del Rey, I was leaving the lobby of her complex and found myself drawn to a strange-looking sculpture in a plexi security box on the front desk counter. It was a Kienholz—"Econo-Can," from 1977—an aluminum gas or mineral spirits can with a round thing pasted on the front that looked like a dead TV and a blocked porthole. Under it was some sort of dial with numbers that looked like an old TV dial but was from a stove. There was an electric cord coming out the back, coiled, unplugged. The piece was silent. It suggested sound, but no image broadcast. It was dead, as if this container for a petroleum product were a TV or ancient radio.

The word "sound" is intriguing and demands examination, like all words of one syllable. What is sound? What is *truly* sound?

Sound is what we hear. As an auditory phenomena, it has no visible form or shape. It cannot be seen, not even when the sound is at an enormous volume. Only its mediums and generators and receivers move. Sound can come from what is made, what is solid. It can come from words and writing, from living things, from animals or trees, sky or earth, really from anywhere. We make sound when we speak, or bang a pot in protest, or cry out, or whisper, or utter a speech in the halls of government, or strike a chord, or when we respond, speaking, to banalities.

it seeks to support (not to mention a vision of autonomous self-government). We do not appeal to existing power structures to somehow resurrect something that has been broken; existing power structures are entirely inadequate to the world we inhabit (not to mention entirely unfun to experience!). We are not protesting in the hope that an imaginary lifestyle can be restored in the future; we are imagining and enacting a new way of living here and now.

We are equally aware of the formidable nature and complexity of what this acknowledgement represents. And that is why we are still here... In this space of possibility, with humility and rage and love for each other, we hope to begin to construct a world we where we might actually want to live. We need more people here—in the vibrant space of the occupation. We need to multiply the forms of participation in the occupation so that together we can look at the ways that the occupation itself can work to subvert our own potential to reproduce oppressive systems of administration and control. This is already starting to happen—this letter is just one instance of a number of affectionate, generative critiques and instigations. We must be ruthlessly and irreverently self-critical. Already we risk the appropriation of the occupation by political and economic forces that wish to restore rather than transform the economy and our ways of being together.

Life.

Life in its entirety,
life with its shortcomings,
hosts neighboring stars
that are timeless ...

rights of immigrants to live and work in peace (i.e. *anyone* not indigenous to this scrap of the Americas). We stand with the many communities struggling for economic and environmental justice in the context of policies and politicians that put profit over people time and again. We are here to stand up. We stand up for our capacity to imagine and manifest a different way of being and our commitment to make a world based on justice, mutual respect, the dignity of all life, and wild joy.

We understand the relevance of media narratives. And yet we refuse to cater to the demands of a reformist agenda. To those who seek a kinder, gentler form of capitalism, as though a slight increase in corporate taxes and financial reform might alter the structure of a system corrupted by power, we must be clear about our differences. We can agree that corporate money has corrupted our political system. We are equally critical of the fact that the top 1% of income earners control over 1/3 of the country's net worth. Many of us are not shy about expressing our hatred for capitalism itself, and the entrenched institutionalized inequalities that stem from it. We do not believe that a legislative solution will lead us out of this crisis; the entire legislative system exists in the service of structures of power designed to privilege the few at the expense of the many, and based on profound disrespect for the needs and perspectives of the majority of the humans on this planet (not to mention the planet itself). We are not excited about a resolution passed by the City Council; the very structures of government must be entirely re-imagined if government is to be actually relevant to the needs of people

We hear you, media, politicians, and bosses always say. But they don't hear us. It's as if we never made a sound, as if we, like Kienholz's sculpture, were a silent radio or TV.

This is the silence of the deaf and the mute. Producing such a state is a clever trick. Who would have thought this principle would come to rule: let the people speak, let objects appear, but cut off the sound. Eventually the people will grow silent. They will grow demoralized. This is a great silence.

In this we find something. For the word sound also means, in English, what is solid, lasting, reliable, and trustworthy. That is, what is done or made and can be relied upon. For example:

Your decision was sound.

The foundations are sound.

The media and system we live under are totally unsound.

The banks are unsound.

The military-congressional complex is not a sound foundation for anything.

The president is not of sound mind or body or spirit.

That sounds good.

His judgment is sound, she said.

How does that sound to you?

His ability to read signs is not so sound, she said, her eyes sad.

Can we find common ground in what is sound?

Is sound our common ground?

But we each hear and listen differently!

The ear and the tongue work as one, they are different and separated but related, as parts of the body, as our organs. The tongue connects to them, to speech and taste, it is fleshy and pink and flaps around and can cause us problems. Sometimes it hangs in

the recess of the mouth as we breath, and sometimes we remain silent. It also can move when we make words, shaping what we think, to register what we eat, to speak. The ear has a similar complexity, and it too is part of sound. The ear is hidden in our heads, only its external flesh visible. Our ear translates what is outside into something inside, it helps us register and sense the world through sound, that we and others are in it. The ear also gives shape to speech, to music, to the creaking of a floor, the low hum of the fridge, a door that closed, footsteps, or a mockingbird working through its dozens of calls. Ah, birds!

Oh, tongue, as my friend Simone says.

Oh, ear!

Oh, all that we *can* sense.

If only what governs were sound.

When is a word sound? When is our language sound? What is it we hear?

When we are in darkness, we cannot see. But a person must be deaf to not hear.

What does it sound like when we bang our pots and pans for a dictatorship to fall?

Can we agree on whether what governs is sound?

Would anyone hear it?

What if we spoke?

What do the people have to say?

How does it sound?

Can we be sound? Are we not?

What *is* sound?

Listen to this:

Mayday Macarthur Park,” or “Copwatch Los Angeles” to encounter just a few recent examples.) How can we organize in sympathy, empathy and solidarity with one another and not reproduce alienating systems of administration?

“Occupation” might also be more than a 24/7 inhabiting of public space by those who recognize our disenfranchisement by an economic and governmental system based in utter disregard of our personhood. Yes, the sites of permanent occupation around the country (over 800 and counting as of today) need your presence, your energy, your creative mind—stand up and be counted among the 99%! And yes, at the same time, our vision of occupation can encompass multiple sites of resistance and a re-invention of practices of relationship and exchange. You can occupy from your home or from your office or from a public bus or from the seat of your bicycle or from the corner store or from the street corner or from your school or from your community garden. We are curious about and interested in all manifestations of revolutionary re-imagining of our modes and our moment, wherever those might occur. And we recognize our kinship with other struggles that manifest elsewhere. We stand with the hunger strikers at Pelican Bay prison (round two). We stand with those resisting the school-to-prison pipeline and its most homicidal manifestations in the aftermath of the state-sponsored lynching of Troy Davis. We stand with domestic workers fighting for recognition of their basic rights and with all workers struggling for a living wage and decent treatment. We stand with those who are undocumented and unafraid and everyone supporting the

power and inequality are—in the marrow of the culture. We share the frustration and resentments expressed by many people of color, women, and queer-identified or genderqueer folks that the space of the occupation sometimes reproduces systems of power that are entrenched in our society, and hence entrenched in our thinking. This is not a peripheral issue. Rather it represents both what is fundamentally problematic within the occupation and a potent potential space for radical transformation.

Our capacity to re-negotiate systems of exclusion and to create working practices and structures that re-envision the terms of power, leadership, and agency is part of the substance of our revolution. The fact that an anti-police brutality committee was pushed out of the formal organization of OccupyLA points to especially loaded power dynamics at play in the structure of the occupation. Regardless of how it was intended, it's too easy to read this exclusion as a reproduction of the ignorance inherent to social systems that disregard the core concerns of the people most affected by a top-down system based in prejudice, fear or outright hatred of difference. When we think about our relationship (or lack thereof) with the police, we cannot help but think about how the police routinely treat the houseless, whose occupation of public space is not read as resistance but might be understood as symptomatic of why it is so crucial to resist. The LAPD has historically been among the most corrupt and militarized police departments in the United States. To those seeking economic and social justice: the police are not your friends! (If you doubt this, please google “José Bernal,” “Kelly Thomas,” “Settlement

Knock knock. Come in. We're sorry to interrupt, but we must ask you come with us.

How about,

Knock knock. Who's there?

Nobody.

Nobody who?

Why is what is called sound the nobodies that rule, decide, and crush?

Why are our voices unheard by those in bureaucracies?

Because there is nobody there.

Is that not unheard of? No, it is not heard.

Common sense is sound. The people's sense of things is sound.

But no one inside systems listens to that sound.

They cannot hear. They are not sound.

At the end of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—recited in oral culture, then written down millennia ago—the poet describes Gilgamesh returning to the city where he was born, a city he has travelled far from. He addresses his travelling companion, a friend. Gilgamesh asks him, Do you think these city walls are sound, have they been well built?

This is the end of the poem.

Are the walls of the city sound?

Our river has two banks: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

A town meeting, where the people govern, against rule. That is sound.

The Russian poet Osip Mandelstam spent time reflecting on sound. The sound of words was important to him. But he did

not think Mr. Stalin with the cockroach whiskers was so sound. Suddenly no one could hear Mr. Mandelstam speak. His sound had been turned off. But the sounds of his words were remembered and repeated in the people's hearts.

Someone who does not think certain things are sound speaks up and turns to the people for sound judgment. Such a person dares to make a sound. He is not heard.

Mr. Mandelstam said we are deaf to the land beneath us, and that ten steps away, no one hears our words. He described a lack of soundness.

This is what happens in a dictatorship. This is what dictatorships do. They disappear everything that is sound. They create a great silence. What is sound cannot be found.

Are our walls sound?

Can the dictators be soundly defeated?

Are the banks of our river sound?

Can you hear that river rushing?

around City Hall, from our homes, in our studios and in our classrooms. This is particularly important in Los Angeles—a city that is nothing if not diverse—where public space is under constant threat of erasure and commodification.

We write out of an awareness of the multiple histories and present experiences at play in any “public” space. We are encouraged by occupations of spaces the State would seek to control—and while we use the terms “occupation” and “occupy,” we are also critical of those terms, as deployed, for instance, in the Occupied Territories or in the occupation of Afghanistan (on this tenth anniversary of that particular act of imperialist terror) or as signaling the occupation of indigenous lands that our cities and their infrastructures represent. The reclaiming of words is complicated, messy, and problematic—which is precisely why it is important to speak across languages and to underline the many meanings present in any term or phrase.

We are especially aware of the significance of people coming together to enact alternative forms of organization. People are learning to take care of each other and to construct an infrastructure to maintain and grow the unwieldy space of the occupation—that is, the unwieldy space of the world. We share the concerns of many, however, that strict top-down and hierarchical models of organization are attempting to impose limits and controls on the spirit and the potential of the occupation. We recognize that such hierarchies can be invisible and subtextual; we are aware of the challenges of constructing new modes of relation and self-organization, and of how deeply ingrained structures of

Open Letter
Re: OccupyLA—
Solidarity, Critiques, Reinventions

**TOWARDS A MANIFESTO
FOR
COLLECTIVE LISTENING**

paracaidistas collective

Strong people don't need strong leaders. - Ella Baker

as many scars
as this after theft the 'unknown'
becomes 'the once was' to form separate
dreams after salvage net weights sink *pretend it's all
make-believe* i need to say *pretend that for every
name they've given us there's a counter gesture for
us to cling to* [we] walk leaving traces after light to
see

'after light'

- Craig Santos Perez

We write to you from the Occupation of City Hall in Los Angeles. First and foremost, in a torrential and tempestuous sea of struggle, we are excited and inspired that people all over the country (and all over the world) are gathering in loose-knit ways to occupy public spaces, to re-think what is possible. It is profoundly significant that this open-ended process has initiated a radically diverse group of participants—including artists like ourselves, who have spent the past week participating in the occupation from the streets

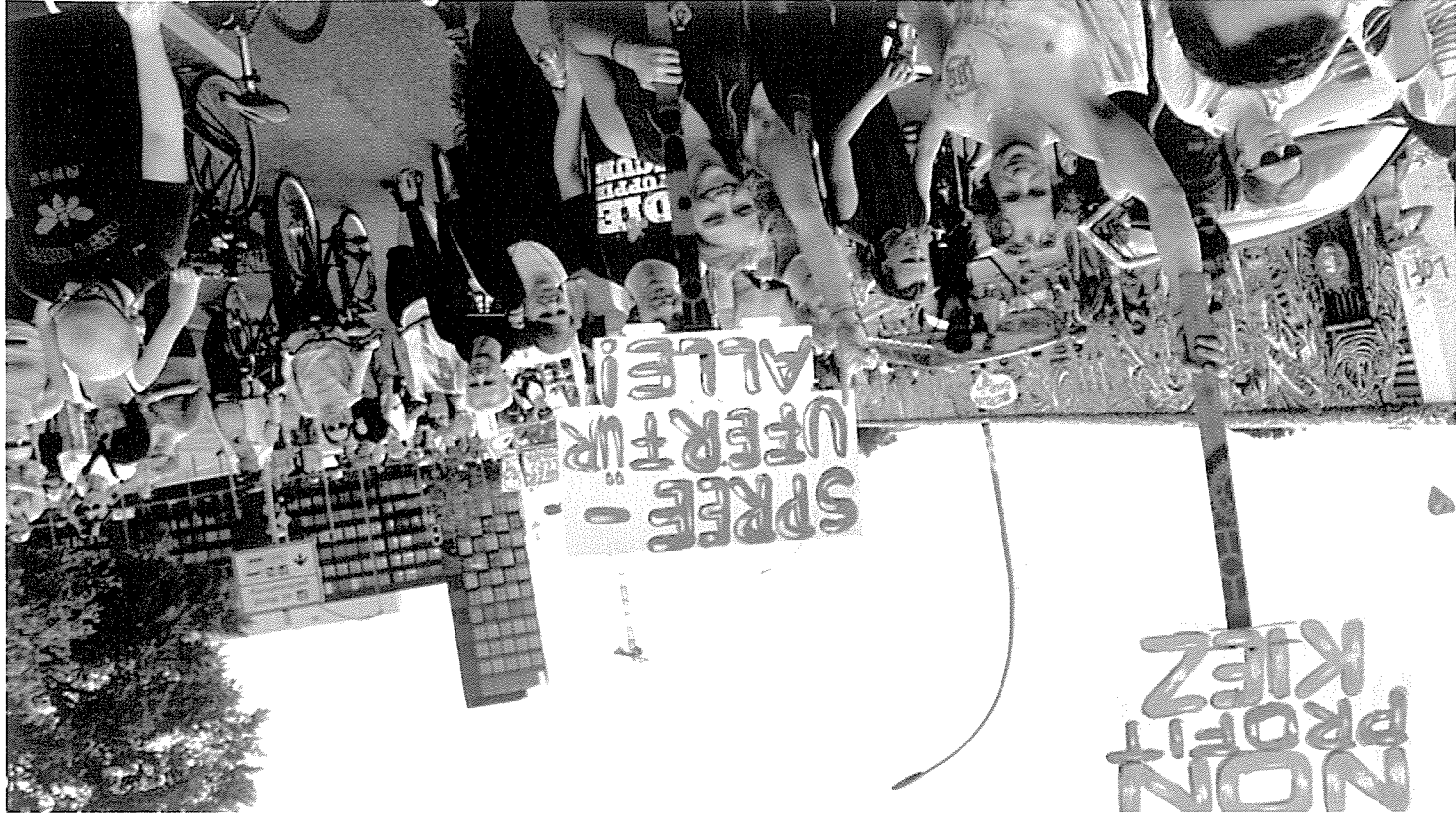
**LISTEN IN ORDER TO GIVE VOICE TO
OTHERS**

LISTEN IN ORDER TO DEVELOP EMPATHY

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO RAISE
CONSCIOUSNESS**

LISTEN IN ORDER TO PROVIDE ANALYSIS

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO TRANSLATE THE
UNSPEAKABLE**



mostly hanging out on the sand or on the ledge to the Spree, enjoying and making the most of the civic in this glorious Berlin summer. There was Jamaican and African food shacks and tents set up for different causes: build libraries in Jamaica, stop animal torture, stop the A100 etc. On the areal there were two different clubs that one could enter. The average age was 30-33: hipsters, punks, students, immigrants, tourists, mothers with their children. Here and there English was spoken.

The dub and reggae truck had entered the areal of Yaam and set up shop. The other sound truck was parked, blocking the road outside Yaam. Over its sound system, the political speeches resumed. But now the crowd was much more sparse, most of the five hundred had gone inside to enjoy themselves on the grounds where only the music and the other sounds of sociality were to be heard. They weren't listening anymore.

LISTEN IN ORDER TO WALK WITH STRANGERS

LISTEN IN ORDER TO FEEL EMPOWERED

LISTEN IN ORDER TO DISTINGUISH AND CHALLENGE POWER RELATIONS

LISTEN IN ORDER TO FREE YOURSELF FROM FEAR

LISTEN IN ORDER TO DEVELOP RESONANCE AND RECIPROCITY

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO ENHANCE
PLURALITY INSTEAD OF PLURALISM**

and the other some ways behind in the parade with techno house with about five to six hundred people in tow between them. Today was a protest action of the 'Spreeufer für Alle' movement¹² against the construction of the planned Mediaspree buildings and the campaign to stop the building of the A100 highway¹³ through parts of Berlin into Friedrichshain. Now I had a decision: either keep working at my desk or run outside and follow the protest parade. I proceeded with the latter of course.

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO BECOME AWARE
OF WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW YOU ARE
YET**

One of the strange things about a protest parade is always that the police are in the front, so the authorities actually set the pace. The parade continued down Köpenicker Strasse and turned towards the Schillingbrücke. Before it went over the bridge, the parade and music stopped and a few people gave speeches in which I learned that the land belonging to squatters not far from here (known as 'Köpi') will be auctioned off on the 6th of August this year but the squatters intend to fight it. Furthermore, the Berliner Senat already has sold off new lands recently at ridiculously inexpensive prices along the Spree to big investment interests totally ignoring preemptively the referendum against such sales, which is being held today. The parade made its way over the Schillingbrücke and stopped outside an amazing patch of open strand areas along the Spree including a music locale and sort of homemade open grounds calling itself 'Yaam.' I went in. Loads of people were chilling listening to the rappers and DJs, drinking, some smoking grass, playing football, volleyball, dancing and

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO PRACTICE
POLITICAL THERAPY**

**LISTEN IN ORDER THE BREAK
ISOLATION AND INDIVIDUALISATION**

¹² 13th of July, 2013 was the referendum on allowing the continuing building of multiple private properties along the banks of the Spree in Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg. See: <http://www.spreeufer-fuer-alle.de/>, <http://www.ms-versenken.org/>

¹³ <http://www.a100stoppen.de/>

I encourage you not to listen, participating instead in a compassionate capriciousness of listening actions that stop, in turn, various different other sounds. Stop listening. Stop it now.

Going out to a club like CBGB and not listening to your friend for the whole night because you tell them, you'd rather listen to the music is one thing, you could be excused. But meeting up for a coffee at a nice outdoor café with a friend only to ignore them and instead listen to the (admittedly) somewhat uninspiring background music of buskers the whole time would be quite another, more inappropriate behavior – almost diametrically opposed to the disturbing guys in the club in L.A. By not demonstrating an ability to *not* listen to the music, a crucial independence from the surroundings in this case would be lacking. We see from concert hall to club to outdoor café the criteria of not listening and interruption shift along a sliding scale. In the final section of this monologue I describe a space, more outdoor, yet with niches of the club atmosphere in pockets, somewhere between CBGB and Helmholtzplatz.

Just today as I was writing in my office, suddenly what I thought was a concert at a nearby park started to get louder. Ironically, I thought, I was going to have to not listen to the civic in order to continue writing this. But then it got even louder, and louder and it became clear that it was moving through the streets. As the floors and windows of the building began shake I went and looked out the window: it was a protest parade. The very special Kreuzberg kind with two sound trucks, one with reggae and dub

LISTEN IN ORDER TO PRACTICE A PEDAGOGY OF THE EAR

LISTEN IN ORDER TO RECONFIGURE THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC

LISTEN IN ORDER TO MAKE THE IMPLICIT EXPLICIT

LISTEN IN ORDER TO FOSTER SOLIDARITY

LISTEN IN ORDER TO RECOGNISE THE OTHER'S DESIRE

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO ENGENDER NEW
ACTS OF EXCHANGE**

otherwise. So outside the triangulation of performance space (performance-audience-outsider) on the meta-level in civic space, yet another polar triangle emerges. Whatever civic sound isn't about one of those things (work-administration/civic duty-art/social life) might threaten, in the public eye, to make us less efficient there, or either serves to enhance our affective experience, helping people survive or enjoy their tasks in those spaces or risks alienating them. The two triangles are inter-permeable noticeably at the axis of outsider

**LISTEN IN ORDER TO CREATE A
POTENTIAL POLITICAL SPACE**

As a composer I have decided that I am interested in where the dividing lines in these borders blur so as to bring contention and the discussion of freedom and compassion therein to a head quickly.

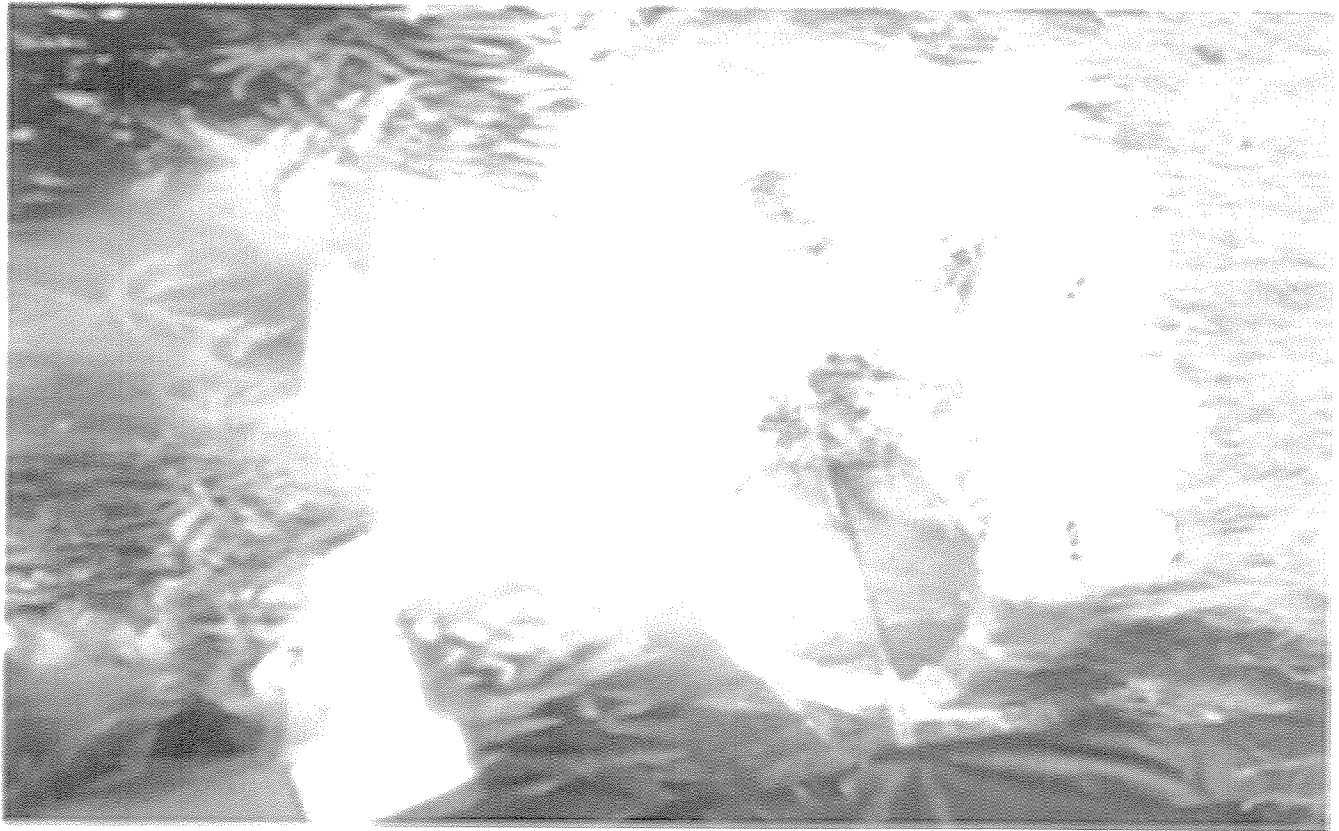
**LISTEN IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY THE
COMMONS**

I would like to take you to Helmholtzplatz in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. Here in Germany, as in many typical northern European countries, it would seem to an American as if the populace has honed the ability of maintaining a sense of a private social bubble impervious to social contact with others to a fine art even when relaxed and hanging out together in a thick mass on a pleasantly designed public square. It is a warm summer day and many people are happily meeting up at the many pleasant bars and cafes encircling the park and, again, from the point of view of an American, masterfully ignoring everyone except the people they have specifically come to meet.

LISTEN IN ORDER TO ORGANISE

LISTEN IN ORDER TO ACT COLLECTIVELY

...



our right to independence from our surroundings. This is a main reason even why the invention of the Walkman cassette player (and its successor the mp3 player) already shared such synergy with the isolating experience of moving through civic space, and was such a success as a mobile bubble. Going between the pool table to the bar in CBGB is a good analogy to the comings and goings in a civic center as far as it goes, but in public space, the points of arrival in most daily lives are usually more centered around work, school or family obligations than social engagements.

Most of the populace's actual encounters with civic space, although usually regular and multiple, generally make up a vastly smaller percent of the time than spent in private in-door areas, and the time out of those hours where we are likely to have, or take, the time to be cognizant of the sound around us to an appreciable degree, is an even smaller percentage thereof (although how aware and open to the influence people are of civic sounds is also highly culturally determined.) The bubble people develop on their way from point A to point B is in fact a way of asserting independence from and protecting themselves from many forms of affective or literal "highway robbery" in civic space – from aggressive advertising or proselytizing, unwanted advances of every sort, navigating crowds and traffic, to the mere depletion of our precious resources for concentration which are so susceptible to constant overload and subversion in the city, where the danger is that, as Thoreau writes in *Walden*, "our lives are frittered away by detail."¹¹

Assembling in civic spaces, if not in consideration of earning a living, purely bureaucratic or political matters, is motivated either by art and performance or our social life

¹¹ Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, p. 395

zones of CBGB were not primarily listening to the band while they were talking at the bar or at the pool table. On the flip side, it was socially acceptable however, an allowed pleasure for them at times, to not listen to their friends, disengage from the talk, phase out of the social milieu and become simultaneously, for a short time, even while in these more social, peripheral zones, like the fans at the front of the bar. In the transitional zones of CBGB, thanks to the band it was acceptable and ok for a while to be a social misfit, to be a "withdrawn introvert." For LaBelle, the disruption in the club, like 4'33" "is a process of confronting the expressive moments occurring around us, which act to broaden our attention, even by force."¹⁰ Similarly, the process of not listening, as rupture, initiates and facilitates operating in both modes, either as fan or as socialite in a club atmosphere. Not listening to art is an act that deflates it, maneuvering a miniature bubble of the social as a surrogate and contentious focus. In the case of the rude club visitors it is not to a voice of authority that they do not listen, but rather to the authoritative central role of performance and performance atmosphere that their ears are shut. If however they had been in an appropriate zone of the space, the disturbance would have been greatly lessened or abated. Unlike not listening to the voice of authority, which is a total disruption, the perforation of a performance scenario is sensitive to socially designated spatial zones. Outside performance venues not listening changes radically however.

The freedom of public space is in some ways also necessarily a freedom *from* listening. By not listening we assert

¹⁰ in Daniels and Arns, *Sounds Like Silence: John Cage 4'33"*
Silence Today, p. 46



Rehearsal for a People's Microphone by Brandon LaBelle

The work is based on notions of civic culture and the emergent crowd, and it appropriates the device of a people's microphone to stage a form of public speech and public encounter. Consisting of a pick up truck, a sound system, a set of fold-out tables & chairs, and this zine, the work circulates through the city of Sherbrooke for a two-week period, parking at specific locations to playback an audio work: a voice that speaks this text and a group that repeats, projecting their voices toward an imaginary crowd.

I miss the rhythm
To fill the void
To amplify the cut
Counter-point
Earth
Sky
The road
The mouth
Echo

Shall I tell you my name
Shall I speak about the city
Shall I sing a song

Check
1, 2, 3
Check

THE BAND WHEN NECESSARY.” Describing the set up of the club CBGB in NY in the 1980s, Byrne says,

“past the little bandstand [was] a pool table located farther back...CBGB was long and narrow, and only a small group of fans could actually stand in front of the stage. Most of the audience would end up at the bar, or hanging around the pool table...This odd, relaxed and even somewhat insulting arrangement allowed for more natural, haphazardly creative development. In a way the casual set-up reminded me of busking. When playing on the street...if you could get the ones who were walking purposely on their way somewhere else to pay attention, then you'd really made a breakthrough.”⁹

From LaBelle's LA club, to Byrne's CBGB, to actual outdoor busking we can imagine the poles of interruption between band, audience and disturbance each on a sliding scale, a continuum of agonistic freedoms where architecture and social convention meet not listening as factors of adjustment. The difference between the club scenario and busking outdoors is plain: the roles are reversed and it is the music that has the potential for disturbing. Outside, in a civic center, the default behavior is usually not really listening to the music but going about your business. The subordinate spaces of CBGB however, the pool table and bar are zones of transition to enjoying these freedoms of movement found in the civic and the intensities of the club performance paradoxically at one and the same time. Although the band may have strived to capture the attention of those “on their way somewhere else” inside CBGB, for those listeners however, it was the reverse. The listeners in the peripheral

⁹ Byrne, *How Music Works*, p. 261

seemed like my only option.”⁸ Many musicians (including myself) can directly relate to the experience Byrne describes, it is a well-known and common phenomenon. When on stage the listening required in order to contend properly in a conversational speech ‘duet’ is nullified. One is no longer required to listen in that way in order to ‘communicate.’ The hazards, expectations and unknown outcomes of a social dialogue are all conveniently circumvented. While performing music, although one ‘senses’ and ‘plays off’ the vibe of the crowd, actually listening to their noise can be a frustrating or even disastrous distraction for the efficacy of the performance. This is one of many ways in which one could even argue that music does not ‘communicate’ as such, but rather entrains. In this way playing music together or participating as an audience member together can be very much like the favorite occupation of pre-conversational children: the most fun you can have is to simply do something together like run after each other and play hide and seek. The band in the club in LA is no exception – the dialogue carried on by the group of guys additionally disturbed the scene because it only served to point out the discrepancy of meaning between music and speech even more, annoyingly pointing it out for all to hear.

Byrne has something additional to say regarding talking in clubs in respects to the claim in his book that composer creativity is a result of the social and architectural design of specific locales and music scenes. He synthesizes rules for generating the same level of dynamic creativity going on any hypothetical music scene using CBGB as a model in the chapter called “How to Make a Scene.” The last rule is “8. IT MUST BE POSSIBLE TO IGNORE

I'm tired of the proper and the powerful
 Words
 Of the empire
 In this mouth
 A to Z
 All this language
 Presses my lips
 It blocks my throat
 I can't breathe
 I can't speak
 The lines
 To provide the argument
 To quote the president
 To agitate the masses
 Henry
 Angela
 Jane
 Me you
 They them
 1, 2, 3
 Check
 We say no to big banks
 We say no to wall street
 We say
 No
 No no
 Nope
 Nada Nicht
 This is that
 That is this
 We say

⁸ Byrne, *How Music Works*, p. 32

A no language
Knowing no
Freeing the voice
This crowd
To throw the voice
Into the crowd
A future body
Shadows
Echoes
The horizon of a new urban condition
Ocean
Cloud
Misty mountain hop
Bop
I am no
Body
Somebody
Your shadow
Shadow voice
You me
Me you
She he
Them
You are a pirate
I am a ship
From the black atlantic
To the northern ports
Ocean language
Form formless
To sound the words
They disappear

There is a kind of not listening that collapses a performance. Brandon LaBelle's article *Noise, Over-hearing, and Cage's 4'33* allows us access to a different example: a moment when at a show in a rock club in LA is disturbed by a group of guys who, not listening to the band, are instead "standing drinking beers and talking, laughing, having a good time and rather oblivious to the situation- that is, that they are breaking the mood, disrupting the scene, causing a ruckus." LaBelle uses this everyday occurrence as an introduction to navigating a tripartite theory of noise and listening. This ontology of interruption featuring the band, the audience and the disturbing outsiders opens a characteristically penetrating analysis of sound and the social in a polar triangulation. I would like to argue that this transferring of a normal social conversation into the context of the music club locale, which becomes "a form of 'disobedience' precisely as it did not subscribe to the intrinsic social contract underlying the scene," is in a sense, actually similar to the band on stage in that they are both exercising their ability not to listen. I would like to investigate the potential of a musical performance (rather counter-intuitively) as also being a corresponding act of not listening, which the disturbance of speech punctures.⁷

In David Byrne's new book, simply titled, *How Music Works*, he admits to have been an "incredibly shy...withdrawn introvert...[probably] having a very mild...form of Asperger's syndrome" at the time when he started playing music in public. As such, Byrne believes his drive to get on stage was a form of over-compensation, "other musicians and even girls (!) would talk to someone who had just been on stage. Performing must have

⁷ in Daniels and Arns, *Sounds Like Silence: John Cage 4'33"*
Silence Today, p. 46

but a hard core of occupiers remained. A specific police officer that was designated to address the protesters with a megaphone now read the same text he had read to the whole encampment some hours earlier at full volume about one and a half meters away from the group, to leave the park or they would be arrested. This was already the second time that he was doing so. When the cop started his announcement this core of protesters in the center of Liberty Park started yelling so loud that they probably couldn't even hear themselves, let alone the megaphone. Many of them just yelled nonsense syllables but a certain contingent were yelling together as children might do over and over again, "we're not listening! We're not listening! We're not listening...!" Immediately when the officer was finished, a young woman addressed the police through the People's Mic, informing the police that a group of protesters had tied themselves by their necks to a pole in the middle of the park and any attempts to remove them would cause them to be killed. Although the People's Microphone was much talked about as being a new 'technology' in many respects, this episode shows how in fact it is clearly a kind of anti-technology capable of defeating practically any amplification brought to bear through the multiplication of a cluster of voices at point blank range. A mass anti-listening device voiding out the voice of authority: the police's megaphone thereby becoming like the "wah-wah" hat-muted trombone sound of the voice of the adults in the Charlie Brown TV special.⁶ There are many more and diverse ways in which not listening can defy authority, of which this example is just a beginning.

⁶ "Charlie Brown Teacher Speaking"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ss2hULhXf04>

As soon as I speak
You have them
In your voice
The horizon
Of the new body
Me you
Double voice
Crowded speech
To make the imaginary republic
The open sea
Shadow square
Islands of resistance
We are not goods in the hands of politicians
We are not goods in the hands of bankers
We are birds
Above the empire
Bird brain
Winged tongue
Crowded mouth
Of no one
Everyone
Henry
Angela
Jane
Are you there
I'm searching your lines
It's more than just 20 cents
Where are you
Have you gone to the bank
To cash the check
It's more than just 20 cents

We don't have much time
They are coming
To take us away
To grab the tongue
To disrupt the crowd
To capture this flag
To break the wing
Of the flagrant
And the fragile
Invisible body
The possible city
The double voice
To echo the void
Between
To bounce and bop
Hip and hop
Flip dip trip
Shadow beat

Should we speak about politics
Should we declare
Or decree
Should we write a new constitution
It's not a crisis, it's the system

Let's steal the city
Drive across the river
To the other side
On the run
Easyrider
Over the border

Did the not listening change from the first time to the next that you went back to reading?

Actively directing oneself or another person, on the other hand, to not listen is a seemingly impossible task, like when I say, 'don't think of an elephant right now.' In order to actively not listen to something requires a lot of energy rather, towards focusing intently on hearing something else. In fact as I was hinting before, listening is actually not listening. Listening is hearing something else. To listen you must stop listening. So by listening can you meld art and politics into a process that heightens compassion? It takes more than listening to accomplish that. You have to get people *not* to listen to certain things as well. I don't want to devolve into a sort of vague moralizing on what people specifically shouldn't listen to, but rather point to a few brief examples of not listening in order to very roughly begin a mapping out of its various means and productivities as a mode of action or inaction in embodied listening in a city.

There is the obvious way of not listening, not listening as not obeying, not following the rules, to decline, desert, differ, to rebel, resist, revolt, to run riot, to shirk, transgress and withstand. As I have been researching sound in the Occupy movement I took the time to watch hours of video footage filmed by NY City police officers of their eviction of the encampment at Zuccotti Park, which was made illicitly available as a torrent on the net by Anonymous⁵. Towards the end of the footage, most of the protesters had been cleared out of their tents and out of the park

⁵ You tube: <http://youtu.be/-t1bG9UGgj0> , Download and Seed..UPDATED Torrent
Link: <http://tinyurl.com/AllyourTapes> , Updated Magnet
Link: <http://tinyurl.com/AllyourTapesMagnet>

I not actually contribute to your not listening to things in the moment around you? Aren't I even interrupting the sound of your own thoughts?

Listen around you now.

Now read. To continue out of logical sequence here from somewhere in the beginning, what I was describing in my morale quandary between poles of political philosophy as composer is how I became aware of the need to develop an art and ethics of composing for the reaction of human bodies in the urban soundscape. Compassion is the link in the perpetual connection and influence between listening to musical sound (or sound as music) and listening in political sound and back again ad infinitum. Compassion is in both forms of listening, it is that which contributes to pulling us back from a cycle of perpetrated violence. But we need freedom as well as compassion. Compassion without freedom is without agency.

Stop and listen back outside this text now...

The dogs
Earth
Sunray
Echo body
Social club
Settlement house
Without hope
Only a dream
To give it away
Make a new home
Like Robin Hood
In the forest
Or Walid
In the square
In the bars
With Hank
The classroom
Sharing the voice
Passing it around
Rhythm machine
Counter-point narrative
The imaginary republic
Sense
Of non-sense
Delirium
No
Yes
Stranger language
A dreaming nation
Shadow speech
For the coming crowd

This is what I heard
Back there
At Walden Pond
In Montgomery
On Boston Commons
In Sherwood Forest
We are an echo
The double
Doubling
A recital
Traveling through bodies
A free voice
Without private ownership
Common language
Like an arrow
Let go
Into the wind
For the new crowd
Wing machine
On the road
For connection
Outlaw culture
Multitude
The social body
Between
Me to you
You to them
Them to they
They to us
Us to this
This to that

When you read ‘politics’ or ‘art’ here I would like you to imagine (don’t recoil yet) that they are merely the same field of human endeavor, and that we are dealing simply with a type of dance we can learn to ever further our capacity for compassion.

Non-violent political protest is the appeal on a mass scale to the human affect of compassion. Compassion encompasses all other affects since it is the epitome of the human mimetic capacity. Protest and political organizing function by appealing in different forms not only to people’s sadness but also to joy, not only to anger but to laughter. Protest appeals to all of our human experience in the hope of a better, fuller life. Art does this too. It offers a vision of how there is ‘more’ possible to life and then a ‘more’ even beyond that, what Brian Massumi references art philosopher Susanne Langer in also calling “semblances.”⁴ We need a new word to describe an amalgam of art and politics in which the eliciting of compassion in all its forms is emphasized. Anyone have any good ideas? Too bad “semblances” is taken by another concept...If any new terminology for the amalgam come to mind please send me an email. In the meantime what happens if we try calling it ‘listening’? To investigate this possibility, lets return again simultaneously to ‘not listening.’

What are you *not* listening to right now? Is it even possible to tell? Once your attention is re-focused on what you think you weren’t listening to, are you not already missing something else? Understanding what I am reading already requires a certain particular listening that I find temporarily disables my ability for other careful listening to what’s going on around me. To actually think about what is written on a page I find I have to stop listening to the words there. In letting these words register in your mind, do

⁴ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, p. 108

has a known and precise political stance or emphasis is equally absurd.

Art (or often “entertainment”) has been condemned in a continuum of various types of political judgments. The continuum reaches from dismissal as pure trash or stylistic posturing, to the idea that the art plays into the hands of hegemony and fascism as propaganda (witness Cardew’s famous text on Stockhausen,) banal brainwashing or destruction of the population’s level of perceptual literacy and thereby its ability to think rationally. These accusations usually evoke the highly unstable and dubious theoretical reduction and opposition of individual artists in networks of social relations as either wholly self-serving or colluding with some teeming conspiracy. This problematic approach is very different however from the accusation of aesthetic failure, however: while I would question the ultimate reality of aesthetic failure except in relation to technical mastery (which is anyway just another term for either mimesis or copying other artworks,) we know for a definite fact that brainwashing, the destruction of art/knowledge, the dissemination of falsehoods, hypocrisy and irrationality exist in instances of the perpetuation of violence, usually for the sake of greed. It’s all around us, whereas aesthetic failure or inferiority is really quite abstract. For this reason I am inclined to give artists who believe their work should have some beneficial effect in politics more benefit of the doubt in the foregoing arguments.

As a precondition to engaging what I write here I plead with you however to forget the entire last hundred years of debate on musical political efficacy, with direct socially / politically based production of sound work on the one side, positioned in opposition to ‘pure’ aesthetics, like in what Jacques Ranciere has called ‘dissensus’ on the other. Lets forget and start again you and I.

Above below
We are the new city
Double city
Beirut Guadalajara
Berlin Montreal
Atlantis
Pirate nation
The global commune
Out of sight
Underwater
Overhead
City with wings
Rhythm machine
Occupying
The between
Drifting disappearing
On the move
Beyond the grasp
Of capital
And the arresting gaze
Becoming invisible
A breath
A sound
Ghost tongue
Fool language
To shadow the empire
Double its rhythm
The echo body

The sun pours from this machine
This double mouth

Minor tongue
Speaking
Of lost objects
That open space
That self-government
The barricades
The grass roots
The festival
Silver Machine
Shipwreck
Pirate island
To count
As the uncountable
To drop
In
Out
Between
To fill the void
The square
Get in
Let us travel
Across the country
In search of friends
Shadow bodies
Stranger nation
To cast the vote
For each other
1, 2, 3
For the unknown
The horizon
Of possibility

unification under political banners, social justice or righteous constitutive power seems on many levels an even greater travesty; it somehow surreptitiously serves the very oppression one wishes thereby to defeat. There must be another way, not pitting these two extremes into diametrical opposition but rather pointing outward into a new process. Could it be that we have reached a stage in history where the very terms we use like music, art, politics, etc. destructively delimit their own possibilities? In the twenty-first century biopolitical dystopia - our current road to an increasingly violent, racist and oppressive future – this ‘mysnomia’ as I’ll call it, is undoubtedly a symptom.

What has again and again been portrayed as aesthetic failure of a composer’s political music has always been so by the standards of either the academic musical institutions (as in the late music of Cornelius Cardew – e.g. a musical failure *for whom?*) or by the underestimation of the reach of political art music in its philosophical and historical influence or by repercussions of an unfair comparison with the (in any case) false and imaginary function of popular protest music as one to one means for insurrection.³ I refuse to be defeated by this, what is, at its core, a failure of analysis in the 20th century, in most cases unwittingly perpetrated by musicologists, historians, music theorists and composers alike. The assertion that music and/or art can be free of politics and exists by and for itself in an aesthetic zone of freedom is a nonsensical conundrum, but the opposite, that all music or art

³ An example of this is much scholarship dealing with the NY Composer Collective of the 1930s [cite]. The disillusionment of some members (like Charles Seeger) in the collective with their own efforts due to that same unfair comparison, notwithstanding!

art and scholarship that upholds the status quo: the same contracts and the same relationships of performance either inside the institutions that are beholden for their survival to big financial interests (albeit even indirectly) or to those institutions that maintain a mere neutrality in the name of ‘great art’ despite the disintegrating world climates: both the environmental and civic ones. So I find myself longing to open new spaces for performance located in ignored, underrepresented and undervalued regions of our climates, the areas of the environmental and civic to which we as citizens are adept, for many reasons, at not listening.

I wish to question not listening, but in so doing to enlist or coopt the idea somehow at the same time.

To add my voice to the many composers who came before me to actively decry the nauseating state of affairs in the world only to practice the same sheltered art for the few, for those intellectual connoisseurs, subversives or elites in the name of the inviolable and ultimate beauty of preserving and advancing a tradition of the arts whether supposedly enriching, rebellious or what have you; to ostensibly uphold a model of what all people might enjoy *if only they too* had the same leisure time to educate and refine their senses for these uncommon pleasures; or for the reason at least to maintain a maximum diversity of artistic output at one extreme end of the spectrum so that “the masses” will have to question and think about what it is, does not appear to have ever been adequate, all of it.

But on the other hand committing the act of eviscerating one’s own most fantastic, rare and unique, personal and inward and therefore often most spiritually rewarding moments of creative output at the alter of social progress as some great composers have done, to whatever extent denying the deep worth of those sincere personal moments to assert sound only as servant in affective

The soft night of the unknown
Darkness dark
Between thoughts thinking
More
Imaginary
To make a public life
Palm trees
Civic dreams
Of flights
And grass roots
Weeds
Tribe of the creole
The poetics of relation
Night birds
Shadow language
Cloud lips
Ocean tongue
Vvva
Kuhh
Zzzz
Migrating dreams
Crowding the mouth
Double the body
Throw the voice
Into the city
To slip through the order
Of the proper and the powerful
To begin
1, 2, 3

(whispering)
I am you
You are them
They are us
In the trees
Under the stars
To hide in the forest
To sneak under the tongue
A speech of difference
A
B
Or B to A
and back again
Forward
No
Pass it around
Schizo-democracy
Imaginary culture
On the road
Off the road
The disappearing appearing
The cosmos
In your eyes
Star burst
Red blue
Yellow green
Feathers
On the skin
Animal magic
Remember
To forget

diameter and hence more than a kilometer's hearing distance away from any residence, where on an average day you might find a mere 10-20 people wandering around aimlessly, we would be verboten to play on acoustic instruments that are not any louder than one's ability to shout. Much of the civic is no longer a public space anymore, in the true sense, but a highly restricted and regulated zone; actual public land is a treasure, which in many places is becoming extremely rare. Fortunately not in Berlin (not yet anyway.) My colleagues and I were able to shift the rehearsal to a real public park in Neukölln.

The freedom of public space is an omnipresent theme in promotion and advertising, whether it's propaganda for a city, company or product. The notion of the civic abounds as a symbol of many freedoms. Grün Berlin GmbH website for information on Tempelhof is called "Tempelhofer Freiheit: Freiraum für die Stadt von Morgen"² I had to reflect unhappily for a moment that perhaps they mean literally that it is free space for the city of tomorrow, but not today. In any case I will return very briefly to pseudo public lands in Berlin later but first I would like to ask the question, in what ways can we define listening in civic space in terms of its inverse, it what we do to *not* listen? A word to my motives in this regard:

In the current world atmosphere of oppression, where it seems there are more large-scale protests, more conflict, oppression, rampant greed, militarization and fascism not only in the West but all over the world than ever, I find myself ever in a quandary about the moral implications of the continued output of

² "Tempelhofer freedom: free space for the city of tomorrow"
<http://www.tempelhoferfreiheit.de/startseite/>

Wir weisen Sie darauf hin, dass Veranstaltungen auf dem ehemaligen Flugfeld bei Grün Berlin angemeldet und genehmigt werden müssen. Da uns Ihre Veranstaltung bisher nicht bekannt war und diese nicht genehmigt ist, weisen wir darauf hin, dass Ihre Bandprobe nicht auf dem Gelände des Tempelhofer Parks stattfinden kann.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Julia Deißbeck
Freie Mitarbeiterin

im Auftrag der

Grün Berlin GmbH Columbiadamm 10, Turm 7, 12101 Berlin
Tel.: +49 30 700 906 - 858
Mail: veranstaltungen@gruen-berlin.de

The gist of the email is that the company must first approve any events on the field and that un-registered events are not allowed, so that our rehearsal likewise may not take place. It came to me as something of a shock (if not a surprise) that not only was the field privately run by a quasi-non-profit company,¹ but that in this space which has been widely advertised as being a new public park for the people of Berlin, an oval more than 3 kilometers in

¹ GmbH is like the suffix 'Ltd.' in England – non-profit status is actually denoted by the suffix e.V. in Germany.

*Fly
Me you
Them them
Us they
Rhythm body
In the wind
To slip through the order
Of the proper and the powerful
To begin
1, 2, 3*

Not listening to music and sound interventions as agonistic freedom in civic space: Prelude to the embodied city by Jeremy Woodruff

To begin this prelude to a discussion of interventions in civic space I have a telling anecdote from recent experience: I am helping to found a new sound collective (or marching band) whose purpose it will be to join protest actions against enforced evictions in Berlin. Upon announcing via mass email the very first rehearsal of the group on the field of the former Tempelhof airport, now a park open to the public, my collaborators and I received an email back from an employee of the company that runs the field, also carbon copied to the Berlin police. The text of the email is included here in full:

Von: THF.EVENT (Julia Deußenbeck)

[mailto:veranstaltungen@gruen-berlin.de]

Gesendet: Donnerstag, 11. Juli 2013 15:20

An: gekko-reichenberger@nachbarschaftshaus.de

Cc: Krebs, Dr. Michael; Sadina, Frank; Herrn Mathias Grunow (mathias.grunow@polizei.berlin.de)

Betreff: Bandprobe Marchingband Tempelhofer Park 15.07.13

Sehr geehrter Herr Nowak,

wir erhielten Kenntnis von Ihrer geplanten Probe der Marchingband am 15.07.2013 um 15 Uhr auf dem ehemaligen Flugfeld der Tempelhofer Freiheit.

