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SOUND BEFORE MEANING

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

In the following pages you will find three intertwined textual forms:

1. Excerpts from the book *The Order of Sounds: A Sonorous Archipelago* (2016) by François Bonnet.
2. Responses (interludes) derived from our reading of this dense and complex book.

3. A series of inquiries and statements that address adjacent concerns, divided loosely into themes.

In the spirit of collectivism and collaboration, we have absolved ourselves of any further need to indicate authorship. We suggest approaching this booklet beyond linearity. It can be opened, closed, skipped through, set down, and picked up in whatever order, whenever, and however the reader might choose.

THE ELEMENT OF SOUND

Sound is elemental. We accept it as a primary force that contributes to our lives—a maker of meaning that we internalize without challenging it, interpreting it through past experience and intuition. When presented to us, questions about sound seem simple enough, as if they are almost redundant or unnecessarily asked. As with all concerns regarding the senses, the cognitive is secondary by design. Each of us could happily carry on, maintaining an intuitive relationship with our ears. Inquiry seeks possibilities, emerging from a hope to establish a more meaningful and progressive relationship within a spectrum of experiences at the heart of who we are.

Sound is a phenomenon that is part of the lives of almost every person on the planet. The elemental comes first. Ideas follow—processes that attempt to activate dimensions of consciousness and interpretation—the opening of a lens which, while a product of the primary experience, when doubled back, affects subsequent readings. Historically, these two polarities have rarely been in harmony, given the tendency of ideas to complicate and limit access to sound, rather than mirroring the natural properties of their subject: availability, access, and a collective, unified experience. Rather than simply telling, ideas, like sound, can instigate a process within which there are no limits or absolutes.

Faced with phenomena that are so familiar and part of who we are, there can be a natural resistance to the idea that there is more than meets the ear—that we may not entirely

understand something so present, so seemingly simple and elemental. In these cases, the organized forms of sound offer important utility. When considering unfamiliar or challenging music, we commonly acknowledge our lack of total understanding. We accept this schism as a natural byproduct of relating to someone else's gesture, but we are less at ease when it concerns ourselves.

Listening as a practice requires reorienting our relationship with our own ears and thoughts, recognizing that we make and order the meaning of sounds: those which are naturally occurring as much as those which are composed or organized. In effect, we must embrace a displacement within ourselves that resembles the schism in understanding that we accept when relating to others' gestures—to ask what our ears and their experiences are telling us, inquiring about how they have arrived at their conclusions, in much the same way we might try to understand others' intentions.

It seems logical to ask, if each of us could carry on, maintaining an intuitive relationship with our ears and be perfectly fulfilled, why complicate such a beautiful and naturally occurring phenomena? Developing a more meaningful relationship with the process of listening is, to a certain extent, a form of politics. By recognizing our understanding of a thing, its own subjectivity as much as our own, we undermine isolation, establishing active participation with the world beyond ourselves and thus a greater sense of relative scale, location, and

meaning. While this could be contained to a personal and internal process—for simple pleasure or an expanded understanding of self—it holds far greater potential.

Sound belongs to no one, but it always comes from somewhere. It travels across divisions in geography and time; it is one of the primary means through which we recognize each other and communicate. It is, at an elemental level, a fundamentally democratic vessel—our relationship to sound being simultaneously collective and individual. It is crucial to note that sound, as object and phenomena, holds no inherent meaning. It is unlikely that the same object or occurrence has ever been heard or understood twice in entirely in the same way. One arrives at understanding through listening, which is filtered by conclusions that are drawn from experience. Within this process, and by recognizing the schisms that it engenders, the terms of relating exist, carrying with them the histories of cultural experience and phenomena. It is not sound that expresses, but the process through which we hear and deploy it.

Dealing with sound by using focused terms is a way of establishing a consciousness of the self—how we make and express our ideas and the way in which they join and interact with others' beings and expressions. Listening can be seen as an attempt to grasp and comprehend the power and utility of sound and to harness our agency through it. It is this openness and possibility that we attempt to mirror in the following pages. Words, at their root, originate in sounds—a form of music, and thus, at

the elemental level, democratic and beyond our control—a part of the process, within which meaning is formed by the reader rather than the writer.

// Bradford Bailey

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THE GRIP OF SOUND

Sound disappears the very moment it appears, or more precisely, in the moment of its appearance. And so its trace is the primordial means by which it can be integrated into a regime of permanence—one that must, moreover, be distinguished from the regime of representation: sound recording (and the associated playback process, which is nothing more than the re-presentation of sound held in memory) can only reproduce, infinitely if so required, the cycle of the appearing and disappearing of sound; that is to say, it can only reveal, over and over again, its irreducible fugacity. [. . .] Without itself being present, its trace draws sound toward a regime of permanence that is located upstream of any process of ‘conservation’. It is the manifestation of sound, the ‘both suprasensory and sensory’ halo surrounding it, affirming and activating its existence. It anticipates the possibility of a place for sound, a stable space, albeit a precarious one.

Less is more...
making the complexity simpler

There are two temporalities of sound:
the time that lapses as it crosses our paths
and the duration of its lasting effect,
forever folding back upon itself,
contributing meaning to all that follows in its wake.

Is
what
we
call silence
simply something that we
choose not to hear?

The sonorous trail that is reverberation, amplifying sound, sublimating it, and even de-realizing it, forms a supernatural trace, holding sound in suspense a little longer than it would otherwise last, rendering it at once tangible and ethereal, affirming the materiality of sound’s existence at the same time as its fantastic irreality.

Are we forever in the grip of sound?
Even if its absence was obtainable—
the elusive object of silence,
its trace penetrates,
lingering and crossing time,
defining and rewriting who we are.

Is the reproduction of sound possible?
Or... is a recording a simulation—
the beginning of an entirely new and autonomous life?

... Resonance is not solely physical. On the contrary, we should recognize that there is a correspondence between the phenomenal resonance of sound, the acoustic cloud, and figurative, speculative resonance, which in fact is always inherent to the perceptual apparatus. Resonance designates both the physical trace of sound (the relic of a sound that has disappeared and yet persists) and the memorial trace (the reminiscence that is convoked to embody memories). Perhaps above all, then, sound is traced in the memory of he or she who has heard it. For it is doubtless the first trace—the memory trace—that dams up sound into a semblance of permanence, retaining for a few more moments more a sound that has already evaporated.

... but can isolation be a means of expanding focus and willingness to learn and discovering further out from a given circle?

Accessibility nurtures discovery
and isolated
learning.

Can the same object be heard twice?
Like an echo,
does it change
and
gather meaning,
becoming something else, as it goes?

Silence is always already sound even as it is, simultaneously,
the absolute limit of sound's disappearance.

How far back does it go?
Is there a primal trace etched on our cells?
Intangible sounds, lingering beyond reach—
bound to danger, survival, and joy.
Asserting influence,
which
one day
might once again crystallize in the ear.

Does sound intervention
—through organization or contextualization—
hold a broad potential to activate a more developed
relationship with sound?

Noises and silences are always relative to a cultural context and to artistic and/or political usage. They reflect various realities, all of which have a certain validity and pertinence, and carry a certain weight in the process of delimiting the area of sound. And yet, noises and silences can sometimes be conflated into an a-perceptual identity.

If sound is a vessel,
what
is
the identity
of that which is contained
within,
or carried
on its back?

The cultural *milieu* is determinant
in influencing appreciation and
“knowledge” of music(s).

Before it is the vehicle of signs, signals, or any semantic information whatsoever, sound bears within itself its own body, its own history, its own marks. It is through these, and not through the sound itself, that it is recognized, that one can know it and hear it—for hearing is always indexical.

Knowing that we make the meanings of sound—
that present truths are the product of past encounters—
how do we maintain the integrity of their origin and intent?

If noise and silence are products of their cultural context,
when they cross great distances,
reaching out from beyond our own borders,
what is this new hybrid that forms in our ears?

APPREHENDING SOUND

Sound is not something self-sufficient and isolated within nature. It cannot exist for itself. So regardless of whether it is audible or not, it is always coupled with listening. The apprehension of sound is always articulated with the listening that corresponds to it, even if this listening is virtual. This coupling is not univocal though, which means that we need to distinguish different ways in which listening can be used, different types of listening.

Can we distinguish hearing from listening?

Perhaps
the answer
lays within sounds themselves—
somewhere between the audible and sonorous realms.

When we impose expectations,
everything falls apart;
we lose the ability to cross boundaries.

Is “experimental” a wall preventing new discoveries
or justifying a non-popular music?

One might define three stages in the apprehension of sound: (1) the unheard, (2) the aurally perceived, designating any sound that leaves a trace (to perceive is always to immediately remember having perceived), and (3) listening or hearing, denoting any audible that is intelligible—that is to say, qualified, identified, and evaluated.

The forced categorization of a sound
may deter new audiences.

Once apprehended, value is imposed
but what of those lingering traces
that fall below the rest?

If you think you can't understand
it's not because you lack cultural references,
it's because you have too many.

Listening is always listening to something, and this is always the function of a given situation. It should not be considered to be strictly autonomous. Listening necessarily concerns both that which is perceived (the given-to-be-heard) and the one who perceives it (the auditor).

What happens when we encounter a sound for the first time—
an alien object that no memory or parallel sense can locate or explain?

Can the audible be free?
Can what it carries and evokes outweigh
the subjectivity and experience of our ears?

Is listening the backbone of
the structuration of sound?

Can organized sound navigate between
the sonorous
and the audible?

If the act of listening is bound to the context in which it occurs,
but meaning is bound to the memories and traces of that
which has happened before,
does this process sculpt a third, transient and ethereal space,
occupied by the auditor alone?

[The] relationship between territory and listening is not
unilateral, though. It is a complex, twofold relation. At the
same time as listening awakens one's consciousness of the
territory, one constitutes for oneself a territorial representation
of that which is given to be heard. By virtue of listening,
one perceives a territory, but at the same time, in the
same moment, one constitutes that territory. It is this double
movement, whereby in one and the same instant, the territory
gives itself to be heard and listening aggregates the perceived
sounds into a spatiotemporal continuity, into a territory, that
constitutes the central node of the relationship between the
audible and the territory.

The audible tells us things, evokes, and makes us feel
something beyond the sonorous. It contributes to a more
general apprehension.

The
listening
can
know
the
Unknown.

To apprehend is
to capture,
to slow,
to stay momentarily,
to recognize
a fleeting passage across our ears.

... a sound doppelgänger.
Similar, but fundamentally different ...

Is every *audibilis* a refrain?

INTERLUDE #1

There is, inevitably, the risk of falling into narrow frameworks, well-trodden paths, or asserting definitions that might limit the hope of inclusivity and pliability. Sound, in its basic materiality—before and within an encounter, organized or unorganized—exists without explicit ownership. It is open. It is inclusive. It is pliable. Regardless of source, proximity, or intention, it is within each of us that meaning is formed. It is the presence of this binary—the interplay between materiality, origin, and necessity, melded with the internal process that sculpts understanding, forever escaping and reemerging—that this object's power can be found. It is democratic and accessible. It comes from outside of us and exists within.

Ideas pertaining to the materiality of sound within the arts, which is different than its use to relate to a specific subject or deliver a specific meaning, are most often encountered within experimental and avant-garde fields—music and sound-art. While the terms of sound and listening should not be limited to these applications or contexts, organized sound—that exists under the natural presumption that it will be listened to—can offer an orientation, particularly when faced with the successes, failures, and paradoxes of experimental and avant-garde approaches, both contemporary and historical. It is, after all, the territory in which many of us developed a conscious and active relationship with the process of listening—an awareness of sound as material or abstract element—an object with potential, with which one interacts.

Sadly, the products of experimental and avant-garde approaches, despite their lofty ambitions and utopian dreams, remain among the least heard bodies of organized sound. It is one of history's great failures: these tools are out of reach of those for whom they were intended, relegated to the outer margins, widely viewed as exclusive, elitist realms, overly intellectual, self-satisfied, opaque, and complex. Nearly every one of these great revolutions—twelve tone technique, indeterminacy, free-improvisation, the reintroduction of just-intonation, graphic scores, non-instrumental sources, electronics, tape music, and synthesis based process, etc.—was conceived as a way of liberating music from long-standing historical constraints, particularly those connected to the elitism of education and class: the very corrupt bastions within which they often currently rest. This is a territory of ideas that strives to establish a more elemental relationship between sound and the listener—to blur the boundaries between its occurrences and organizations and who we are. To bring it closer. These approaches can be seen as an instigating process, available to everyone, intended to carry on after a relationship with a work concludes—to be internalized and adopted across a broad range of practices, contexts, and approaches.

While often closer to sound's natural occurrence and organizations, the sounds and structures generated by the avant-garde are most often regarded for their differences and challenges. In essence, by utilizing more familiar, intuitive, or accessible sources and approaches, these ideas create a territory that seems less familiar or accessible. This could be

interpreted as an indication of failure, but that is, at least partially, the point—one stage in an incomplete process. One must become displaced in order to readdress the terms through which we hear and to make meaning from what we encounter. The problem is not what the avant-garde has presented and proposed but rather the unwillingness to complete the process that it has begun.

While it becomes difficult to retain a sense of where it all began, these ideas have rarely reached the audiences for which they were conceived. And so we must break the *ouroboros*, returning to the original spirit of our context, reactivating its utility as a process of accessible application and subsequent interpretation—its openness, accessibility, and democracy—the material and meaning that grows from within. Sound is open. It is inclusive. It is pliable. It comes from outside and exists within.

FORM AND THE VOICE OF SOUND

Reduced listening, which is a formal listening, targets the suitable object, not like a perceptual sieving that picks out the sound object, but more like an active process that itself, according to predefined criteria, instigates the formation of sounds into objects.

Does "active listening" suggest
in its negative
a "passive listening"?

A reified sound is
an embalmed sound.

Does the body of a sound,
carry the body of its source?

The audible has no reality without both of these terms: the immanent and the transcendent. Even if it is necessary to distinguish between the two, sound is both event (the sound appearing) and sensible manifestation (the appearance of sound). However, if the audible is the sonorous as 'formation of form', the sonorous should not simply be considered the undifferentiated magma of raw acoustic material.

What is the life of a sound
...once it is no longer audible to our ears?
...once it reaches the ears of others,
but not our own?

Can sound open the possibility of two parallel,
mirroring worlds?

Sound does not individuate itself and it is never already individuated. So it acquires autonomy only through the external action of an individuating intention. Reduced listening is precisely such an intention: it realizes the autonomization of sound by making it thinglike.

How can one *listen* if one doesn't
cherish the art of *hearing*?

The existence of sound is
relational.

Do noise and silence combine together in what we call
background noise?

Sound is nothing, or so little.
And yet, sometimes, it's almost everything.
Or is it?

When creating sound,
where is the schism
between
the form that is given,
and the form that is received?

Sound perceived 'as object' is always a formal index, a
potential sign. A sound considered as autonomous, whether
or not it is qualified as a sound object, is thus always an
audibilis. It is always the result of listening, it always
belongs to a field of audibility, and it always falls under the
influence of signifying regimes. Form does not liberate the
sonorous, it channels it, 'audibilizes' it ...

This sound-becoming-object is revealed through the primary
sound object in the modern history of listening, the object
that incarnates the very paradigm of reproducible, recorded
sound: looped sound, imprisoned in the locked groove of a
record, and later a length of magnetic tape, itself also looped.

Is a perceived sound always an object?
Is its formation equaled by its loss?

Is it possible
to perceive
the authentic form
of a sound?

Must the formation of the audible be the product of a confrontation,
actively pursued,
or is it possible to remain passive, unassertive,
caught in its drift?

A sound is not a word.
Music is neither a text nor a formula.

Where can the sound event be found
in the sound of the sea?

DESIRING-LISTENING AND FETISHISM OF LISTENING

Listening always supposes, modulates, and depends upon a relationship. The joy of hearing is the joy of being-in-relation. [. . .] As one of the two terms of oral communication (the other being speech), listening always presupposes a strong relational character between that which sounds and that which listens. [. . .] It is in this sense that we may say that sound speaks. But we must clarify how 'sound speaks'. The only sound that can 'speak' is sound that is targeted by listening; it is listening that makes it speak.

In the deployment of sound,
when does it leave our control?

When do we listen without prejudice?

Desiring-listening is the listening that invests itself in every place, in every circumstance, disseminates itself...

Communing through silence
enables
sharing, amongst others.

Does sound have a momentary, autonomous life?
Somewhere between the spaces of
delivery and receipt.

Music is this process of integrating sonorous elements, activating an organizing function through musical listening. Thus, even where there is no clear and explicit musical intention in the production of sound, it can very well be reincorporated a posteriori by listening. It is this kind of reincorporation of musical intention in listening that permits humans to speak of 'birdsong'.

Are the aesthetics of sound
a product of the desires, expectations,
and presumptions
we impose?

Is what we hear,
what we want to hear,
what we expect to hear,
obscuring the nature of truth,
emanating from within a sound?
Is its truth,
ours, and ours alone?

Listening is never directly connected to sound: there is always a pretext, a context, a conduit, which predetermine it. It is the 'henchman' of a discursive scaffold whose duplicity often involves a claim to return to sound itself, when in fact it only establishes sound in a utile relation, when it only produces listening in order to hear it speaking words that it has put in its own mouth.

Is there liberation
from
our own desire,
our fetish, of sound?

Is it valid to expect the visual
when faced with sound?

Does the need to assign source, origin, and place
limit its potential?

Bringing together the objectivation of sound and the revelation of listening as desiring-listening, we can glimpse the existence of other protocols that structure audition, and instances where the desiring process is directly integrated with perception. The complex of listening and object, the relations that it supposes and through which it functions resonate particularly strongly with one of these possible protocols: that of fetishism.

Are we able to conceptualize
and seek the unknown?

Once it becomes musical,
sonorous material
already belongs
to an ordered world.

Music is never isolated. It is part of a system of values and representation that each individual develops in experiencing the world and relating to it. The 'musicalizing' tension of listening acts as a desiring-tension—one listens musically to that which promises to be musical. It thus transfers onto sound the values that are attributed to the musical.

Is listening a process of
making music in our minds?

Was there ever a pure experience?

To desire, the desired must be known.

The secret project of the discourses on sound
is less to qualify it than to essentialize it.

Is the desire that leads our ears
founded on a hope to recapture that which is lost?

Listening is always predetermined by the intentions that fuse with it. These intentions, these tensions, orient its power of focalization, its faculty for transforming the sonorous, the unheard, into the audible. Listening, mobilized and driven by these tensions, constitutes sound objects by determining them formally or symbolically. Sound is thereby reified, rendered tangible. It is invokable, convoke-able, utilizable. Like a fetish, it serves as a medium for the desiring tensions that invest perception, enslaving the latter so as to make it an instrument of *jouissance*.

INTERLUDE #2

Defining or labeling a type of music or an event as “Experimental” in the general sense (and not as a sub-genre such as experimental pop, rock, jazz) risks deterring new ears and souls from opening up to these types of music, which are somehow perceived as weird, difficult, or even inaccessible. Members of the international community that embrace this niche music argue that it is very much an inclusive, social, generous, and non-pedantic musical practice, both in the act of its creation and in listening. However, it is unfortunately often seen as creative elitism consumed by music snobs or at best, specialists—thus becoming a victim of its name, which blocks its potential for wider appreciation, audiences, and discovery.

How can one remove these boundaries of intellectualization, knowledge, and reclusion and demystify experimental music? How can we enable an active, curious, participatory, and meaningful relationship with sound and music for new audiences? An appropriate context for representation appears to be a key factor in making “experimental” music approachable and eventually enjoyable—although for some, this feeling does not coincide with any form of experimental art. The challenges this music poses are part of what make it so exciting; when sounds are heard for what they are or what they are meant to transmit, new listeners will most likely be taken by it, whether in the live or recorded context.

But how can an invitation from within be done in the most welcoming and open way? How to nurture a relationship with the external world when appreciation is fundamentally

individualistic, even as experiencing music remains a social phenomenon? It isn’t about a request to enter a community, since cultural cells have lost their meaning, becoming more homogenized and predictable. In this current internet age, music discovery has become far more fragmented, as individuals build their own personal taste. However, at the same time, the online medium connects us all and enables the sharing of knowledge and discovery. Virtual access has eliminated the need to purchase physical formats, which used to be the only means of learning outside of one’s own cultural reference, lowering and actually nullifying barriers to entry. There are no gatekeepers to acquiring new tastes, and now more than ever before, the experimental music niche can embrace new members.

So we, as part of this music community, must be stubborn and try to trigger people’s interest in engaging with this perceived “non-music”. The event (a context, a moment) bridges the divide with generosity, reaching out rather than secluding itself to the community. It is the execution via a social interaction that compensates for what could otherwise remain isolated listening. Yet this can only be achieved with a reciprocally receptive ear and mind. This listening asks us to leave prejudice, preconceptions, and apprehension behind; it is demanding and requires active listening. The context can be created and adapted to be welcoming to newcomers, but gathering new audiences is complex, especially given the significant distractions posed by other more social and artistic gatherings.

But then again, isn't this applicable to many other units of contemporary culture? The effort should be communal and complementary. If the goal is to generate new audiences, it will require a collective desire and the social production of art with a strong willingness towards this end.

AUTHORITARIAN LISTENING

Discourse intervenes in listening by turning the perceived object into an object that can be spoken of, described, classified, linked to this or that other object—that is to say, by making it communicable. Discourse introduces heard sound into a community.

*Listen...simply let go.
No prejudice needed.*

Is it possible to dis-organize
organized sound?

If sound is fated to the meaning we impose,
what is this transmogrify that occurs within our ears?

If it is possible to shore up power by capturing the listening of another, it is also possible to develop and practice strategies of power through the exercise of listening, precisely by virtue of this principle of solidification. Such practices can become a powerful instrument of power, or at the very least can bring about the ascendancy of he who listens over he who emits a sound, he who speaks. But once again, he who listens must be the sole depositary of that which has been expressed.

Is there a political potential of sound,
beyond intentions of control?

If the
authoritarian
tells,
is that
authoritarian
our ears?

If politics
are the armature through which the balance of power is determined and distributed,
and the act of listening is bound to the assertion or acceptance of power,
where is the politics of sound located?

Sound can be constituted as an island and aggregated into an archipelago only in so far as it is dominated by discourses. Furthermore, it is these discourses and their empire over listening that isolate sounds, turning them into islets, only to then bring them together, endowing them with a coherence that takes the archipelago as its model, so that they themselves form an archipelago. The sonorous archipelago forms interlacings of discursive regimes, whose influence over the sonorous islets is distributed at the behest of the ideal currents that elect them or divest them.

Does a sound have inherent authority and legitimacy?

Silence must be disturbed by noise
... and noise should be silenced.

Curating new
and experimental music
is
exercising power over the audience.

Not all of the various authoritarian practices of listening are solely a matter of instrumentalizing the aforementioned or using it for the ends of power. Listening is not fated to simply be a function of authority; it can also be an expression of authority, in which case it is no longer used to exact power but only to illustrate it, to attest to it, to express it.

What once was unexpected becomes expected,
and this new freedom transformed into a set of chai.

Listening is driven by
power,
desire,
and territory.
It is never pure or free of mediation.

... an archipelago of discourses, desires, beliefs ...

Listening, that instrument for capturing the sonorous, is a process of attachment, a ligature running between the sensory, a language that articulates it, and a discourse that defines it. The territories of sound are aggregated, structured, by the intermediation of models and discourses that 'unconsciously' conduct listening. One sound calls for other sounds; one discursive channel implies others.

Isn't valuing sound
a way of being more conscious of it
and its effects?

For a trembled listening.

PHONOPHANIES

If every territory is the spatial manifestation of the expressive mark that constitutes it, then its frontiers emerge as sites of intermodulation between many such marks. What territory also reveals is that, while the expressive mark may presuppose identification and isolation (the conditions for its discrete existence), it also implies a structure or milieu that surpasses it and within which it is accreted.

Identity dissolves
in the sonorous field

There is no ontology of sound
to be discovered

Sound is unreachable.

Is the location of response
bound to the source of these sounds?

Sound is not doomed to be exclusively a medium of discourse [. . .] The sonorous is a modality that persists in all sound and perdures even in the audible. [. . .] The sonorous resists a total textualization of the acoustic sensible. The sonorous prevails, inaudible, in the preconscious strata. It is immediate, immanent to listening, and cannot be extracted from it, cannot be the object of any commentary, cannot be objectivated.

What is a sound body?
What is a body?

Perception is indissociable
from actions of representation.

Although listening is always tempted by form, although it is always caught up in the meshwork of discourses, it is not doomed to be a mere instrument for the reading and verification of these discourses in the audible domain.

The phantom island is a phantom island as long as it's not an island.

Sound is situated in an intermediate space, a narrow crest line upon which, in the very time of perception, the reception, projection, and representation of the sensible interface with each other. A sound that no one hears, that no one perceives or can manage to apprehend, is not really a sound. What is lacking is the appearing of this sound.

What happens when you hear the humanity of sound before its source or resonance?

Does listening to certain music enable access to a given community or an escape from generalization?

Is a sound
a
sound
when it is not heard?

The relation to the sensory is never pure. The abandonment of identification, which cannot be avoided if one chooses to work with limit-forms (the 'informe', the imperceptible, the indistinct) does, however, allow for a re-establishing of access to the sonorous, where before it had been obstructed by the substitution of the audible for sound, that is to say a substitution of the textual for the sensory, or again, an enslavement of listening to behaviors and regimes of discourse that determined sound and listening.

Can anything be felt twice? Or is the second time already a representation that is offered to us?

There's no point in aiming for sound's pure nature, or sound for itself (what would that mean, anyway?)
Instead, aim for the interstices in which sound differentiates itself.

When sound crosses time,
divorced from its location, source, and temporality,
is it capable of occupying us completely,
or does it carry transcendent ghosts—
the source being our desire,
and what we long to hear?

INTERLUDE #3

Saying “the sound” can sometimes be a trap. It is fairly well known that activating a discourse is always about sharing a vision of the world (*weltanschauung*). And behind this sharing, there is always a transaction. In other words, every discourse carries with it an authoritarian modality that seeks to convince, to impose, to enforce. It is the very form of speech—the one who speaks seizes the one who listens for a moment—which implies an authority. Thus, even when the precise object of discourse is to evoke or denounce this authoritarian modality, it exposes itself in the very act of enunciating, expressing this authoritarian trait itself. This paradoxical loop relates to all anti-authoritarian texts, discourses, and theories. So how can such ideas be expressed through a discourse that itself takes an authoritarian form?

But we should not be crippled by such a paradox since only the outcome matters. What is important here, in these texts, these fragments, is to trigger an awareness in the reader, or at least to reactivate it. An awareness that our relationship to sound is not pure, that sound itself exists only through the relationship between an event and a listener, that the senses do not conceal an ultimate truth beyond words, and that any attempt to affirm a truth based on these same sensations is always an imposture.

The world of sounds opens to the sensory experience, demanding us to listen, watchful. And such an experience of listening is a source of great happiness: it imposes silence in its duration, forces us to suspend the course of our thoughts, plunging us into the here and now. It suspends

the ordinary course of things, seeking, for a moment, the extraordinary feeling of being alive. It then opens to us, in the pre-constructed space. The one before certainties, even before beliefs were formed. It brings us back to the stage of the leaf cradled by the wind, to the branch carried by the water, to the stage where the body, before being an empire, a citadel, is first of all a sensitive crossroad swept from all directions by the thrills of the world.

Man, before constituting himself as a social being where everything is sign, language, representation, and symbols, is first of all a being-in-the-world where everything is sensations, alerts, impressions. And art has always been the expressive means intended to create a bridge between these two conditions, this modality to share and communicate these intimate impressions. To evoke the ineffable.

In the empire of signs, phrases, and discourses, it is always difficult to express the inexpressible without spilling over into the discourse of revelation. No one is enlightened nor has the duty to reveal. On the other hand, text and discourse can be devices, not of revelation but of activation or incitement. A text can trigger a desire to travel, it can revive a love or reopen an injury. For our part, through these fragments, these signifier islands, the only ambition is to revive a desire, a need: that of being attentive.

FRANÇOIS J. BONNET (France, 1981)

Is a Franco-Swiss composer, writer and theoretician. Based in Paris, he is in charge of Ina GRM, Institute founded in 1958 and birthplace of musique concrète. He has published several books (The Order of Sounds, a sonorous Archipelago and The Infra-World have been published in english by Urbanomic). His last work to date *Après la mort*, has been published in 2017 by éditions de l'Eclat.

BRADFORD BAILEY (USA, 1978)

Is an English-American writer and critic, offering particular focus to the notion of sound and music as a pathway toward mutual aid, shared and cross-cultural understanding, collectivism, and community. He is the writer of *The Hum*, a blog supporting historic and contemporary music which exists beyond the realms of mainstream interest, and has written extensive articles, texts, and liner notes for various publications, festivals, and record labels.

ERIC NAMOUR (Lebanon, 1976)

Is a music curator and producer based in Mexico City who has worked on projects and festivals in Italy, UK and Mexico. He set up the Mexico-based independent organisation *elnicho* in 2010 - originally a micro itinerant experimental music shop - through which he now sets up (free) music series and sessions in various institutions, museums, venues or public spaces. His personal interest and research through this work is in promoting and disseminating adventurous music to a wider audience, re-contextualising it to incite a more focused listening experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the contributors for their dedication to this project, as well as Éditions de l'éclat y Urbanomic Media Ltd for making possible the reproduction of extracts of the book *Les mots et les sons. Un archipel sonore* (2012) written by François J. Bonnet.

This project was made possible thanks to the support of the French Institute for Latin America (IFAL), Fundación Jumex de Arte Contemporáneo and Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo A.C.

LIBRETA ELNICHÓ

How to approach the accessibility of new music to new audiences? How to entice people to get closer and discover without preconceptions or reluctance—but rather as a new form of participation and natural listening experience, what is often perceived as difficult music? What is the relationship of this music, if any, with contemporary arts in a way that it may grasp the attention and active involvement of the spectator and/or listener? While musicians and artists must reach out and pull people in, it is also our calling as listeners to brave boundaries of prejudice or fear. We hope that this series of Libretas will open new sound territories to a broader audience.

This booklet is an attempt to harness the incidental moments that are often passed by or overlooked, those meandering conversations that inevitably occur between friends who share a passion for a common subject. Evolving over the better part of a year, this conversation blossomed from the friendship among the participants. Each of us works within a distinct territory addressing avant-garde and experimental practice. Thus, when placed together, we considered the possibility that sharing aspects of these experiences with the conclusions drawn from them might offer some form of utility to other members of our community—present and future—with the wish that they might also serve to activate a point of entry for new participants.

We hope that the initial seeds of this effort—friendship, community, and a love for sound and “challenging” music, with all of the beauty and potential they hold—are retained as the primary force throughout these pages. Each grew as much from joy, camaraderie, and listening as they did from focused thought.

// Eric Namour y Bradford Bailey

elnicho is a small independent organization based in Mexico City dedicated to promote the appreciation of new and experimental music with concerts, presentations, talks, workshops and a festival. Through random micro sessions and editorial projects, elnicho aims to put innovative music on the foreground, combining and reconciling different approaches and contexts to broaden the spectrum of contemporary culture through sound and music.

elnicho.org

* FUNDACIÓN JUMEX
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Libretas

This publication is a collaboration with elnicho, as part of a series of booklets dedicated to sound and music within the broad context of contemporary culture. Libretas is a project of Buró-Buró that aims to share conversations and encounters that contribute meaningful ideas and reflections on contemporary culture.

Buró-Buró is an interdisciplinary office and publishing house that addresses contemporary topics through culture, art and education.

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Binding: Eduardo Ruiz | Eduardo Bautista

First edition, 2018

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ISBN 978-607-98419-2-8

Buró Buró Oficina de proyectos culturales, S.C.

Jalapa 27, Roma Norte

Ciudad de México, 06700

buroburo.org

Printed in Mexico