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Sonic peripheries : middling with/in the event

Klusmeyer, P.

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Author: Klusmeyer, P.

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Part One

MIDLING WITH/IN THE EVENT

THINKING SOUND

I begin Part One with an aphorism, if you will, that marks the beginning of the concluding chapter of *What is Philosophy?*; there Deleuze and Guattari write: “We require just a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness” (1991/1994, p. 201). This observation, I suggest, we can all relate to, that is, it is an experience that we all share and know to some or lesser extent. Indeed, it is distressing when either a nascent idea, or say, a ‘feeling of import’ slips away.

What remains is an impression, a faint residue, or glimmer of sensation that is not yet articulate thought; something that ‘tickles the imaginary skull’, as one *Sonic Peripheries* attendee put it in the interview following the event/sonic artwork-performance. “I could feel it ... not really feel it because it’s imaginary. But that’s how, I guess, I felt it. And really did” (Radovic 2012). She said it was difficult to find the words for what she had experienced. What came to mind was the description of the ‘tickle-and-skull’. What to make of the phraseology? The image she invokes is of a fleeting, somehow bizarre nature. Clearly, something happened; ever so lightly touching the body, ‘tickling’ the mind – or, as Deleuze might say, intersecting with the brain and stirring a nerve, so to speak. Her recollection of a ‘sonic happening’ reflects on an incipient occasioning that had emerged at the edge of chaos. And it is this kind of glimmer of sensation –

Thinking Sound

apprehended at the threshold of nonconscious-conscious perception that is of interest here and where we come back to below.

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In Deleuze and Guattari, *chaos* is equivalent to “a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence” (1991/1994, p. 118; italics in original). According to Alberto Toscano, “Chaos is thus defined not by its disorder but by its fugacity” (2010, p. 48). Disquieting? Common sense tells me to keep order in check. “This is why we want to hang on to fixed opinions so much [... they form a kind of] ‘umbrella,’ which protects us from chaos” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, pp. 201–202). Deleuze-Guattari believe that opinions about things and states of affairs help us to structure our thoughts and represent them to others, but they also insist that “such simplicity detracts from the variety and uniqueness evident in our experiences of the world” (Stagoll 2010b, p. 53). ‘Opinions’ (they refer to the Greek word *doxa*) are nothing but “extracted clichés from new perceptions and promised affections” (ibid., p. 150). Departing from this premise, what philosophy and artistic practice can do and should do is *undo* simplification: “make a slit in the umbrella [...] to let in a bit of free and windy chaos” (ibid., p. 203). Deleuze-Guattari (following Nietzsche) request that philosophy and art think and ‘do’ experimentally, that is, that they “no longer accept concepts as a gift [... but] *make and create them*” (ibid. p. 5; italics in original). What follows from this?

At the outset of this thesis, I talked about the impetus behind the (ad)venture. The intention has been to inquire into and get attuned to the complexity of the sonic in relation to artistic practices. To me, this suggests the question of what happens when a sonic artwork-performance happens; or slightly revised, with an emphasis on sensation, the question reads: What happens when sound happens

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

as an aesthetic force? ('Force' here means: "any capacity to produce a change or 'becoming', whether this capacity and its products are physical, psychological, mystical, artistic, philosophical, conceptual, social, economic, legal or whatever" [Stagoll 2010c, p. 112; italics in original]¹). This concern demands that we consider sound (and sonic arts) beyond our own presuppositions. How does one move beyond one's expectations and pre-conceived ideas that seek satisfaction? How to allow for, that is to say, *infuse* an openness to encounter sound in ways other than expected in a given circumstance? This task, I argue, is one for the artist-led curator/theorist to take up in close proximity to the artist and artworks. My incentive was, and still is, to facilitate situations that incite a 'thinking-in-motion' that invites us to discern and contemplate a sonic event – as it comes, as it goes – to inquire into the goings-on, the what-has-happened-in-and-between the rhythmic ebb and flow. Can we conceive, or rather 'prehend' (Whitehead's term) a relation or movement that is in excess of 'a' mind, that constitutes a qualitative difference present in the world which is 'felt' by organic and nonorganic

¹ Cliff Stagoll further explains, "For Deleuze, we can only truly *perceive* [cosmic/universal/earthly] forces by *intuiting* them; that is, by grasping them without reference to a conceptual understanding of existence" (2010c, p. 110; italics in original). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari write, "The most we can say is that when forces appear as forces of the earth or of chaos, they are not grasped directly as forces but as reflected in relations between matter and form. Thus it is more a question of thresholds of perception, or thresholds of discernibility belonging to given assemblages" (1980/1998, pp. 346–347). For them music (I propose: the sonic arts in general) does not reproduce the sonorous but renders forces sonorous, i.e., harnessing forces of the cosmos, the universe, and/or the earth. Though sound's nature as affective and paradoxical occurrence remains ambiguous: oscillating, as it were, between matter and form (or matter as it comes to matter), intuited as intensive force *and* apprehended as 'aesthetic figure' through sensation. As suggested in the introduction: *sound occupies a space that sits between oppositions*. Neither this nor that – *a double negation that produces a condition for 'paradoxical affirmation'*, which gives way to productive (aesthetic) encounters; hence our interest in sound's occasioning as aesthetic force or figure and the happenings that might bring to pass the unexpected. See Stagoll, C. 2010c. Force. In A. Parr ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 110–112; Deleuze G. & Guattari F. 1980/1998. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Thinking Sound

life? This concern evokes the Deleuzian image of *?being* in the sense proffered by Claire Colebrook:

That is, being cannot be reduced to the world of present beings or things, or what we can say is, but this does not mean we should posit some negative beyond being or nonbeing. Rather, being (as *?being*) is life understood as the potential for creation, variation and production in excess of what we already know to have existence. (2010d, p. 192)

With this said, it is important to take note of the implied vitalism in Deleuze, since 'being (as *?being*)' implies a virtual force that enfolds as it unfolds "potentials through contingent and productive encounters" (Colebrook 2010c, p. 4). It can also be thought as chaos-like force-field or energetic flux, which is "something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (Coole & Frost 2010, p. 9). It is the virtual but real existence from which we come and from which we draw. The 'we' is meant to read as the entangled subject-object or the entwined encounterer-encountered, anyone-and-anything invested in the eventfulness, i.e., the chaos-cosmos from which sound as aesthetic figure eventuates. Also, and this is of import, at the peripheral line between the virtual and the actual, thought is born as emergent capacity through sensations (more on this below). I am interested in these emergent becomings and curious about thought that aligns to a *thinking sound* that captures the nature of the sonic as vibrational, thus, as a material force underlying all aesthetic experience. What does this mean in the context of this project?

The *Sonic Peripheries* cases that I have alluded to so far wish to foster a sonic thinking, a thinking-in-motion. It means that we need to establish conditions that impel us "[to] plunge into the chaos," as Deleuze-Guattari (1991/1994,

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

p. 202) dramatically put it, or, alternatively, to free-fall into the 'not-yet-thought', in the hope of challenging the predictable, to create experiences in experiments: "variations that are still infinite" and "varieties that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ but set up a being of the sensory, a being of sensation," to quote from *What is Philosophy?* (1991/1994, pp. 202–203; italics in original). Looking ahead at some of the work of Part Two we might say that for *Sonic Peripheries*, the artistic series and research (or call it 'the adventure', since it is one in many ways), different practices and agents were purposefully 'thrown into' the same pond – causing the expected ripples and some unexpected diffractions; mapping in the process new patterns of thinking-sound, or tracing those that were set in motion by others, take Deleuze-Guattari, for instance (aren't they sonic thinkers par excellence?), and not to mention the invited artists whose work I owe much to in terms of making the events possible, after all. As remarked on by Deleuze: "It is at the level of interference of many practices that things happen, beings, images, concepts, all kinds of events" (1985/1997, p. 280). Theory (philosophy) and art practice – in their relatedness – create spaces for fabulation. In the making of research creations, interferences take place, cause new conceptual patterns, images, sounds – all types of (ad)ventures.

In light of this, what can we say about the role of the 'art recipient', or more precisely, the participants of a sonic artwork-performance within this ecology of practices? I propose that they equally partake in constituting a relevant element in the sonorous as well as pictorial, sculptural, and situational becomings that arise from the aesthetic encounters. However, I do not mean 'participatory' in the sense of relational art² – although there is a kinship to this type of socio-

² Relational art is a term coined by the French art critic Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s "to describe the tendency to make art based on, or inspired by, human relations and their social context" (Tate, n.p.) and artist's associated with relational aesthetics are Angela Bulloch, Liam Gillick, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Jens Haaning, Philippe Parreno, Gillian Wearing and Andrea Zittel. Bourriaud in his book titled *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) defines the term as follows: "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (p. 113). See Tate. 2018. Relational Aesthetics –

Thinking Sound

political art, but not a likeness. The kinship this research shares with relational or participatory art resonates with Claire Bishop's definition of it as an "artistic orientation towards the social" where "the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations [...] while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*" (2012, p. 2; italics in original). However, this study neither seeks a discussion of 'active' versus 'passive' spectatorship nor of "'bad' singular authorship and 'good' collective authorship" (ibid., p. 8). What is at stake here is the transformative power that artworks, performances and situations (in sum: sonic artwork-performances) afford. This will be explored in this thesis alongside the question of how the forces at play give rise to a 'situatedness'³ wherein different 'agents' collide, coalesce and *inspire* aesthetic encounters, and give rise to 'the event/s' (see Part Three: The Event/s). Situatedness then speaks of a spatiotemporal 'eventness', i.e., the emergent becoming of a now

Art Term. *Tate*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/relational-aesthetics> [Accessed: 21 May 2018]. See also Bourriaud, N. 1998. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les presses du réel.

³ It should be noted that the term 'situatedness' links to Feminist theorist Donna Haraway who illustrates how we as human subjects are produced through and by the environments we inhabit, i.e., social, political, economic, technological, and cultural *situatedness*. Her work on situated knowledges "emphasizes the ways in which science is a rule-governed form of 'story-telling' that aims at getting at the truth, but the idea of truth she uses here is not that of reality *an sich* but a reality that is produced by human material practices" (Janack 2004, n.p.; italics in original). Also importantly to add, in Haraway's words: "Feminist accountability requires a knowledge tuned to resonance, not to dichotomy. [...] Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning" (1988 p. 588). The latter is of interest since we will lend an ear to 'material-discursive' (material-semiotic) events actualizing as in/determined sonic occurrence through aesthetic practices. This also implies that the concepts and case studies under discussion here are produced through the 'entanglement' of matter and meaning whereby a distinct separation between one and the other is suspended or indiscernible. See Janack, M. 2004. Feminist Epistemology. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-epis/> [Accessed: 20 May 2018]; Haraway, D. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14, 575-599.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

– not just in the simplistic sense that something “‘happened’ at a particular moment in time, but in so far as it aspires to bring a variety of elements and forces into relation with one another” (Parr 2010, p. 31). So what happens when the participants take ‘the free fall into chaos’, thus facing the unknown, the not-yet-thought? What do they bring to the impending situatedness? And what do they possibly retrieve from this experiential event?

But before we can address this, we need to also ask, what counts as thinking sound? How can we practice a thinking-sound as a kind of pragmatics of inquiry?⁴ We will pursue these questions in a bit of a roundabout way: we begin by exploring Deleuzian aesthetics (or strictly speaking, a Deleuze-Guattarian aesthetic). We then move on to Whitehead’s theory of prehension, meet Massumi and Simon O’Sullivan along the way, among others, until we reach a juncture, namely the upcoming chapter of Part One: Aesthetic Encounter.



Not what art is but how a work of art does. This Deleuzian-inspired credo will guide what is coming next.

How-an-artwork-does and affects matters to Deleuze. In his earlier work on aesthetics (esp. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*), Deleuze constructs a theory of perception where ‘sensation’ is thought as a pre-individual, asubjective plane of intensity. It “opens at the threshold of sense, at those moments prior to when a subject discovers the meaning of something or enters into a process of reasoned cognition” (Conley 2010, p. 247). Sensation is “what vibrates at the

⁴ Here I would like to adhere to Massumi’s sense of ‘pragmatics’. He explains, “Pragmatic doesn’t mean practical as opposed to speculative or theoretical. It is a synonym for composition: ‘how’ processual differentials eventually play out as co-composing formative forces. [...] The co-composing of formative forces constitutes in each exercise of experience a novel *power of existence*: a power to become” (2011, p. 12; italics in original). See Massumi, B. 2011. *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Thinking Sound

threshold of a given form," explains Tom Conley (*ibid.*, p. 248; emphasis added) and calls on Paul Cézanne's still lifes and the 'appleyness' of the apples.⁵ The feeling or intensity arises from the taking-form of the apples as the painterly abstraction that they are. Sensation tickles the mind into intuiting the 'aliveness' of apple, i.e., its appleyness. For example, in the earlier statement by Marijana Radovic: something 'tickles'; which is to mean, it vibrates exactly on the edge of sense and nonsense, that is, at the peripheral line between vibratory force and the sonic landscape in its taking-on-gestalt-like-formation: "I could feel it ... not really feel it because it's imaginary. But that's how, I guess, I felt it. And really did." Or take Vesela Bodurova who was attending the same event as Radovic. She said of her experience: "I felt that I can see and smell the sea and feel the water running beneath me" (2012). Both 'listened to' a 90-minutes sound performance-cum-installation (more on aspects of participation and listening soon) that led to a place where intuition and imagination meet, or rather coalesce. "The place is a 'multidimensional' phenomenon. It exceeds space and time and is still the place that it is," says Wilke Thomssen (2012) who was there, too, along with a small crowd of sonically interested students and locals. I choose to discuss the above observations because they describe the kinds of experiential events that 'live on' or carry on. As Thomssen points out: 'it exceeds space and time', *becomes* the place it occupies. It is not a 'beyond' but a virtual yet real existence. The experience carries on; it has its own life.

"Art preserves, and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved," write Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994, p. 163). This is key to their aesthetics, and this is of interest to us. The point I want to come to will take time to reach, but suffice it to say that in order to explore the conditions by which the sonic occurs as aesthetic figure we need to follow the Deleuze-Guattarian credo and look to the how-the-artwork-does and how it affects. Generally, 'affect' means here "the

⁵ In the words of D.H. Lawrence, "the appleyness of the apple" in Cézanne; as quoted in Deleuze, G. 1981/2003. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. London: Continuum, p. 35.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

transitional product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost" (Colman 2010, p. 11). Affects are quick to strike and carry on; thus art *transforms and endures* by way of a *faint residue* that subsists always-already in the middle, never localizable, but occupies bodies, 'spaces' – physical, spiritual, intellectual, and cognitive. The 'faint residue' can also be read in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense as "*a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*" (1991/1994, p. 164; italics in original). We will continue to elaborate on this notion because it serves as our basis for understanding the processes involved that inform thinking-sound.

Let's reiterate Bodurova's account of a sonic occasioning: "I felt that I can see and smell the sea and feel the water running beneath me." Her wording seems unusual, remarkable even. Remarkable insofar that she doesn't say I *imagine* the sea, that is, conjure up an image of a seaside. What she describes is neither a memory of a day at the beach nor a generic notion of *any* sea. Rather, she *feels* the seaside: she smells the ocean and senses the swell of water. Bodurova retrieves blocs of sensations.

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari consider blocs of sensations as a *being* of sensation that exists of percepts and affects rather than perceptions and affections. To them, percepts compare to "*nonhuman landscapes of nature*" and affects to "*nonhuman becomings of man*" (ibid., p. 169; italics in original). Here Roland Bogue provides a helpful gloss: "Percepts are like landscapes in which the human being as subject no longer exists and yet remains diffused throughout the landscape; affects are intensities that traverse individuals and go beyond ordinary emotions and sensations. Percepts and affects exceed lived experience and our recollections of that experience" (2010, p. 100).⁶ It is worth noting

⁶ Bogue provides an instructive reading of *sensation* in Deleuze's (and Guattari's) work. See Bogue, R. 2003. *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. New York: Routledge, p. 164ff.

Thinking Sound

that for Deleuze and Guattari all art creation is about the extraction of blocs of sensations: “to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another” (1991/1994, p. 167). To harness the forces of the cosmos, “to make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become” (ibid., p. 182), they consider the artist to be “a seer, a becomer” (ibid., p. 171). By the same token, this should include the ‘art recipient’, the participant of a sonic artwork-performance. Bodurova intuitively grasps the seaside as she ‘listens-in’ (see also Part Three: Experiment 1). We might say that she sees – foresees (also forehears) – as she enters the field of audition. She enacts a spiritual insight specific to the relational whole opening up before her, therefore, becomes cosmic-ocean through sensation. She feels the water beneath her, above and surrounding her, fusing momentarily with the multidimensional phenomenon that exceeds spatiotemporal coordinates but is of the real. I suggest that she *think-feels* the sonorous (nonhuman) landscape, which seems to afford indefinite olfactory and vague ocular impressions. The concept of thinking-feeling belongs to Massumi (2011, 2002). There he allies intuition with imagination: “Imagination is the mode of thought most precisely suited to the differentiating vagueness of the virtual. [...] Imagination can also be called intuition: a thinking feeling. Not feeling something. Feeling thought – as such, in its movement, as process, on arrival, as yet unthought-out” (Massumi 2002, p. 134).⁷ Hence thinking-feeling

⁷ Dermot Moran (2000) points out how at the turn of the twentieth century the role of ‘intuition’ was emphasized by philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Henri Bergson, and William James. Here Bergson’s account of intuition from *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1913, pp. 6–7): “By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within the object in order to coincide with that which is unique in it and consequently inexpressible” (as quoted in Moran 2000, p. 10). According to Moran, “the prevalence of notions of intuition as a kind of spiritual sympathy with the object of knowledge has often led to phenomenology being widely misunderstood as a form of irrational mysticism” (ibid.). In fact, it should be noted that our take on intuition supposes a post-phenomenological position where experience (sensation) is desubjectified and disembodied from affection and perception. This could be taken for some form of ‘mysticism’, however, should rather be read through the lens of Deleuze’s ‘incorporeal materialism’, which, perhaps, to an extent, favors a

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

the fragrance of the sea is a form of extracting percepts and affects from the sonic artwork-performance on site. Bodurova fabulates becoming-sea; this, we understand, is not a thing recollected but a process of transformation: a transduction. “Like electricity into sound waves. [...] Or vision into imagination. Or noise in the ear into music in the heart. *Or outside coming in*” (ibid., p. 135; italics in original). The artist composes from the outside, the ‘great outdoors’; deploying field recordings and electric pulses, creating rhythms and swooshes; sonic textures that infuse the place turning it into the kind of space Thomssen describes above: a multidimensional soundspace: spectral occurrence of real existence.

What follows is an excursus into the Deleuzian concept of becoming (an annotation to what’s been and will be said, if you like) because it ties directly to sensations and thus to thinking-feeling, moving us further along the path of thinking-sound towards where sonic occurrences enable a possible ‘transformation of the subject’ (cf. O’Sullivan 2001b, 2006). To start, it is worth quoting Cliff Stagoll (2010a, p. 26; italics in original) at length here:

Deleuze works at two levels to rectify such [i.e., difference-from-the-same] habitual thinking. Philosophically, he develops theories of difference, repetition and becoming. For the world of practice, he provides challenging writings designed to upset our thinking, together with a range of ‘tools’ for conceiving the world anew. At both levels, becoming is critical, for if the primacy of identity is what defines a world of re-presentation (presenting the same world once again), then becoming (by which Deleuze means ‘becoming different’) defines a world of presentation anew. Taking his lead from Friedrich Nietzsche’s early notes, Deleuze uses the

notion of ‘magic’. Moran, D., 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. New York: Routledge; see more on *magic* in Massumi, B. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 257–258.

Thinking Sound

term 'becoming' (*devenir*) to describe the continual production (or 'return') of difference immanent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise. Becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events.

Becomings can thus be thought as 'affect-emergence', a qualitative difference immanent within the world. *We become* would then mean that we transform through sensations: "Sensory becoming is the action by which something or someone is ceaselessly becoming-other [... ;] sensory becoming is otherness caught in a matter of expression" (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, p. 177). It is a movement in-and-between the rhythmic ebb and flow of pure experience: a relation that constitutes nonconscious feelings ('prehension' in Whitehead) in the production of events. In soundspace, the thinking-feeling someone (or something) operates as sensory medium for the taking account of change: "I guess, I felt it. And I really did." This is Radovic's vague but rigorous description of the glimmer of sensation (the faint-residue that persists) phosphorescing from within herself at herself precisely as affect-emergence.

"Deleuze believes that each change or becoming has its own duration, a measure of the relative stability of the construct, and the relationship between forces at work in defining it" (Stagoll 2010a, p. 27). In this view, becoming creates its own temporalities, which forfeits the notion of a transcendental time, i.e., "the Kantian *a priori* form of time that depends upon attributes of a particular kind of consciousness" (*ibid.*; italics in original). Change occurs in the time of the 'return', the eternal production of difference immanent within the coming-to-be of events.

Becoming-soundspace might produce moments of temporal suspension: "The time disappeared similar as in the feeling of joy or boredom," says Markus Walthert (2012) of his experience when listening to the unrolling soundscape of *Sonic Peripheries #6*. His description reminds me of Whitehead's question con-

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

cerning the sensation of anger: “How, he asks, does an angry person know he’s angry the next moment, even if it’s just a halfsecond later? He isn’t reflecting, he doesn’t conclude that he’s angry. He just is, still. He finds himself still *in* his anger” (1933/1967 as paraphrased in Massumi 2011, p. 64; italics in original). Joy and boredom (also coming from own experience) seem to produce a similar effect or feeling insofar that joy (or anger in Whitehead’s example) presents “the in-ness of that moment, as it was the in-ness of the preceding moment” (ibid.). The issue thus is not the content of joy or the reason for boredom, rather the affective temporality it brings to bear: Nothing changes but everything does in the meantime.

In Deleuze-Guattari, the meantime or ‘meanwhile’ (*entre-temps*) is allied to becoming. “The meanwhile,” they write, that is, “the event, is always a dead time; it is there where nothing takes place, an infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past, awaiting and reserve” (ibid., p. 158). Though I believe that the feeling of absence-of-time Walthert observes is neither ‘dead’ nor ‘empty’, rather, it is a ghostly fullness in the sense Karen Barad puts forth. Let me interject that by ‘dead’ Deleuze-Guattari are also likely to mean ‘unlivable’, i.e.: “The event is immaterial, incorporeal, unlivable: *pure reserve*” (ibid., p. 156; italics in original). Read as such, the ‘pure reserve’ aligns with the notion of *virtuality* as a field of energies or reservoir of potentialities – certainly ‘uninhabited’ by human subjects but a ‘place’ we are entangled in, no matter what. Not to diverge too far and risk overextending the excursus, I will keep the upcoming passage on Barad’s “ghostly non/existence” (2012, p. 12) short; it will serve to illustrate a point, or say, a way of being in becoming, that I endeavor to show.

Barad writes, “the void is a spectral realm with ghostly existence;” and claims (alongside Deleuze-Guattari) that this virtuality is exactly not a nothingness (ibid.). It is full with buzzing potentialities at the peripheral borderline of being and nonbeing. There is no absence (not even an absence-of-time), but rather, “the infinite plentitude of openness” (ibid., p. 16). This makes for a *lively*

Thinking Sound

tension, “a desiring orientation toward being/becoming” (ibid., p. 13). We can intuit-*imagine* the spectral realm if only we are careful enough; patiently attuning to the not-yet determined *becomings* – listening-in and -through – towards where time appears to vanish, slows down (or speeds up!) in ‘the in-ness of the moment’.

Becoming-different or becoming-other “*is its own time*, the real time in which changes occur, and in which all changes unfold” (Stagoll 2010a, p. 27; italics in original). Perhaps it would look like this (in lieu of words): “—.—.—.—.—.—.—.—.—.—” (Sick 2011). The punctuation marks or, here, ‘diagram’ (a derivative from *Sonic Peripheries #5*) represent, that is, enact a time of production originated in difference and becoming; here real time becomes duration intermittingly (and rhythmically) marked by temporary determinacies, the taking-form of this or that. “The actual is not what we are but, rather, what we become, what we are in the process of becoming – that is to say, the Other, our becoming-other” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, p. 112).

We become ‘Other’ through blocs of sensations, again through the imperceptible forces that affect us; “the forces of gravity, heaviness, rotation, the vortex [... etc.,] and time (as music may be said to make the sonorous force of time audible);” they become expressive, transforming themselves, giving themselves a new quality (ibid., p. 182). “This is not a signifying relation, in which the material plane is understood as a chain of signifiers and the aesthetic plane is the field of the signified: rather, it is a relation of eruption” (Grosz 2008, pp. 74–75). There’s no avoiding it (why would we?); the sublime surge embraces us wholly, incites a loosing of oneself to then come out of the hold slightly other to one’s self. “Art here is no longer a reassuring mirror of our own subjectivity, but an experiment in exploring what lies *beyond* our subjectivity” (O’Sullivan 2001b, p. 118; italics in original). In our context, the art events or happenings – more precisely, the sonic artwork-performances in association with the ‘Performative Encounter activity’ (more on the curator-led intervention in Part Two) – set the condition to exper-

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

iment and explore, to mindfully free-fall into *the between* – maybe as ‘foreseen’ in the diagram in the form of the *dash* before (or after) the period, like a pause that doesn’t stand still. Generally understood in a text as indication of a break in sense, the dash, here, indicates a threshold to an ‘infinite plentitude’. This is where becoming-other co-exists with time, creating its own temporality. And this is where sensations come in, quite literally entering the between: “Sensations are subjective objectivities or equally objective subjectivities, midway between subjects and objects, the point at which the one can convert into the other” (Grosz 2008, p. 76) – an openness for becoming – anew; a space of invention and fabulation; a time of contemplation. What art does is precisely for life to transform itself; a transition or evolution through which all becomings pass, from one state to another: “we become by contemplating it” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, p. 169).

Contemplation is a curious doing. It presents us with a simple yet complex doing. It is a way of being in becoming which is active as it is passive; as such, it is not deliberately active but also not entirely passive. The doing – embedded in the lively tension of becomings – sits in-between. Keith Robinson (2010, pp. 124–125) describes Deleuze’s (Whitehead-inspired) notion of contemplation as “a passage or folding ‘between’ states, a movement of pure experience or perception that increases or decreases its potential through interaction and communication with those states.” In Whitehead, this is considered a “*taking account*” (1925/1967, p. 69; italics in original). For our purposes, we draw on the nonphenomenology of Deleuze and Whitehead’s aesthetic ontology as the basis for a pragmatic inquiry into artworks, performances and situations.⁸ The intention is

⁸ Daniel Smith and John Protevi in ‘Gilles Deleuze’ in the *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* comment on Deleuze’s relation to Whitehead as follows: “although the points of comparison are many, Deleuze himself rarely discusses Whitehead, save for several important pages in *The Fold*” (2018, n.p). Here I would like to add that Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* considers Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* to be “one of the greatest books of modern philosophy” (2001, pp. 284–85).

Thinking Sound

to trace a 'new materialist' aesthetics premised on blocs of sensations that engender a situatedness from which the 'art recipient' might emerge slightly changed. Therefore, we continue to elaborate on the question of what could be considered a thinking-sound. For this, we outline the doings in contemplation (Deleuze) or prehension (Whitehead). This leads us next to what I provisionally call 'factual-fictional energies' and the experience of lived abstraction; as Deleuze points out: "The abstract is lived experience [...] you can live nothing but the abstract" (1978, n.p.).

The statement that follows presents experience as the occasioning of life; life is understood here as vital or energetic existence:

What matters is to understand the experience [of the sonic] not as an intellectual abstract but as a living; that is to say, immanent to the experience is something that conveys the real in the lived

Further – and this pertains to Whitehead's critique of pure of feeling, in other words, his theory of prehension – Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* relate Spinoza's notions of 'affectio' and 'affectus' to Whitehead's prehension, that is, "each thing [is] a prehension of other things and the passage from one prehension to another a positive or negative 'feeling'. Interaction becomes *communication*. The ('public') matter of fact was the mixture of data actualized by the world in its previous state, while bodies are new actualizations whose 'private' states restore matters of fact for new bodies. Even when they are nonliving, or rather inorganic, things have a lived experience because they are perceptions and affections" (1991/1994, p. 154). In the concluding chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, they return to Whitehead with respect to the latter's notion of 'superject'; they elaborate, "The brain is *mind* itself. At the same time that the brain becomes subject rather 'superject', [...] the concept becomes object as created, as event or creation itself [...] And this *I* is not only the 'I conceive' of the brain as philosophy, it is also the 'I feel' of the brain as art" (ibid., p. 211; italics in original). See Smith, D. & Protevi, J. 2018. Gilles Deleuze. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2018 Edition. E.N. Zalta ed. [Online] Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/deleuze/> [Accessed: 20 May 2018]; Deleuze, G. 1988/1993. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: Athlone; Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1991/1994. *What Is Philosophy?*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

experience. The lively [*das Lebendige*] in the experience gives the experience its actual life.⁹ (Thomssen 2012)

'The lively' is prior to 'an intellectual abstract'; it precedes cognition. It constitutes a form of knowing that follows from the encounter with art. Experience is something that *happens* – unfolds, never at standstill. It *becomes* in process. In the Event the sonic is called into being as aesthetic expression conjointly with the 'art recipient' as *participant*.¹⁰ "Sound is a process that sweeps you along and which enfolds you in its process of change, wanting to take you elsewhere," Thomssen said later in an interview with the author.¹¹ In conver-

⁹ Translated from German by the author. Here in the original: "Das Entscheidende ist, die Erfahrung nicht als eine intellektuelle abstrakte, sondern als eine lebendige zu verstehen; d.h. in der Erfahrung ist etwas enthalten, was dieser Erfahrung erst das eigentliche Leben vermittelt. Das Lebendige an der Erfahrung gibt der Erfahrung ihr wirkliches Leben."

¹⁰ See Deleuze 1988/1993, pp. 76-82.

¹¹ Wilke Thomssen, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, attended all three case studies. This interview followed *Sonic Peripheries #6* in July 2012. It should be noted that Thomssen was a doctoral student of Theodor W. Adorno at the Frankfurt School. In the interview, he made reference to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970/2002), calling attention to the latter's use of 'lived experience' (*lebendige Erfahrung*). Thomssen claims that for Adorno to use the notion of lived or living experience is noteworthy since it refers to something that indeed, according to Thomssen, precedes language/cognition and, as such, eludes theory/critique. Adorno further writes, "That the experience of artworks is adequate only as living experience is more than a statement about the relation of the observer to the observed, more than a statement about psychological cathexis as a condition of aesthetic perception. Aesthetic experience becomes living experience only by way of its object, in that instant in which artworks themselves become animate under its gaze. This is George's symbolist teaching in the poem 'The Tapestry', an *art poétique* that furnishes the title of a volume. Through contemplative immersion the immanent processual quality of the work is set free. By speaking, it becomes something that moves in itself. Whatever in the artifact may be called the unity of its meaning is not static but processual, the enactment of antagonisms that each work necessarily has in itself" (1970/2002, pp. 175-176; italics in original). Following this passage Adorno endows the artwork with a monadological character, which he finds "as true as it is problematic" (*ibid.*, p. 180). This brief discussion in *Aesthetic Theory* resonates, in my view, with Deleuze's chapter 'What is an Event' in *The Fold* (1988/1993)

Thinking Sound

sation, he emphasizes the processual aspect in aesthetic experience, temporal progression and finally *change* taking place.¹² Would we not consider change to be the most obvious and inevitable factor in life? And as such, in art? Common sense provides us with the assumption that, for instance, time is linear and appears to move forward. Everyday occurrences (based on the laws of classical physics, e.g., the apple falls to the ground) evidently give us impressions of mutability; however, it is a type of mutability that still remains, at least to some degree, predictable. Even though Thomssen speaks of a temporal progression, implying perhaps a telos in the experience, I read his account as an attempt to articulate the *not-yet-thought* as it “wells up from below the threshold of human awareness” (Massumi 2011, p. 165). The experiential event ‘in the act’ creates its own rhythm, a trajectory that proceeds *achronologically* designating – a time and a space and a thought – once the experience has come into perceptual focus. This rhythmicity also means that the threshold of awareness within the body is of particular concern.

Let me quickly add here that Thomssen cautions against “the instrumental use of an abstract concept of thinking” in favor of a unity of thinking and feeling: “Only when thinking is joined again with feeling in the process of thinking does the human body react with sensations; only then,” he carefully suggests, “can we

where he talks about Whitehead’s concept of prehension, which is of import here. Suffice it to say at this point that Adorno’s aesthetic theory plays only a partial role in the present discourse. See Adorno, T.W. 1970/2002. *Aesthetic Theory*. New York Continuum.

¹² The ‘elsewhere’ Thomssen alludes to in his account of aesthetic experience is not a transcendent space but instead speaks of the potential immanent to art, which lies beyond signification. The power of art, or here, the power of the experience of the sonic artwork-performance as *living* “names art’s specificity as art [... that is] not just ‘meaningful’, or not only an object of knowledge (although it is that too)” (O’Sullivan 2010a, pp. 190–191; italics in original). See O’Sullivan, S. 2010a. From Aesthetics to the Abstract Machine: Deleuze, Guattari and Contemporary Art Practice. In S. Zepke & S. O’Sullivan eds. *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 189–107.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

be sure that anything happens in thought that has relevance to a person.”¹³ What is of relevance then inheres in the reciprocal relation between feeling, or rather pure perception, and thought.

Massumi writes in *Parables of the Virtual* (2002, p. 91): “Perception and thought are two poles of the same process. They lie along a continuum. [...] The poles of perception and thought are at the limits of the same continuum.” We might say that experience is change felt as ‘the slide’ – from one end to the other, the feedback and forward between the limits – enfolding the not-yet-thought and unfolding future-thought. A corollary to this is that thinking is born under the constraint of the slide and the material force integral to the process. “Sensation is an extremity of perception,” contends Massumi: “It is the immanent limit at which perception is eclipsed by a sheerness of experience, as yet unextended into analytically ordered, predictably reproducible, possible action” (ibid., p. 97). Which also means that sensation is of the between, “between the perceiver and the perceived” (ibid, p. 90; italics in original). Always in motion, sensation is in excess over consciousness, yet despite it (or precisely because of it) inaugurates a qualitative difference that is *presencing* in the world.

On this view, sonic artworks are more than ‘material facts’ played back to an audience. Here, I refer to recorded sounds (field recordings) or vibrations that somehow modulate a work or result from a process. (The spectrum of sonic art is wide. My description is in no way representative of a still burgeoning field. It is limited to the artistic practices and works presented at *Sonic Peripheries* only.) We might say that sonic artworks are creations of factual-fictional intensities or energies extracted from the natural world. We thus turn to sonic art practices and performances that operate at the interface of the virtual and actual, generating

¹³ Translated from German by the author. Here in the original: “Erst indem das Denken sich wieder vermählt mit dem Fühlen – wo in einem Denkprozess der menschliche Körper mit seinen Empfindungen reagiert, um das mal vorsichtig auszudrücken – ja, erst dann kann man überhaupt sicher sein, dass in dem Denken irgendetwas geschieht, was für den Menschen wichtig ist.”

Thinking Sound

'moods' or 'affective tonalities' (Whitehead's terms), provoking new experiences and expressions that link to the qualitative difference ('the lively') that live on. In closing this thought, we might also say that Thomssen's prehension of the sonic artwork-performance is exactly 'what it is' because it is informed by the moods, the lived abstraction felt as 'the in-ness' of one moment to the next.

"In fact, [the body] is just as much part of nature as anything else there – a river, or a mountain, or a cloud. Also, if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends" (Whitehead 1968, p. 21).

In what follows, we embark on a minor detour that is major in terms of its experimental and experiential merit. The aim is to connect theory and practice by way of listening, then empirically map the occurrences that are both fact and fiction in order to further demonstrate how thinking-sound in relation to thinking feeling *does* (informs one another). For this, we rehearse a text score by the sound and media artist Achim Wollscheid:

Please listen carefully to the different sounds of your environment
Adopt one of the sounds
Try to imagine this single sound expanded over one minute
Do not change it, just maintain it
Try not to hum it, just think it
Then quit ¹⁴

◆ ◆ ◆

Wollscheid's text score along with other signs was mounted in Hampstead Heath, London as part of the project *Piece for a Listener* (LaBelle 2000 in Ehrlich et al.

¹⁴Text score as quoted in Ehrlich, K. et al. eds. 2003. *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*. Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, p. 222.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

2003, p. 221). It asks the random passer-by to shift the attention and “consider sound as an affective and influential physical phenomena in the world [...] And more so, as an ecological layer in which we are implicated” (ibid., p. 222). (If you haven’t already tried, I encourage you to take a moment to engage in the practice. In my view, it can be carried out at any time and anywhere.) As soon as we partake in the experiment, we notice the complexity of the task or activity. Among other things, it shows that “[t]he physicality of sound, as a movement of air pressure, of vibration, of interpenetrating exchanges from all around, forms an enveloping and effective influence” (LaBelle 2010, p. 133). Doing research in and through sonic art practices corroborates these ideas; further, I hold that our attentiveness opens up to the world of vibrational forces: a strange but nevertheless familiar reality.¹⁵ This is not the place to dive into a full discussion of modes of listening, though; suffice it to say that alone “the advent of recording and broadcasting forever altered the experience of listening and drew attention to the act of listening itself” (Cox & Warner 2004, p. 66). Indeed, the possibility of re-listening to *recorded* sounds poses yet another set of problems that artists, scientists, and theorists have been attending to and addressed through their respective practices. Seminal figures since WWII such as Pierre Schaeffer and R. Murray Schafer must be mentioned here. The former coined the term ‘*musique concrète*’ (concrete music) and dedicated his artistic-theoretical career to developing a typology of sounds,¹⁶ while the latter initiated the so-called Acoustic

¹⁵ I engage my students in listening exercises on a regular basis. Depending on the course, I will devise a series of prompts that start simple and increase in difficulty during the term. The difficulty lies in the ability of discerning how sound effectuates: what it does, how it does, and lastly, what it is, what it means to a person; in other words, the complexity that comes along with listening ‘as such’. Here is one such prompt followed by a question. The query is as simple as it is demanding: “Take 10 minutes to listen to your surroundings. What did you notice? Please describe.”

¹⁶ On Schaeffer’s sonic research see Chion, M. 1983/2009. *Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Trans. J. Dack & C. North. *EARS*. [Online PDF] Available at: <http://ears.pierrecouprie.fr/spip.php?article3597> [Accessed: 21 May 2018].

Thinking Sound

Ecology movement along with like-minded musicians, artists, and thinkers.¹⁷ (More on this topic in Part Four.) However, for the time being, let us refocus on listening and adopt one, two or three sounds as samples for probing factual-fictional energies.

Say you spent some time 'just' listening to the surroundings – what did you notice? To me, Wollscheid's text score poses a challenge. It requires of us to zero in on a particular occurrence that once in perceptual focus vanishes within split seconds. We might go so far as to say that the score invites failure. Or, put differently and giving my remark a positive spin, it confronts us with a phenomenological and epistemological complication, or rather, *complicatedness* (as in 'elaborately intra-/interconnected'). Our enactment of the text score reveals "the interconnectedness of things, their interplay across the senses, and the implicatedness of the individual within a broader field of concern" (Ehrlich et al. 2003, p. 222).

As I type these lines, I sit in front of my laptop, indoors, and try to listen intently at the same time. The window is closed. The door of my study is closed, too. It seems quiet apart from the expected sounds of keyboard strokes, a few cars passing in the distance, and the soft fizz of sparkling water in a glass next to me; the water emitting tiny popping sounds – irregular and somewhat edgy – is creating a curious percussive noise. And, finally, there is muted birdsong. I decide to adopt the sound, or strictly speaking, the sounds of the fizzy drink. I stick with

¹⁷ Acoustic ecology, also known as soundscape studies, started in the early 1970s with R. Murray Schafer and other scholars from the Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada) as part of the World Soundscape Project, later to be re-inaugurated as the World Forum of Acoustic Ecology. Still active today, the international community of ecologists, scientists, musicians, and listeners are interested in outlining "a sociology of sound," so Ken Ehrlich et al.: "for what becomes apparent in soundscape studies is the overall structure of social institutions, their manifestation in governmental policies related to noise, and the ways in which a more general attitude towards sound as reflected in listening consciousness is manifest in social relations" (2003, p. 222). More on Acoustic Ecology see Schafer, R. M. 1977/1994. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester: Destiny Books.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

them for some time. While the pops get softer and less and less prominent, I take up Wollscheid's cue and *imagine* the sonic event. A shift from the factual to the fictional? Not quite; this inference would be too short-sighted. Thinking *about* sound is not what I mean by thinking-sound.

Let us try again.

Here we are imagining-intuiting the sound of sparkling water. Glittering flashes of tiny pops, small sonorous explosions, which, as the effervescence subsides, will eventually fade away from earshot. We know or *attune* to the intricacies of an eventfulness in its acquiring gestalt in the form of frequencies, intensities and duration. We think-feel the expressive taking-form of the sonic. Wollscheid's prompt incites a reading and invites the listener to explore sounds as conceptual constructs. But more so, the activity lets us slip into the artfulness of the everyday. As Massumi advocates in *Semblance and Event*: "There is an artfulness in every experience. Art and everyday perception are in continuity with one another" (2011, p. 45). As said before, the point I want to make is not easily made, since the thinking-feeling of what happens that Massumi means pertains to what he refers to as "the messy middling goings-on of pure experience in all its potential and complexity" (*ibid.*, p. 11). (Massumi draws from neuroscientist Antonio Damasio who employs the phrase 'the feeling of what happens' as a description for "that background feeling of what it's 'like' to be alive, here and now" [*ibid.*]). Messy and maybe difficult to come by, but still, *something that's doing*; or put this way and bring it to a point: "Something's happening. [...] There's happening doing. This is where philosophical thinking must begin: immediately in the middle" (*ibid.*, p. 1). Thus we look to Massumi's activist philosophy in order to come by, which is to say, to problematize *middling with/in the event* in relation to sonic art and associated practices.

What art can do is to reveal a world, a nature to which we are no strangers, Rick Dolphijn (2014) reminds us, but "have been blind or deaf to [... ,] a

Thinking Sound

wholly other nature that we have just never ‘been in’ before” (p. 190; emphasis added). Nature ‘unforeheard’ offers an alterity that “reveals pure elements and dissolves objects, bodies and the earth” (Deleuze 1969/1990, p. 317). In Deleuze, the concept of ‘wholly other’ is linked to Michel Tournier (*Friday, or, The Other Island* [1967]),¹⁸ though it can also be identified within other creative fields aside from literature. The notion cuts across all the arts where the distinction between content and form is suspended. Dolphijn in ‘The Revelation of a World that was Always Already There’ demonstrates this via Samuel Beckett who comments on Joyce’s literary work: “Here form *is* content, content *is* form. His writing is not about something; *it is something itself*” (as quoted in 2014, p. 189; italics in original). It is an occasioning of wholly otherness, a breaking open the present, a revealing of nature ‘unforeheard’. Dolphijn concludes that “this otherness is never ‘outside’ of something” and insists that “[t]he revelation of a world is in no way imaginary or idealist. The world given rise to is revealed as both a new material assemblage and as the idea that belongs to it” (ibid., pp. 189, 190). Here, too, “we become with the world” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, p. 169). Becoming-world as sensory becoming is “otherness caught in a matter of expression” (ibid., p. 177); a kind of contraction of material and immaterial (spiritual) forces into affect-emergences – as we have already seen in our earlier case.

Thinking-sound inaugurates the factual-fictional energies of ‘the lively’ occurrence where ‘form is content, content is form’ – to borrow the Beckettian phrase. (Note that the hyphen connecting the terms factual and fictional denotes their coming together, co-occurring along the same creative flow. Keith Robinson informs us that for both Deleuze and Whitehead, “being, thinking, and creativity are one” [2010, p. 122]. Every activity, event or *sonic occurrence* is thus creation or ‘creativity’.) The attending to ‘the messy middling goings-on’ allows us to respond and resonate with the materiality surrounding us; we *slip in*. In other words, we practice a listening that “produces an opening for, an experience of the

¹⁸ See Deleuze, G. 1969/1990. *The Logic of Sense*. London: The Athlone Press, p. 312ff.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

event, precisely, as the affect" (O'Sullivan 2001a, p. 128); connecting us directly to the natural world, 'intra-acting' within the dynamism of its forces (Barad 2007, p. 141). This we can intuit through the tiny pops, the evanescent sonic explosions (or, indeed, through whichever sounds you have chosen during the detour, our sonic excursion, that is). Another example for middling-with/in is Radovic's somewhat bizarre 'tickle-and-skull' analogy for the affective quality specific to a sonic event of *Sonic Peripheries #6*. Bizarre, uncanny or beautiful – whatever we call it, the occasioning of experience is not a 'signifying relation'; rather, the beautiful, bizarre, ugly or just unprecedented occurrence is the registering of the experience's taking effect. This is not altogether a conscious act on behalf of the listener, that is to say, 'the subject who intends', as the phenomenologists might say. No will of the Self to listen 'artfully' is required, quite the contrary. To think-sound involves a kind of listening with emphasis on awareness that enables us to "sidestep ourselves," as O'Sullivan (2001a, p. 128) puts it.

The pragmatic act required to 'sidestep our self' is neither prescribed nor follows a specific procedure. Though the attitude enacted may be close to what Henri Bergson terms 'sympathy', an aspect of his philosophical method known as *intuition*; the issue at stake in Bergson's approach is to "enter into an experience *directly*, so as to 'coincide' and 'sympathise' with it" (Stagoll 2010d, p. 136; italics in original). The question (or ploy?) is how the human observer can exceed habitual thinking and its all too anthropocentric leanings. Here Stagoll's commentary is quite instructive: "The manner in which one achieves this [i.e., to coincide and to sympathize], though, is notoriously difficult to describe, with as many characterisations as scholarly commentaries. Sometimes Bergson aligns intuition with artistic sensibility and awareness, or a detachment from reality. At other times he associates it with pure instinct" (ibid.). The latter point is of interest to us: "Instinct, Bergson says, is not cognitive. It is sympathetic;" and as such, it is a mode of thinking that is one with doing (Massumi 2014, p. 32).

Thinking Sound

We 'do' as we slip in the event's unfolding in the blink of an ear, as it were – middling with/in the event. This is not a listening to, but rather a listening-*in* and a listening-*through* the physicality of sound: "Pure energy forms, directly perceptually-felt as rhythm in an amodal in-between of hearing and proprioception on a boarder zone with thought" (Massumi 2011, p. 145). Hearing (or perception of vibrations more generally) and thinking are two poles of the same process. Echoed in my own words, experience is change ap/prehended as the slide between perception and thought, the feedback and feedforward between the limits, enfolding the not-yet-thought and unfolding future-thought. We think-feel in sensation and we become (wholly other) through sensation. We are sympathetically attending-to the something's-happening that transports us "into the heart of a unique event that is just beginning, with which our life will now coincide, but whose outcome is as yet unknowable, and consequently inexpressible" (Massumi 2014, p. 32). Whatever wells up from below the threshold of our awareness brings to bear a (naturing) nature unforeheard.

Sonic art practices in particular induce an affirmative ambivalence (or 'paradoxical affirmation', see in the Introduction). The ambivalence lies in the nature of the sonic's occasioning as an energetic, physical phenomenon that has the power to affect and yield effects. It is integrally ecological in the sense that its occurring implicates environments (both human and nonhuman). This is not to say sound is naturally 'natural' as opposed to 'cultural' – rather it oscillates along a 'nature-culture continuum' (Massumi's term, see 2011, p. 165); *alas*, my choice of linking the words: factual-fictional. Perhaps the neologism leaves much to be desired? Nonetheless, it should point to *the potential inherent in the occasioning itself* – as the life dynamic that it is, the potential of being 'the feeling of what happens', the 'vitality affect', which Massumi discusses with regard to the imperceptible, the virtual or 'pure potentiality' underlying all experiences (Deleuze

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

1988/1933; Whitehead 1929/1978).¹⁹ “Art brings that vitality affect to the fore [...; and art] brings back out the fact that all form is a full-spectrum *dynamic form* of life. There is really no such thing as fixed form” (Massumi 2011, p. 45; italics in original).

In anticipation of what comes next, it might be worth emphasizing that Massumi's activist nonobject philosophy is invested in the occasion of experience and its makeup as singular event in an ongoing activity synonymous with life. Whitehead, Deleuze, and Massumi – each one is interested in mapping the conditions of a novel experience-in-the-making. This thinking presupposes that creativity and novelty lie at the gist of all matter and more so: *pure potentiality lies at the gist of all matter to come as it comes to matter*. Of interest is that art and everyday perception relay each other. Of concern is to practice a thinking-sound as artistic and philosophical pragmatic that shows us ‘the techniques of existences, unforeheard’ (cf. Dolphijn 2013). Hence, we slip in the midst of ‘what's-known’ and ‘what's-not-known’ to encounter a wholly other nature that forces us to think anew. What's next follows in the lines of thought established so far and seeks to explore *the happenings, the encounters* that make us think. To do this we look into what Massumi calls ‘semblance’ (and ‘techniques of existence’) in relation to Whitehead's aesthetic ontology to further elaborate on the question of what happens when *sound happens as aesthetic force* – keeping in mind that *Sonic Peripheries'* concerns lie in finding out how the form of content, that is, the material condition of a sonic artwork-performance, and the form of expression (as sensation) are co-emerging, or being produced in one another. Finally, let me close this section by remarking that sound's occasioning

¹⁹The term ‘vitality affect’ originates with American psychiatrist and psychoanalytic theorist Daniel Stern. See Stern, D. 1985. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 53-61; Stern, D. 2010. *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thinking Sound

comes in many guises, as the case studies to be discussed below have demonstrated experimentally-experientially (see esp. Part Three: Experiment 1 and Part Four: Experiment 2). My task, then, is to engage in a kind of mapping of sonic occurrence that does justice to sound's unique coming into existence as aesthetic figures through artistic practices, participant involvement and other fictive or real intercessors.²⁰

²⁰ "There is no work, Deleuze writes, without intercessors. 'Fictive or real, animate or inanimate, our intercessors must be created. They come in series'" (Deleuze 1995, p. 125 as quoted in Manning & Massumi 2014, p. 64). See Manning, E. & Massumi, B. 2014. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Deleuze, G. 1990/1995. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

AESTHETIC ENCOUNTER

'It happens that ...'¹

Jean-François Lyotard

It happens that *there is* ... it happens that there is *something* in the encounter with the sonic (vibrational force, audible or not) that impinges on the environs of which we as listeners (or 'participants') partake in – however, not exclusively so. The encounter with vibrational force is active and all-pervasive, "a becoming-temporal of spatial movements and spatial processes, the promise of a future modeled in some ways on the rhythm and regularity of the present" (Grosz 2008, p. 55). A material event occurs, happens – *happenstance* – between one thing and another: "Physically, vibrations occur as oscillations due to frictions or the pressure waves of a sound, resulting in a resonating energy field. [...] Sounds are generated by vibrating objects and materials, and they in turn generate, through a sort of reciprocal exchange, further vibrations as they come to touch material surfaces" (LaBelle 2010, p. 134). Take a drumhead, for instance. Tap a drum and its membrane begins to vibrate, waves of energy drifting outwards – similar to a

¹ Lyotard 1988, p. 18 as quoted in O'Sullivan 2001a, p. 128. See also Lyotard, J.-F. 1988. *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 16–27. See O'Sullivan, S. 2001a. The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art beyond Representation. *Angelaki*, 6(3), 125–135.

Aesthetic Encounter

pebble striking the surface of water, generating movement away from the point of contact. A sound takes place: *splash!*, then propagates in vibrant silence; or, a percussive *thump!*, resonating through the drum, a noise occupying spaces, lives.

For Jean-François Lyotard, “to encounter an event is like bordering on nothingness” (1988, p. 18). When he speaks of an event (his idea of ‘eventness’ as described in *Peregrinations*), Lyotard does not imply sound per se. Indeed, he doesn’t specify ‘what’ exactly ‘there is’ that is encountered (in the everyday in general, or in art in particular) other than that “‘there is’ something here and now, regardless of what it is” (1988, p. 19). This “uncanny ‘fact’” is to be endured as “‘directly’ as possible without the mediation or protection of a ‘pre-text’” (ibid., pp. 19, 18) – hence Lyotard’s definition of an event as “the face to face with nothingness” (ibid., p. 17). O’Sullivan adopts the latter’s call for ‘a practice of patience’, which he further conceptualizes in his own writings on art and aesthetics, affect and the production of subjectivity (O’Sullivan 2001a, 2001b, 2006). The appeal for a *practice of patience* lies in the pragmatics of the act: a kind of listening within and ‘beyond’ as experiential non-intentional doing that opens onto “a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991/1994, p. 118; italics in original). To face nothingness, then, does not confront us with an absence, a lack of some kind – on the contrary, this attunement allows for something to happen that lets us access “a kind of *immanent beyond* to everyday experience” (O’Sullivan 2011a, p. 127; italics in original). Indeed, “[n]othingness is not absence, but the infinite plentitude of openness,” we are reminded by theoretical physicist Karen Barad. In *What Is the Measure of Nothingness?* (2012, p. 16), she explains: “Infinities are not mere mathematical idealizations, but incarnate marks of in/determinacy. Infinities are a constitutive part of all material ‘finites’, or perhaps more aptly, ‘af/finites’ (*affinities*, from the Latin, ‘related to or bordering on; connection, relationship’).” The it-happens-that perhaps compares to an im/material touch, a fleeting gestalt in movement, in the

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

sense of “a oneness-in-manyness of a moving on” arising on the edge of the in/finite (Massumi 2011, p. 35). “[I]f we listen carefully,” advises Barad, “we can hear the whispered murmurings of infinity immanent in even the smallest details” (2012, p. 16). To listen-in is a kind of attentiveness based on the ethos of patience or equanimity (*Gelassenheit*), a ‘letting-be’ of things and situations in their unfolding; “impoverish your mind,” says Lyotard, “so that you make it incapable of anticipating the meaning, the ‘What’ of the ‘It happens ...’” (1988, p. 18). This sympathetic-attending-to the it-happens-that of *the smallest details*, may lead to discerning nature’s unforeheard clamor in the depth of pure sonic energy forms (see Part Three: Experiment 1 and Part Four). Finally, and not surprisingly, John Cage comes to mind. The artist, composer, writer, mycologist, and practitioner of Zen follows an aesthetics similar to Lyotard’s “ascetic attitude” (ibid., p. 20), premised on the principle of “let[ting] sounds be themselves” (Cage 1961, p. 10).

The upcoming anecdote of Cage’s visit to the anechoic chamber (a room with an exceptionally low degree of reverberation) is well known in the field of sound studies, and it has been retold many times.² Needless to say: it is worth

² See, for instance, Augoyard, J.F. et al. 2006. *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP; Kahn, D. 1997. John Cage: Silence and Silencing. *The Musical Quarterly*, 81(4), 556–598; Kim-Cohen, S. 2009. *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*. New York: Continuum; Nudds, M. & O’Callaghan, C. eds. 2010. *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Toop, D. 2010. *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of The Listener*. New York: Continuum. Also view the excerpt of Nam June Paik’s 1973 video work ‘Global Groove’ where John Cage describes his visit to the anechoic chamber: “It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. Anybody who knows me, knows this story. I am constantly telling it. Anyway, in that silent room I heard two sounds: one high and one low. Afterwards I asked the engineer in charge: ‘Why, if the room was so silent, I had heard two sounds?’ He said: ‘Describe them.’ I did. He said: ‘The high one was your nervous system in operation, the low one was your blood in circulation’.” Transcribed by the author from Paik, N. J. & Cage, J. 1973. John Cage, a visit to the anechoic chamber. *Global Groove* (excerpt). [Youtube] Available at: <https://youtu.be/jS9ZOIFB-kl> [Accessed: 21 May 2018].

Aesthetic Encounter

repeating, though this time I seek to emphasize the interconnectedness – strictly speaking, the intra-activity – of energies taking effect (i.e., material finites in the taking-form as part of an entangled state).³ Here, I want to suggest that Cage's experience gives way to a radical-empirical account of patiently ap/*prehending* a situatedness, which eventually, yet decisively, turns away from predetermined 'nature'/'culture' distinctions. He (or something?) lets-be and listens, enabling what I call a genuine aesthetic encounter. What follows is Cage's description of the event of 1951:

[... I] heard two sounds, one high and one low. [... The engineer] informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music. But this fearlessness only follows if, at the parting of the ways, where it is realized that sounds occur whether intended or not, one turns in the direction of those [one] does not intend. [...] This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together. (ibid., p. 8)

³ Here I refer to Karan Barad's notion of *onto-epistemology* or, more precisely, what she terms 'ethico-onto-epistem-ology' which, in her words, "point[s] at the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology when engaging in (scientific) knowledge production, with scientific practices, and with the world itself and its inhabitants – human and non-human beings that intra-actively co-constitute the world" (2007, p. 90 as quoted in Geerts 2016, n.p.). See Geerts, E. 2016. Ethico-onto-epistem-ology. *New Materialism*. [Online] Available at: <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/e/ethico-onto-epistem-ology> [Accessed: 25 May 2018]; Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

Two remarks should be made regarding this. Not even silence can be free of sounds.⁴ Cage's sudden '(spiritual) insight' engendered a radical shift in the artist's conception of sound and silence (which is never 'silent'), heralding in its wake unprecedented sonic art practices. Listening for Cage, then and later, means listening to all noise, whether sound, silence or music. And he offers a simple formula: "All I am doing is directing attention to the sounds of the environment" (1995, p. 98). In the film documentary *Listening* (1992), Cage briefly speaks about sound in relation to listener expectations: "When I talk about music, it finally comes to people's mind that I am talking about sound that doesn't mean anything. It is not inner, but is just outer. [... Those] who understood this finally said, 'You mean it's just sounds?'" In that sense, he promotes a practice that *redirects* attention to the ongoing vibration that is sound. Thus, meaning can be found in sound itself resonating in and as part of an environment. Cage objects to anthropomorphizing the sonic and prefers, again, "to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments" (1961, p. 10). Surely, sound occurs 'out there'; however, in my view, it is neither 'inner' nor 'outer' but *immanently there*. This expanded reading denotes a vibrant ecology where sound is understood as oscillatory material force.

Critical in Cage's perception of his *aesthetic encounter* is the realization that sounds just happen, indeed keep on happening, regardless of one's intentions. The listening-in on the it-happens-that opens up to "the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, *not* separate, are in this world together" (ibid., p. 8; emphasis added). For Cage, this understanding presupposes a 'cognitive turn', that is to say, a surrender of purposiveness that lets us sail the ocean of sound. Nothing is lost. "In fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any

⁴ Or put this way: Not even silence can be free of *vibrational force*. Cf. Barad, K. 2012. What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice. *DOCUMENTA (13): 100 Notes 100 Thoughts*, No. 99. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, p. 12.

Aesthetic Encounter

continuity" (ibid.). In 'Experimental Music' (1961), Cage brings up the question of why to compose music. I shall quote his musings in their entirety in order to then conclude with some thoughts on the nature-culture entanglement introduced here.

And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: *a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play*. This play, however, is an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord. (ibid., p. 12; emphasis added)

The question we pursue is less the question of why write music; rather, we seek to pursue the Cageian paradox as formulated above. First, however, let me reflect once more on Cage's experience in the anechoic chamber – more precisely, his phenomenological account of embodied experience. Clearly Cage anticipated 'pure' silence but encounters his own corporeal being instead – the background noise of life: breath, metabolism, circulating blood. This basic albeit profound realization that all noise is silence (or silence is noise) led to his reevaluation of sound, silence, and music. To turn towards *any* sounds without preconception requires in his words a "psychological turning" that calls for "a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity – for a musician, the giving up of music;" he concludes that "humanity and nature" are allied in this world (ibid., p. 8). There is an *affinity* (to say it with Barad), a connection with what we take to be our humanity (or culture) and nature. This is similar to what Massumi will argue in *Parables for the Virtual*, namely that nature and culture are not disentangled

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

from one another but belong to the same continuum. For the latter, “the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’ feedforward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense” (Massumi 2002, p. 11).⁵

My aim at this juncture is to present an extension to Cage’s proposition. I argue that the encounter with the sonic necessitates more than a cognitive turn. It requires foremost an *aesthetic operation* that rests on the entangled state of nature in culture (or, if you prefer, cultured nature) and the processes involved in aesthetic experience. Here Whitehead’s aesthetic ontology is of significance and to that, we will now turn.

Whitehead’s ontology is aesthetic due to his account of prehension, which, simply put, privileges feeling over understanding. In this sense, the term, the concept of aesthetics does not primarily imply a theory of the beautiful, that is, a theory of art more generally. Rather, in its root meaning, aesthetics implicates the senses and sensibility. Whitehead’s philosophical thought on par with William James’s radical empiricism (more on this below) advocates *experience* as the basis for all ‘our’ knowing. Nothing lies outside experience and experience, hence, includes everything. Therefore not only humans ‘feel’, but so do nonhuman, organic and nonorganic entities; as such, an electron has feelings, desire and creative impetus. Whitehead says, “The basis of experience is emotional” (1933/1967, p. 176). His cosmos is filled with “throbs of feeling” or also “pulses of experience” where actual occasions as basic elements of his process philosophy engage in mutual relations of provocation.⁶ This ‘doing’ he calls prehension. Whitehead

⁵ Thus the need, according to Massumi, “to theorize a *nature-culture continuum*” (2002, p. 11; italics in original). See also Massumi, B. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 38-39; 258n10.

⁶ See Whitehead, A.N. 1933/1967. *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: The Free Press, p. 177; Lachmann, R. 1997. Susanne K. Langer’s Notes on Whitehead’s Course on Philosophy of Nature. *Process Studies*,

Aesthetic Encounter

employs the term *prehension* rather than perception in order to avoid anthropomorphic, that is, cognitive and rationalistic connotations. On this view, rocks, electrons, trees, jellyfish, microbes, and ourselves are equally filled with pulses or throbs of experience. As we are aware of touching, tasting, hearing with our body, so does a plant nonconsciously feel and nonsensuously think itself in the act of growing towards the direction of light (see Marder 2013; Massumi 2011).

It is the creative dynamic, the rhythms of lived experience shared by nonorganic and organic life that is of concern here. To inquire into the sonic's *creativity* also means to ascertain the *dynamic details* of a process. "These details are played out at the level of the emergent occasion, in the constellation of the event. They are [...] its technicities, its overarticulations, its preaccelerations. They are the event's *more-than*," writes Erin Manning (2014, p. 323; emphasis added). We take up Manning's cue and consider the 'more-than' in our context to mean the 'uncanny' ap/prehension of a qualitative dimension that often goes unnoticed in everyday perception. This brings us to Massumi's project and what he refers to as "an artfulness in every experience" (2011, p. 45). He (with Manning) holds that it is precisely in art through which we ap/prehend life dynamics, that is, the lively details of a process: "Art brings that vitality affect to the fore" (ibid.). We perceive –prehend, if you will – relationally and through processes. That is also to say, there is always more than meets the eye (and ear). There is a potential moreness that wells up from an overfull nothingness. The trick here will be how to account for the more-than. Hence, we follow Massumi's lead (which he in turn took from James) that says, "take everything as it comes" (ibid., p. 86) – which lands us back onto Cageian aesthetics.

Knowingly or not, Cage enacted a radical empiricism that is invested in a 'purposeless play' and the credo of 'a purposeful purposelessness'. This seeming

26(1/2), p. 150. Goodman, S. 2010. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, pp. 95–98.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

paradox welcomes the complexity of the world, this life, a life. It is his commitment to say 'yes, and' – accept purposefully and carry on purposelessly – in the creation of art (note that my reading should be taken with the caveat that Cage, his life and artistic practice certainly show further breadth and are not limited to the above). My point here is that Cage not only 'deals with' sounds, he also deals with all phenomena (which classical empiricism excludes). Whitehead's ontology includes and describes them as 'eternal objects' that are "relations, contrasts and patterns [... that are] real, because they are themselves 'experienced relations', or primordial elements of experience" (Shaviro 2009, pp. 40–41). We might say that the artist sidesteps his subjectivity in 'the dealings' with the world: listening-in and letting be; attuning to a world of relations. Cage's practice here takes the form of a non-intentional pragmatics where (sound) art "is the technique for making that necessary but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by" (Massumi 2011, p. 45). This is not a throwback into romanticism – if anything, it is a realism with the odd touch of mystic happenstance.

Deleuze and Guattari, Whitehead, Massumi and Manning, now Cage – what links them? And how does this relate to our venture? First of all, the common thread lies with creativity or what Deleuze calls "the formation of a New" (1988/1993, p. 77). This brings with it the underlying questions of what an event is and what the conditions are that make an event possible. Furthermore, I suggest that their practices – philosophical, artistic, or both – entail an empiricism that is always already middling in the eventness: It is a thinking-in-motion that does not start in the mind but in nature. "For Whitehead, nature thinks;" this might raise eyebrows but was once explained by Manning as follows: "When Whitehead says that nature 'is impenetrable by thought', what he means is that thought does not enter into nature from the outside to orchestrate it from without. Nature is not a passive element to be mediated. Nor is thought a mediating activity" (Whitehead 1929, p. 13 as quoted in 2013, p. 214). This said,

Aesthetic Encounter

thinking presents a rhythmic to and fro *from within* – enfolding the not-yet-thought and unfolding future-thought: “Nature *creates* thought” (ibid.; italics in original).

“I guess, I felt it. And I really did” (Radovic 2012). Something’s happened! “There’s happening doing,” to echo Massumi and recall for a moment Radovic’s expression from the previous section: the tickle-and-skull; the glimmer of sensation that affects the body, mind, and spirit – the latter, however, precludes any notion of transcendence.⁷ In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead makes use of the word *concern*, which, appropriated from the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends, a Christian movement), is a term suitable to express what the tickle itself marks – namely, “the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given;” it is “divested of any knowledge” conveying the “fundamental structure” of experience (Whitehead 1933/1967, p. 176). “Aesthetics is the mark of what Whitehead calls our concern for the world, and for entities in the world” (Shaviro 2009, p. 46; italics in original). It is a philosophy that inquires into how the something’s-happening *is* doing that shows a genuine concern for the *affective tone*, the qualitative-relational dimension of something’s-happening doing – in short, the event’s more-than – especially relevant in the context of sonic artwork-performances. This speculative philosophical attitude wants to exceed epistemology and circumvent hermeneutics; it engages in the concern for the relations that connect experiences, which are exactly these in/determinate and hard to grasp atmospheres or ‘moods’ that enliven the encounter with the sonic – that is to say, those situatednesses which this adventure explores. In

⁷ ‘Spirit’ here can be read both as *natura naturans* as well as a *natura naturata*. “The first term may be literally translated as ‘nature naturing’, that is, as producing itself, while the second may be translated as ‘nature natured’, that is, created forms. The former is thus a verb, intrinsically and internally dynamic; the second, a noun, suggesting greater inertia and heteronomy” (Coole 2010, p. 97). In that sense spirit - as nature’s force - *creates* thought giving impetus to a thinking that starts from within. Coole, D. 2010. The Inertia of Matter. In D. Coole & S. Frost eds. *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 50–115.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

Essays in Radical Empiricism, James writes: “the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system” (1912, p. 42; italics in original). Here, indeed, through the sonic artworks and performances, we participate *in the concern for any kind of relation* that we prehend as intensities of varying degrees, tendencies, which are felt in their movement-moving on. Not imagined but stirring the imagination, no less.

♦ ♦ ♦



Figure 1

Shawn Decker (foreground), *Sonic Peripheries #6*, ‘Non/Natura Naturans; Discerned Presence’ (2012). Art Gallery Künstlerstätte Stuhr-Heiligenrode, June 28, 2012. Photo by Annika Meyer.

Aesthetic Encounter

It is the event. Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space with their harmonics or submultiples. The sounds have inner qualities of height, intensity, and timbre. The sources of the sounds [e.g., analog, electromechanical or synthesized oscillations] are not content only to send the sounds out: each one perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own. These are active perceptions that are expressed among each other, or else prehensions that are prehending one another. (Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 80)



Wow! A performative-installation is featured tonight.⁸

Shawn Decker – US American artist, musician, composer – suggested the term ‘performative-installation’ for the sonic artwork-performance presented at *Sonic Peripheries #6* (see Figs. 1 and 2). The set-up for both performance and installation consisted of 36 two-inch speakers, three pairs of Genelec speakers and three additional studio speakers (used as mono output), all of which were distributed throughout the entire first floor of the gallery (including the kitchen, bathroom, and hallway). The small speakers, situated along the walls of the large exhibition space, functioned as kinetic electromechanical device emitting *clicking* sounds. The other loudspeakers diffused Decker’s field recordings from various parts of the world (ranging from atmospheric sounds of places to more concrete sonic *gestalten* – e.g. a seagull’s scream or the bullfrogs’ booming croaks). In addition, a microphone positioned above the gallery entrance piped in noise from the local outdoors, which were intermittently fed into the live mix, the

⁸ In reference to Deleuze’s phrase in the chapter ‘What is an Event?’ of *The Fold* where he begins with the statement: “A concert is being performed tonight” (1988/1993, p. 80). As an aside, Deleuze considers the latter sentence to be his favorite of *The Fold*; see Deleuze, G. 1990/1995. *Negotiations, 1972–1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 160. Deleuze, G. 1988/1993. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: Athlone.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

performance indoors. What was heard, or rather experienced, throughout the performative-installation were many events producing a rich soundscape of on-site sounds combined with field recordings in juxtaposition with synth-based sounds, clicks and swoosh-like motions simulating the rhythms and patterns found within any ecosystem: A sonic multiplicity or composite mediated through technology, that is, hard- and software like laptop, synthesizer module, micro-controllers, mixer, etc. programmed and performed live by the artist.



Figure 2

Two-inch speakers mounted along the gallery walls (here, below the windows), emitting clicking sounds.

Aesthetic Encounter

One of Decker's intentions was to tap into what he calls the 'inherent rhythms' of field recordings. Deploying bricolage and other bespoke techniques, Decker created an abstraction from sonic matter that doesn't represent 'a' place, but rather, I will say, enacts lived abstraction: semblance of rhythms and patterns immanent within resonance of spaciousness in the making.

I invited Decker to participate in this case study, particularly since his art practice is positioned at the intersection of music composition, the plastic arts and performance, using physical and electronic media to investigate, simulate, and praise the natural (and 'non-natural') worlds.

Massumi uses "the word *relation* to refer to the full spectrum of vitality that the dynamic form really includes, potentially, abstractly self-expressed in its semblance" (Massumi 2011, p. 46; italics in original). Semblance does not refer to a specious appearance of a 'thing' – it's not an illusion. Rather, semblances eventuate in the encounter with art as *aesthetic effects*. Similar to Manning's more-than, Massumi says that semblance is "a placeholder in present perception of a potential 'more' to life" (ibid., p. 49). Through semblances we can intuit-*imagine* "the experiential reality of the virtual" (ibid., pp. 15–16) – the virtual to mean "the abstract event potential in lived experience" (ibid., p. 49). Here, Deleuze explains: "once you have reached lived experience, you reach the most fully living core of the abstract. In other words, lived experience represents nothing. And you can live nothing but the abstract." (1978, n.p.). Massumi (pace Susanne Langer) illustrates this nearly counter-intuitive notion through an example from the decorative arts: vegetal motifs. We don't actually see "spirals, we see *spiraling*. We see a *movement* that flows *through* the design" (2011, p. 41; italics in original). Nothing is moving, yet it is. It is an abstract but *real* movement. "Semblance is the manner in which the virtual *actually appears*. It is the being of the virtual as lived abstraction" (ibid., pp. 15–16; italics in original). Wow! The artwork's affect is felt as the aesthetic effect within an instant.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

Also, we might know this effect as the feeling we have – quite literally – when the tiny hairs rooted in the dermis of one's skin rise in response to something unfamiliar in the familiar: a 'goose bumps' (or hair-rising) moment. Agreeable, disagreeable or otherwise, the judgment of the affect and its effect *felt* (as goose bumps, for instance) is another matter altogether. (Consider the mind's maneuver to comprehend and categorize what follows from the encounter to be an after-effect.)

In conversation with this author, Decker himself speaks of *Wow!* as the feeling of the THAT – *that* which marks the moment of change and also *genuine* surprise. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

There were several moments, where I was just like 'Wow!', you know. I mean, several things happened in the space where two or three random events that coincided with something that I had programmed on the synth, you know – which coincided with something that was bleeding in from the other room. So it was like a really complex set of things going on there and interacting. And suddenly there was this giant transformation where the whole soundscape sort of changed from one sound to another and this was an amazing kind of moment of transition where everything changed at once. (Decker 2012a)

Not only is the artist struck by this *giant transformation* – this all-embracing activity – but so are the listeners (participants); bricks and mortar, floor boards, air molecules, the fly seeking escape from a closed window. In fact, any entities inside and outside the gallery were complicit in the coming-together of

Aesthetic Encounter

forces that created semblances.⁹ The affective quality of life's more-than *unfore-heard* is an immanent intensity that becomes apparent (*erscheint*).¹⁰ In the case of a sonic event, the occurrence 'strikes' differently than, say, photography or other visual or plastic arts would. The difference, I suggest, lies in the semblance itself. Sonic occurrence is neither static nor possibly mnemonic, as a photograph might be; rather, the point I want to make now is quite another, namely that sonic matter is perpetual creation: it moves, changes, impinges. It transcends borders, permeates bodies and *creates spaces* (or spaciousnesses). It articulates shapes and produces surfaces. Sound woos without promise, and its lure goes beyond language. 'Wow!' is thus another way of giving utterance to the intensive prehension of the aesthetic encounter with the sonic – hence the added punctuation (!) to indicate the genuine exclamation.

In the chapter 'What is an Event?' of *The Fold*, Deleuze traces the lively dynamics of nature's occasionings with the aid of Whitehead's theory of prehension. Neither an idealism nor a materialism, according to Adam Robbert, "but an organic realism evolutionary in character" (2012, p. 3), Whitehead's speculations are premised on the fact that the fundamental reality of nature is one of passage and differentiation: "sense terminates, not in things, but in something going on" (Bigger 2005, p. 608). As a consequence of this, Whitehead advocates *against* what he refers to as 'the bifurcation of nature', that is, "the strange and fully modernist divide between primary and secondary qualities" (Latour 2011, p. xii).

⁹ In developing the notion of semblance, Massumi also draws on Walter Benjamin, cultural critic and essayist, who employs the German *Schein* which translates to appearance, speciousness, sheen, glint, among other possible meanings in English. See Benjamin, W. 1919–20/1996. On Semblance. In M. P. Bullock & M. W. Jennings eds. *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 223–225; Benjamin, W. 1920–21/1996. Beauty and Semblance. In M. P. Bullock & M. W. Jennings eds. *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 283.

¹⁰ Cf. "Every artistic thing that is beautiful has semblance [*Schein*] because it is alive in one sense or another" (Benjamin 1920–21/1996, p. 283).

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

Bruno Latour in his foreword to Isabelle Stengers's *Thinking with Whitehead* helpfully elucidates:

Bifurcation is what happens whenever we think the world is divided into two sets of things: one which is composed of the fundamental constituents of the universe – invisible to the eyes, known to science [...] – and the other which is constituted of what the mind has to add to the basic building blocks of the world in order to make sense of them. (ibid., p. xii)

Again – for Whitehead (1920) – nature is observed in perception through the senses. The mind is relegated to a mere supportive role. Stengers says to this, drawing on Whitehead's *Concept of Nature*: "If the 'mind' is to be responsible for something it is in terms of selection and simplification, not of addition [...] and if 'what we know instinctively' is to be confirmed, selectiOn and simplification – in short, abstraction – must not define 'knowledge', but always such-and-such a way of knowing" (1920 as quoted in 2011, p. 48).

What I want us to pay attention to is the potential moreness to life that can be discerned through art – especially through sonic arts – which brings forth all kinds of knowings. When Deleuze asks, 'What is an event?', he turns to sound. Deleuze begins his account as follows: "A concert is being performed tonight;" and continues: "It is the event" (*The Fold*, p. 80). In an earlier block quotation (p. 77), Deleuze discusses the connection between vibration and prehension. There he writes, "Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space [...] each one perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own" (1988/1993, p. 80). This activity is full of *self-enjoyment* and intensity: "The origins of the sounds are [...] prehensions that are filled with *joy in themselves*, with an intense satisfaction, as they fill up with their perceptions and move from one perception to another" (ibid.; emphasis added). The vibrations at

Aesthetic Encounter

play in sonic artwork-performances are proliferating. Moving back and forth, sonic waves add up and intensify, creating resonances – sonic effects – creating *self-enjoyment*. “Self-enjoyment is not a moral category. It is not about the enjoyment of this or that. Not the enjoyment of the subject for life, but the enjoyment of life in the event of life-living [...] as the continuous outdoing of any notion of life in-itself or nature in-itself” (Manning 2014, p. 322; italics in original). Resonance is then *an event of life-living* – a relational field where prehensions as reservoirs of self-enjoyment inhere the power to create anew, that is, ‘a New’ from a vastness of oscillating, sonorous molecules that forever retain a certain more-than.

Decker participates in the *becoming* of resonant spaciousness. He is confronted with and part of a transformation, a coming-together – that is, a prehension of partial events that make up a situation of the it-happens-that. This happening – the *Wow!* – expresses the excess of the inexpressible: *Something’s pushed the limits of what’s known and to be known*. On par with sensation, this eventness provokes, stirs – vibrates. The sheer *wowness* of the change marks the affect-emergence registering as the certain more-than within an activity and incipient expression – a novel soundspace in the making.

Before I narrow my focus in future chapters to aspects of sonic occurrence and the ensuing expression of various aesthetic figures, let me make some closing remarks on semblance in the context of aesthetic encounters.

◆ ◆ ◆

This is not Utö island. (Ceci n’est pas l’île de Utö.)

Or, when Thomas Edison was heard saying: “I was never so taken aback in my life.”¹¹

¹¹ See Taussig, M. 1992. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, pp. 211, 278n13.

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

Those familiar with the essay 'Profound Listening and Environmental Sound Matter' by Francisco López, published in *Audio Culture* (2004), might recall the section framed by the epigraph, 'This is not a pipe', or, in the original French, 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'. This iconic phrase by the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte marks the incongruity of what something represents and still is not what it appears to be.¹² It is worth noting Robert Hughes's remark on 'the catchphrase of modern art' which the art critic considers to be "a condensed manifesto about language and the way meaning is conveyed, or blocked, by symbols;" he writes, "No painter had ever made the point that 'A painting is not what it represents' with such epigrammatic clarity before" (1980/1995, p. 244).

López takes up Magritte's provocation and transposes it to the sonic arts. The experimental musician argues in his essay that what we hear in his piece *La Selva* is not the rainforest La Selva (in Costa Rica). If it is *not* a representation of the site, well then, what is it? His response: "the musical piece is rooted not in a documentary approach but in a notion of 'sound matter'" – the focus lies on, López says, "the inner world of sounds" (2004, p. 85). The latter's proposition resonates much with Decker's concern for the 'inherent rhythms' of field recordings, since they also do not represent a place but construct experiential facts from a virtual reality or a material immanence (or field of energies).¹³

¹² The painting by René Magritte discussed here is titled *The Treachery of Images* also known as *This Is Not a Pipe* and *The Wind and the Song*, 1929. The work is part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) Collections. See online <https://collections.lacma.org/node/239578> [Accessed 25 May, 2018].

¹³ It probably does not need mentioning this far into the thesis that *virtual reality* here doesn't refer to digital simulation or some other computer-related context. As already made clear, the term 'virtual' goes back to Deleuze's naturalist ontology. Constantin V. Boundas describes the concept as follows: "the virtual and the actual are two mutually exclusive, yet jointly sufficient, characterisations of the real. [...] Without being or resembling the actual, the virtual nonetheless has the capacity to bring about actualisation and yet the virtual never coincides or can be identified with its actualisation" (2010, p. 300). Boundas, C.V. 2010. Virtual/Virtuality. In A. Parr ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 300–302.

Aesthetic Encounter

In what follows, we seek to further pursue the manner in which the virtual comes into actualization: the how and what of the it-happens-that. Then let us take the above phrase, 'This is not Utö island' – or *Ceci n'est pas l'île de Utö* in allusion to Magritte – for a teaser for more on how sonic matter comes to matter. The issue is too comprehensive to develop near the end of this chapter. Suffice it to say that field recording (sound recording more generally) presents us with an ontological ambivalence – a challenge – that we shall revisit later.

It comes as no surprise that the US American inventor of the phonograph was feeling *aghast* when he first heard himself recite the rhyme 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' from playback. He was reported saying: "I was never taken so aback" (as quoted in Taussig 1992, p. 211). This was in 1877 – Thomas Edison encountered the alienness of his own voice listened to from a distance. In the twenty-first century, sound recording still affects greatly – through the memories it stirs or the moods it gives rise to. Here, for Edison, there is also a complexity at play whereby the material and the discursive interlock: the spoken words (in their hapticality) and the meaning of the words spoken (how something's been said). According to the anthropologist Michael Taussig, "'Taken aback' is a significant choice of words for this historic moment, a spontaneously fitting way of expressing [...] the 'shudder of mimesis' being taken back to childhood, back to primitivism" (ibid.). The uncanniness in the aesthetic encounter – earlier referred to as the unfamiliar in the familiar – might be in part due to *mimesis*. But rather than *mimesis* (here to mean the imitative representation of a 'thing' through audio), I want to advocate instead the notion of *sonic semblance* where recording, and in this instance field recording presents us with a kind of objectivity that we can experience as *likeness* of a 'thing' and/or 'atmosphere' embedded in the materiality. In other words, in Decker's recording of Utö island, for example, we believe to hear a seagull's scream (across the stereo field) and feel the *spaciousness* of the site recorded as the "uncanny excess of actual objectivity"

Part One – Middling With/In the Event

(Massumi 2011, p. 56). On the whole, we think-feel sonic matter (artifacts) as it comes to matter.

As mentioned before, sound art is ontologically ambivalent, or even onto-epistemologically *tricky*. ('Tricky' in the sense that it requires care and concern to do justice to the ecology of practices involved.) It should be noted that Massumi has raised the subject of semblance in music. However, there is plenty to discover in contemporary sonic art practices that I shall continue to problematize here. What's at stake is to give expression to the technique, the manner in which sonic matter comes into articulation.