Evental Aesthetics

Vol.1No.3(2012)

Art and the City

Evental Aesthetics

www.eventalaesthetics.net
ISSN: 2167-1931

• ••• • ••• • ••• •

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

Art and the City

Introduction

Mandy-Suzanne Wong
Joanna Demers

For now, you are nothing more or less than a *flâneur*.

It's tempting to offer such luxurious counsel to readers of this issue, the third issue of *Evental Aesthetics* and our last for 2012. A *flâneur* is a sort of person that we are perhaps most likely to associate with Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's work does not explicitly feature in the pages that follow, but the approach to urban realms that he deemed characteristic of *flâneurs* might indeed be useful to those readers who journey from the heart of Manhattan to Singapore and Brazilian shantytowns, via Paris, the suburbs of Los Angeles, and Lagos, guided by our contributors. It might even seem that some wish for a bit of *flânerie* guided the editors to this theme, *Art and the City.* It might seem that our aim is to entice city-dwellers and visitors to take the time to wander urban spaces in search of nothing in particular, except perhaps the insight – enlightening, disturbing, or both – that sometimes attends the experience of art, in this case art inspired or on offer by the city.

Who is Benjamin's *flâneur*? He is a wanderer for whom the city comes alive. The place through which he passes deep in reverie, at the tempo of a tortoise, becomes more for the *flâneur* than what it is.[1] It is at once far away and hyperpresent; he is in the city and in some long ago time; his experience is that of abstract thought and of his multiple senses. His perspective is piercing and distracted.

> At the approach of his footsteps, the place has roused; speechlessly, mindlessly, its mere intimate nearness gives him hints and instructions... Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room...That anamnestic intoxication in which the *flâneur* goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge — indeed, of dead facts — as something experienced and lived through.[2]

We might also say that the perspective *du flâneur* is conscious, self-conscious, and unconscious; or that it is at once analytical and inattentive, bent on pleasure – reflective, self-reflective, unreflective all at once.

Why don't we simply say that the *flâneur's* experience of the city and urban life is an aesthetic experience?

> Most famously developed by [Charles] Baudelaire, the *flâneur* is the casual, often aimless urban roamer, who leisurely ambles through the city streets. Unlike his counterpart, the thoroughly modern man who passes by in his routinized hurry, the *flâneur* takes up a new stance to the world he passes through. He embodies a simultaneous attitude of detachment and involvement, disengaging himself from the crowds and humdrum street life, yet nonetheless engages from a distance, gazing and probing his surroundings. This curious perspective, [Howard] Eiland notes, enables the *flâneur* to take up a position that permits a privileged mode of experience, one that poises him to consciously register many of the overlooked textures of modern life. For Benjamin, who brought together a wide range of seemingly disparate influences to inform this idiosyncratic conception of experience — Baudelaire, Freud, Bergson, and surrealism, to name a few — it is an intensely heightened kind of receptivity. It is a transformed experience of both space and time that has been shaken loose from deadened habit, and which has become open to the disclosure of deeper truths about both the past and the historical embeddedness of our social, cultural, and political present.[3]

In Michael Bacal's account above, the *flâneur's* perspective could be likened to that of an attentive visitor to an art museum (slow-moving, index finger pressed lightly to cheek), or a wide-eyed reader of a weighty, classic tome: one wanders the city not in pursuit of an appointment, a parking space, new shoes, but a "heightened kind of receptivity...that has been shaken loose from deadened habit, and which has become open to the disclosure of deeper truths..."[4]

"The disclosure of deeper truths."

Our contributors demonstrate how art in the city, art "about" the city, art compared to the city, can indeed bring to attention the insidious forces underlying every city's gleaming, wide-awake veneer.

Louis Ho and Mayee Wong (no relation to Mandy-Suzanne) discuss how the work of SKL0, the "Sticker Lady" of Singapore, challenges the claim that street art is a form of vandalism, a postulation that has brought SKL0 into several direct conflicts with Singapore's conservative authorities. At the same time, SKL0's defenders in the Singaporean media compare her to the American street artist Banksy, a shadowy figure whose works fetch extraordinary prices on the global art market. As Ho and Wong suggest, underlying Singapore's ambivalent reception of SKL0 is a confused set of ideological priorities. Is Singapore best served by the stringent aesthetic protection of its streets, or by an artist who might put the city-state on the map alongside other major players in the art market?

From a vastly different perspective, and across the Pacific Ocean, Alan Nakano describes the sonic, visual, and online installations of Inouk Demers, a Canadian-American artist based in California's South Bay. Demers' work subtly calls attention to what Nakano calls "the incidental," those details of a place, or of its history, that typically pass unnoticed. But to make the (keen but well-worn) argument that the "truth" about a situation lies in its obscure details is the prerogative of neither Nakano nor Demers. Rather, Demers' work implies – suggestively but unassumingly – that the proliferation of "incidental" sounds, coincidences, images, and happenstances in every environment precludes any insistence on any particular truth.

According to object-oriented ontology (OOO), such ambiguity is not just a quality of a place, but, in the words of Kris Coffield, "an agential act committed within a particular set of relations and topological deformations." Acts and events are themselves not only occurrences but

also objects. Even signifiers and terms are as much agential objects as they are affective occurrences. Within the framework of OOO, Coffield interprets New York City's controversial 9/11 Memorial in relation to the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City (the event known as "9/11" and its aftermath) and the signifying term "9/11." His perspective, which grants all three phenomena the multiple and fluid ontologies promised by OOO, reveals how the 9/11 Memorial simultaneously endorses and subverts ideological myths – concerning unbridgeable difference, an incurable, nationwide wound, and revenge masquerading as security – that pervade American politics and culture in the new millennium.

The varied perspectives of our contributors differ from that of the *flâneur* in at least one important sense: they are far from "leisurely." Instead, they incisively question. So it's fitting that this issue also includes reflections on perspective itself, on how we may interact with art and the city. Self-reflection, in other words. Our contributors suggest idiosyncratic ways in which audiences or visitors may approach artistic representations of a city, or even the city itself: thoughtful approaches that encourage more sensitive relationships with the world we live in, and with the very notion of *place.*

At a time when studies of non-Western peoples still insist on "fieldwork," "from-the-trenches" perspectives that are inevitably invasive to the subjects under consideration, Carol Magee bravely proposes a "dis-stanced" approach to distant art. From such perspective, and a distance of several thousand miles, she analyzes photographs and sound art by, respectively, Abraham Oghobase and Emeka Ogboh, both of Lagos, Nigeria. Following Martin Heidegger's and Jeff Malpas' philosophies of place, she proposes that stillness and distance – which may manifest in several ways – mayn't necessarily hinder interpretations of faraway art, but in some cases might just enhance our sensitivity towards those who are unlike ourselves.

Ljubica Ilic interrogates listening as a potential avenue towards productive and sensitive co-existence. Analyzing Claude Chabrol's short film *La Muette,* Ilic notes the characters' participation, and lack thereof, in listening and communication. Comparing Chabrol's film to the *Ecologues* of Virgil, who equates sound with freedom, she assesses the functions of listening and sound in Chabrol's urban (Parisian) setting, as compared to the same in Virgil's "pastoral" setting. From this analysis, she extrapolates a "post-pastoral" perspective that attempts to elide the questionable yet loudly lamented rift between "nature" and "culture."

In an entirely different vein, Diana Boros uses an artistic thought-experiment to consider how a Western city-dweller might be persuaded to alter his or her perspective on his or her urban environment. In Manhattan, for example, Boros finds that most inhabitants hurry through the city without noticing it, intent instead on their personal agendas, typically motivated by the materialistic success promised by the capitalist system. She speculates as to whether music idiosyncratically inserted into public environments, in the form of what she calls "musical-intervention art," might just encourage urban dwellers to look up from their agendas, and engage with non-materialistic aspects of their own and others' personalities. Interestingly, Boros' hypothetical artwork aims to tempt urbanites away (if only momentarily) from their habitual, typically consumerism-driven perspectives, *using* the aesthetic techniques of commercial advertising: invading the public environment with deliberately chosen music.

Finally, David Goldblatt wonders if we might approach the city itself, at least certain of its architectural structures, in a manner similar to how we listen to music. Comparing the creative processes involved in "straight-ahead" Western jazz to the construction of Brazilian *favelas*, he finds that the constructive processes that result in shantytowns are comparable to musical improvisation. Drawing on philosophies of improvisation by Philip Alperson, David Davies, and many others, Goldblatt proposes that architecture and the city might be best considered not only as "final products," or collections of fixed structures within and around which we perform our roles as denizens, but also as performances and living processes in their own right.

So then: *flânerie* as a self-reflexive mode of questioning. But is even that enough? For the city wearied by recession, its beseeching eyes boarded up; for the completely artificial environment that fills the atmosphere with fumes, an environment constructed to feed ravenous ideologies and clamoring markets – things that give rise to wars and egg them on – is "heightened receptivity" enough of a reaction? Mere *response*, stickers, songs, dioramas, thoughts: what good is it, what help, what *use* is any of it? In the twenty-first century, philosophical considerations of the environments that we humans create and destroy cannot but brush up against this kind of question, even if it's only as we brush by a passing shadow.

But you see, our contributors emphasize and exercise the creativity involved in productive response. So that their responses no longer constitute mere reactions. Is it enough, to think and to create. For human beings, thought and creation are precisely that with which conscious change begins. And, as Benjamin points out, to wander the city, to be in a place reflective-unreflectively, is not necessarily to attempt to resolve oneself of one's responsibility toward a place, one's responsibility for its wounds and ornaments. The observer, the writer, the philosopher, does not absolve himself from anything by virtue of the deliberative and abstracted qualities of his perspective. Despite whatever distance a *flâneur* may claim from his bustling subject of observation, despite that as an author he may mask himself from his readers using descriptors and deductions of unquestionable accuracy, he remains "a true suspect," and pretends to nothing less.[5]

• Notes •

[1] Benjamin writes, "In 1839 it was considered elegant to take a tortoise out walking. This gives us an idea of the tempo of *flânerie* in the arcades." Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap, 2002), 422.
[2] Ibid., 416-417.
[3] Michael Bacal. "Walter Benjamin, the *Flâneur*, and Redemption." *TELOSscope*, 29 November, 2011. http://www.telospress.com/main/index.php?main_page=news_article&article_id=485
[4] Ibid.
[5] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 420.

• Bibliography •

Bacal, Michael. "Walter Benjamin, the *Flâneur,* and Redemption." *TELOSscope*, 29 November, 2011. http://www.telospress.com/main/index.php ?main_page=news_article&article_id=485

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002.

COLLISION

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics,* the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.

Ho, Louis and Mayee Wong. "The Sticker Bomber and the Nanny State: Notes from Singapore." ***Evental Aesthetics*** **1, no. 3 (2012): 10-22.**

ABSTRACT

In the Southeast Asian city-state of Singapore, street artist SKLO has come into conflict with the authorities for her sticker bombing and stenciling. Her arrest foregrounds issues about the socio-cultural resonances and broader value of street art in local public discourse. This article explores SKLO's praxis vis-à-vis the phenomenon of official graffiti, and its structuring of the tightly regulated public realm. Dubbed the "Sticker Lady," SKLO has been also referred to as "Singapore's Banksy" by local and international media. Besides prompting questions regarding the value of street art as expressions of local culture, these references shed light on how the figure of Banksy has become a figure of neoliberal urban aesthetics, especially pertaining to urban entrepreneurialism – a globally circulated signifier of a particular image of street art that sees the attachment of monetary value, celebrity and cool to such artistic works of subversion. These references to Banksy also raise a deeper question: can the Singaporean authorities accept the subversive and political aspects of art as the city-state embarks on a neoliberal agenda to present itself as a considerable player in the global art market?

KEYWORDS

SKLO, street art in Singapore, neoliberal urban aesthetics, aesthetics of resistance, street art vs. vandalism

The Sticker Bomber and the Nanny State: Notes from Singapore

Louis Ho
Mayee Wong

They appeared overnight.

"Mystery stickers press on at pedestrian crossings," a headline read.[1]

In a country renowned for its public cleanliness, these mystery stickers presented themselves as anomalies within an immaculate streetscape. One would look down to push the button on a traffic light, and there it would be: a round black sticker bearing a message, and a pictorial tag comprised of two triangles and a tiny dot, the calling card of local graffiti artist, SKL0.[2] The repertoire of *bon mots* featured several in the local hybrid vernacular, Singlish. There was *Press some more*, and *Press once can*

already, i.e. pressing the button just once is enough. Others included *No need to press so hard*; *Press until shiok*, or press till you get a kick out of it; *Press for Nirvana* and ironically enough, as it turned out, *Anyhow press police catch*, a dictum against pressing the button at will, the result of which might prove to be a run-in with the boys in blue. Less frequently, one would encounter *My Grandfather Road* stenciled on a stretch of street, or inscribed on the wall of a building, the phrase being one used against careless drivers and irresponsible pedestrians, two classes of people who tend to ignore the rules – people, in other words, who behave as if their grandfathers owned the streets.

The authorities were less than amused. Sticker Lady, as the media and the general public now dubbed her, was arrested, though released the following day on bail. An online petition and several dedicated Facebook pages materialized in response, as did calls by various individuals for leniency toward Singapore's very own Banksy.[3]

SKLO. *Anyhow press police catch*. Used by permission.

• Subversions •

Contrary to popular belief, there is graffiti aplenty on the streets of Singapore – albeit of the so-called official variety:

> Regulation is an inescapable part of everyday life...epitomized by the ubiquitous...signs displayed on buildings of public access, Entry and Exit (or In and Out), and...the prohibition circle with its diagonal red slash across the circle warning, for example, No Smoking. It is these signs that we designate official graffiti..."Official" is a status which not only marks formal legitimacy, but also asserts legitimacy; the same No Smoking sign adorns law courts, restaurants, and stores, has found its way onto the front door of private homes. It is the appearance of official status that is the key.[4]

Official graffiti, then, is simply the most direct manifestation of bureaucratic will; individual agency is negotiated around the parameters it enacts. Singapore's famously spotless urban fabric, its glitzy architecture and pristine streets, is the most immediate expression of the ruling administration's[5] zero-tolerance attitude towards the disruption of public cleanliness and, by extension, civic order.[6] This disciplinary dystopia is maintained through various means: policing, surveillance technology, and a diverse array of signage deployed to exhort, to warn, to prescribe and proscribe. *No Littering*; *No eating or drinking*; *No Smoking*; *CCTV in operation* – the examples are numerous.

Louis Ho. *No Smoking* sign. Used by permission.

It is against this milieu of relentless regulation that the formal characteristics of SKL0's stickers articulate an aesthetics of resistance in crucial, critical ways. The chief strategy here turns on the twin axes of appropriation and subversion: contra the visual language of those symbols that seek to determine so much of the lived everyday, her stickers insinuate themselves into the landscape of the familiar as simply another form of regulatory display, at once borrowing and destabilizing the appearance of such official signage. They assume the guise of an official notice, both their size (perfectly obscuring the round portion of the black button boxes) and their palette (blandly blending in with the surrounding surface) seeming to suggest that they are site-specific entities, just one more sign put out by the authorities to govern public behavior. And while the imperative voice of these pseudo-signs likewise adopts the tone of bureaucratic decree, what they proffer instead is an instant of light-hearted hilarity, all the more affecting because completely unanticipated. At the moment when one, reaching down to push the button at a pedestrian crossing, may reasonably expect to see a sign bearing directions of some kind, there it is instead, a memorandum of comic import: *Press until shiok.*

The linguistic implications of SKL0's stickers also foreground the fissure between state-sanctioned cultural forms and their reception at a grassroots level. In a setting where the imbalance of power between state and citizen is particularly stark, the artist's embrace of Singlish, inserted into public sites as the ersatz language of bureaucratic proclamation, represents an open contest of the government's perennial drive to improve the standards of English in Singapore. The previous theme of the Speak Good English Movement, in 2010, had as its tagline "Get It Right."[7] To that end, it promoted the "guerilla tactic" of sticking remedial Post-it Notes over public signs rendered in Singlish, or ungrammatical English – with little distinction made between the two.[8] Posters featuring these yellow Post-its began appearing everywhere, from cafés to libraries: an offending phrase (e.g. "You got eat already or not?") shown crossed out and replaced by its officially acceptable translation ("Have you eaten?"). These posters constitute yet another form of official graffiti, one that seemed ubiquitous during the life of the campaign.

Louis Ho. Public Post-it Note from the *Get It Right* campaign. Used by permission.

SKLO's unauthorized inscriptions run directly counter to the spirit and the visual contours of the push to "Get It Right." Her deliberate use of Singlish, of course, asserts the prerogatives of colloquial language against a linguistic mold cast by the authorities, a top-down imposition on so fundamental a fact of life as everyday speech. The camouflaged aesthetic of her stickers likewise presents a contradictory visuality that resists the conspicuous palette of the Post-it Notes and posters, which were intended to arrest the glance. Most salient, perhaps, is the artist's encounter with the law, which belie the spurious "guerilla tactics" of the official campaign – tactics propagated by an administration which endorses such maneuvers as a function of broader socio-cultural control, but which, as symptoms of individual expression and autonomy, are prohibited.

SKLO's stickers challenge the prevalence and regulatory character of such official signs within the sphere of the everyday. As an intervention in a public realm subject to varied forms of supervision, her work defies the hegemony of a bureaucracy obsessed with order – a subversion of official priorities, a declaration of agency in the face of a monolithic state apparatus.

• Discourses •

SKL0's arrest prompted the opening of a public discursive space centered on the question of whether her work counts as vandalism or street art, with many Singaporeans petitioning for the vandalism charge against SKL0 to be considered under the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act. This debate raises further questions: What is the value of street art? Should street art be recuperated from the law under a special rubric? These questions resound in the context of a city-state that is still struggling to develop its cultural identity, while pursuing global ambitions that are dependent on normative notions of cultural vibrancy and aesthetic clout. One of the reasons for widespread support of SKL0 is that her work speaks to the local population. Previously, the most highly profiled cases of graffiti in Singapore had been committed by foreigners; the infamous Michael Fay incident in 1994 put Singapore on the map as a draconian regime with the caning of the American teenager. SKL0, however, is a Singaporean artist, and her messages may be considered as "act[s] of reclamation."[9]

SKL0. *My grandfather road.* Used by permission.

But the rallying cries of Singaporeans to defend their very own Banksy call for an examination of contexts beyond patriotic claims to subversive creativity. The discourses surrounding this incident shed light on how the figure of Banksy has become a figure of neoliberal urban

aesthetics – a globally circulated signifier of a particular image of street art that sees the attachment of monetary value, celebrity and cool to artistic works of subversion. In an age of urban entrepreneurialism, culture and the arts have become an indicator of the economic competitiveness of a city; and works by famous street artists, such as Banksy, now contribute to the notion of the cultural vibrancy of a given city or place as a reflection of the work of productive creative industries.[10] Street art's accessible, critical, and aesthetic appeal encourages institutions and companies to appropriate it for their agendas, which include promoting the city and its creative culture. As a local Nominated Member of Parliament noted, the street art of Melbourne has been marketed as a tourist attraction, even though the State Department imposes strict anti-graffiti laws.[11]

Banksy's success is attributed to the wit and sheer audacity of his various undertakings, like his 2005 stunt: placing his artworks in New York museums without their permission.[12] His work has moved from the streets to more official art spaces thanks to his notoriety; his show *Banksy v Bristol Museum* was displayed in the Bristol City Museum in 2009. Banksy has now become even more famous for breaking into the art market without going through the traditional channels, and for fetching extremely high prices for his work – two of his works have garnered sales prices of over one million dollars in 2008.[13]

SKL0's work comes nowhere near Banksy's in terms of monetary value or international publicity, but one cannot help but wonder if comparing them might reveal an unconscious economic motivation behind Singapore's bid to become a competitive art capital. The proliferation of Banksy references in the media imbues value to SKL0's work by emphasizing its cheeky subversion; but Banksy is also mobilized as a brand, which vindicates the professional legitimacy of the artist's work. These references highlight a paradox underlying neoliberal urban aesthetic production: the value of such art lies in its resistance to the commodification of everyday urban life, and is created by its own commodification and internationalization in the art market.

However, street art never gets institutional respect from the mainstream art world, and it will always be caught up in discourses of commercialism, cleanliness and social order.[14] The secret of Banksy's art-market success lies in his maintenance of street art's outsider status, by playing up the aesthetics of resistance that provide the basis of its artistic and monetary value. To this day, he insists on being known as a "quality vandal."[15] In Singapore, the aesthetics of resistance in graffiti/street art

have been domesticated by governmental authorities, to the point where aesthetic resistance is translated into creative decoration. Graffiti artists spray their works on sanctioned public spaces; some Singaporean artists believe that "graffiti doesn't have to be subversive to be considered art."[16] Resistance and subversion are notions associated with criminality, which is always severely punished – a Singaporean graffiti artist says, "I know there is a law to obey, and there's no running away from it."[17] Given this social climate, it is not surprising that SKL0's work has generated such debate in Singapore. The defense of SKL0 as Singapore's Banksy raises the deeper question of whether the Singaporean authorities can accept the subversive and political aspects of art, aspects that are often promoted as its selling points, while the city-state presents itself as a considerable player in the global art market.

Fundamentally, the work of SKL0 is tied to the context of the street. The effectiveness of her work has to do with its direct response to the issues on the freedom of public space. In recent years, the street has served as the backdrop for various protests and revolutions around the world, and the emergence of the Occupy movements has confronted the public with the problems of privatized space and culture. However, the streets are clean, business- and ad-friendly, and Occupy-free in Singapore, thanks to a strongly policed, self-regulating social culture.[18] In this sense, the stakes are unusually high for SKL0, but as her friend relayed during a meeting, "the streets were the only place to convey her message."[19] SKL0 was recently invited by the local independent arts centre The Substation to produce an artwork. A large sticker now resides on the walkway wall just outside the centre. Emblazoned on it is the word "Opportunity."

• Notes •

[1] Goh Shi Ting, "Mystery stickers press on at pedestrian crossing," *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2012, Home, B19.

[2] Believed to be one Samantha Lo.

[3] See also Peter Beaumont, "Strict Singapore divided by the arrest of its own Banksy," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/10/sticker-lady-strict-singapore-divided.

[4] Joe Hermer and Alan Hunt, "Official Graffiti of the Everyday," *Law & Society Review*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1996), p.456.

[5] The PAP, or People's Action Party, has uninterruptedly governed Singapore since the country's independence in 1965. Its political hegemony is often adduced as an example of one-party rule.

[6] NYC Mayor Ed Koch, for one, who led the so-called 'war on graffiti' in the early 1980s, believed that its prevalence was not merely a symbol of the city's decay, but fostered an atmosphere of unlawfulness in general: "Koch's war on graffiti characterized writing as a major contributing factor to New York's elevated crime rate and general lack of civic order. The official argument against graffiti rested on the notion that citizens were frightened by it because it represented an unlawful disruption of the urban environment, which encouraged other, more severe crimes." See Anna Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art* (London & New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011), p. 54.

[7] The Speak Good English Movement was officially inaugurated in 2000 – to, in its own words, "encourage Singaporeans to speak grammatically correct English that is universally understood." See http://www.goodenglish.org.sg/category/movement/about-us.

[8] Lim Wei Chean, "Don't ignore poor English, fix it – with a sticky note," *The Straits Times*, September 8, 2012.

[9] Ng Yi-sheng, "Samantha Lo vs. the Vandalism Act," *The Online Citizen*, June 9, 2012, http://theonlinecitizen.com/2012/06/samantha-lo-vs-the-vandalism-act/.

[10] Tim Hall and Phil Hubbard, eds. *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation* (London & New York: Wiley, 1998).

[11] Janice Koh 许优美, "Sticker Lady's Arrest: Is There Space for street art in Singapore?" June 4, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/notes/janice-koh-许优美/sticker-ladys-arrest-is-there-space-for-street-art-in-singapore/414236755288024.

[12] Randy Kennedy, "Need Talent to Exhibit in Museums? Not This Prankster." *The New York Times,* March 24, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/24/arts/design/24arti.html.

[13] Ulf Wuggenig, "The Tattooings of Cities. Notes on the Artistic Field and Popular Art in the City," in *Parcitypate: Art and Urban Space*, eds. Timon Beyes, Sophie Thérèse Krempf, Amelie Deuflhard (Zürich: Niggli, 2009), Section 198.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Lauren Collins, "Banksy Was Here: The Invisible Man of Graffiti Art," *The New Yorker*, May 14, 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/14/070514fa_fact_collins.

[16] Adeline Chia, "Spray Paint Art: Is graffiti art? And does sanctioned graffiti deserve the tag? The verdict is divided," *The Straits Times*, June 21, 2007. The pdf form of the article is available at: http://kamaldollah.wordpress.com/2007/06/21/is-graffiti-art-and-does-sanctioned-graffiti-deserve-the-tag/.

[17] Adeline Chia, "Spray Paint Art: Is graffiti art? And does sanctioned graffiti deserve the tag? The verdict is divided."

[18] Shibani Mahtani, "Protesters Fail to Occupy Singapore," *The Wall Street Journal*: WSJ *Blogs Dispatch*, October 15, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/dispatch/2011/10/15/protesters-fail-to-occupy-singapore/.

[19] Mayo Martin, "Sticker Lady! Town hall meeting! The Lowdown!" *TODAYonline: For Art's Sake!*, June 13, 2012, http://blogs.todayonline.com/forartssake/2012/06/13/sticker-lady-town-hall-meeting-the-lowdown/#more-5401.

• Bibliography •

Beaumont, Peter. "Strict Singapore divided by the arrest of its own Banksy." *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/10/sticker-lady-strict-singapore-divided.

Chia, Adeline. "Spray Paint Art: Is graffiti art? And does sanctioned graffiti deserve the tag? The verdict is divided," *The Straits Times*, 21 June 2007.

Collins, Lauren. "Banksy Was Here: The Invisible Man of Graffiti Art," *The New Yorker*, 14 May 2007. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/14/070514fa_fact_collins.

Goh Shi Ting. "Mystery stickers press on at pedestrian crossing." *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2012: Home, B19.

Hall, Tim and Phil Hubbard, eds. *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation.* London & New York: Wiley, 1998.

Hermer, Joe and Alan Hunt. "Official Graffiti of the Everyday." *Law & Society Review*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1996): 455-480.

Kennedy, Randy. "Need Talent to Exhibit in Museums? Not This Prankster." *The New York Times*, March 24 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/24/arts/design/24arti.html.

Koh, Janice 许优美. "Sticker Lady's Arrest: Is There Space for street art in Singapore?", June 4, 2012. https://www.facebook.com/notes/janice-koh-许优美/sticker-ladys-arrest-is-there-space-for-street-art-in-singapore/414236755288024.

Lim, Wei Chean. "Don't ignore poor English, fix it – with a sticky note," *The Straits Times*, September 8, 2012.

Mahtani, Shibani. "Protesters Fail to Occupy Singapore." *The Wall Street Journal*: WSJ *Blogs Dispatch*, October 15, 2011. http://blogs.wsj.com/dispatch/2011/10/15/protesters-fail-to-occupy-singapore/.

Martin, Mayo. "Sticker Lady! Town hall meeting! The Lowdown!" *TODAYonline: For Art's Sake!*, June 13, 2012. http://blogs.todayonline.com/forartssake/2012/06/13/sticker-lady-town-hall-meeting-the-lowdown/#more-5401.

Ng Yi-sheng. "Samantha Lo vs. the Vandalism Act." *The Online Citizen*, June 9, 2012. http://theonlinecitizen.com/2012/06/samantha-lo-vs-the-vandalism-act/.

Waclawek, Anna. *Graffiti and Street Art* . London & New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011.

Wuggenig, Ulf. "The Tattooings of Cities. Notes on the Artistic Field and Popular Art in the City," in *Parcitypate: Art and Urban Space*, eds. Timon Beyes, Sophie Thérèse Krempf, Amelie Deuflhard (Zürich: Niggli, 2009), Section 198.

COLLISION

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics,* the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.

Coffield, Kris. "Terror, Trauma, and the Thing at Ground Zero."
***Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2012): 23-32.**

ABSTRACT

Ten years after the assault on the World Trade Center, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum was opened to the public. Built amidst the busy financial corridors of Lower Manhattan, the memorial was designed to provide a tranquil space for honoring those who perished in the terror attacks. Yet reading the 9/11 Memorial in terms of public remembrance fails to account for either the ontopolitical impact of the attacks as an event that continues to unfold or the contingent relationship of the monument to modes of narratizing 9/11 trauma. To counter the recuperation of the 9/11 Memorial within nationalist security discourses, this essay employs an object-oriented framework to evaluate how 9/11 texts, political symbols, and memorial components operate as things-in-themselves, retaining individual agency apart from human motivations. Theorizing the signifer of "9/11" as a fiction productive of homogenized affect, I argue that the 9/11-signifier stabilizes the equilibrium of the state by suppressing the agency of objects that propose ways of relating to 9/11 that challenge the "hyperrelational" logic of United States security constructs, whereby all objects are said to be interconnected through a conflation of the marketplace, Constitution, and God. In preserving the material displacement of objects from familiar spatiotemporal locations, however, I contend that the 9/11 Memorial deterritorializes becoming from human subjectivity to withdrawn objectal being, in turn creating space for an uncanny affirmation of difference.

KEYWORDS

9/11 Memorial, World Trade Center, object-oriented ontology, trauma, hyperrelationality

Terror, Trauma, and the Thing at Ground Zero

Kris Coffield

Unveiled on the tenth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum attempts, in the most literal sense, to concretize the materiality of public remembrance. Designed by architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker, the memorial opens with a pair of one-acre inverted reflecting pools, symbolizing the void left by the collapse of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers. Each pool is accentuated by a manmade waterfall, the largest such fixtures in the United States, whose cascading rhythms suppress noise from the surrounding cityscape, creating a somber sanctuary. To further the monument's visage of serenity, landscapers peppered the remaining six acres of the Memorial Plaza with approximately 400 sweet gum and swamp white oak trees that rain shade over bronze plates lining the parapet walls of the reflective pools, on which the names of 2,983 victims are inscribed.[1] Taken in its entirety, the memorial divests visitors of the easy bifurcation of nature and civilization and, instead, uses negative space to render self-identification uneasy and ambiguous. To borrow a

term from ecological theorist Timothy Morton, guests are revealed as *strange strangers,* concurrently marking and marked by the unbounded being of their surroundings in an ongoing process of contingent affirmation.[2] In radicalizing the contingency of relations between all things extant at the 9/11 Memorial, human and nonhuman, this essay will engage in an object-oriented reading of the tribute, ultimately proposing that the 9/11 attacks were traumatic not just for the loss of life they incurred, but the aesthetic dissensus that was wrought on the American ontological imaginary.

Juan Carlos Cruz. 9/11 Memorial (South Tower Pool) at Night. Creative Commons.

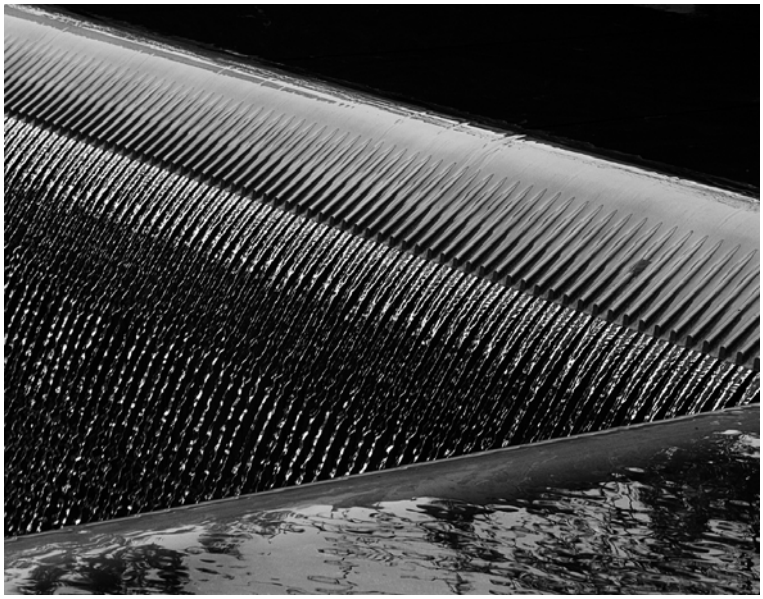
• Noospherology versus OOOsphereology •

Peter Sloterdijk likes spheres. For this German philosopher, spheres are "thought-figures" that represent an epistemological shift toward "animated, interpersonal, surreal space," whereby relations within traditionally neglected spaces, such as a maternal wombs or metropolitan apartment complexes, are mined for their anthropogenic pregnancy.[3] In reconstructing the metaphysics of being from the vantage point of space, Sloterdijk compellingly contends that much of modern metaphysical inquiry

denies the encounter of space and time in the constitution of being by valorizing temporality at the expense of architectonic excavations. At the same time, however, Sloterdijk's line of thinking remains fundamentally anthropocentric, suffering from what the speculative realist Quentin Meillassoux calls *correlationism*, or the idea that philosophers may only access thinking and being as they are correlated to one another, disavowing any reality external to this perpetual linkage as inaccessible.[4] Growing from the Kantian transcendental ideal of objects conforming to the cognition of their perceiving subject, correlationism poses a problem for theorists attempting to think through the actuality of events like 9/11, which portend grave consequences for affected populations, both animate and inanimate. Specifically, in abrogating knowledge of reality outside of the circular thinking/being dyad, correlationist philosophical trajectories recuperate within and subsequently reify conscious human experience, marking claims about being as always already characterizing being-for-anthropos, rather than being-in-itself. Thus, though Sloterdijk's spherology provides a useful corrective to theory's (and particularly political theory's) disregard for the spatial dimension of spatiotemporality, it could be adequately described as *noospherology*, given its limitation of spherological inquiry to the sphere of human thought, relation, and agency.

In contrast to correlationist and anti-realist philosophies, object-oriented ontology (OOO) proposes that all relations distort their relata in the same fundamental manner, thereby equalizing the ontological playing field on which all entities are situated.[5] Founded by Graham Harman, object-oriented philosophy upholds the principle of *anthrodecentrism*, whereby post-Kantian transcendentalism is rejected in favor of the idea that objects exist independently of human consciousness and are incapable of exhausting one another's inhered, or *withdrawn*, potential.[6] In radicalizing finitude to the extent that all objects, conscious or otherwise, are incapable of perfectly translating objectal relations into complete knowledge of the objects involved, OOO holds that the qualities perceived or manifested by an object at any given spatiotemporal locus are, themselves, products of objectal agency. In other words, writes Levi Bryant, qualities are not tantamount to an object's potential, but "acts, verbs, or something that an object does."[7] Blue, by Bryant's reasoning, is not something that the 9/11 Memorial's reflecting pools are or a quality that they possess. Instead, the pools' color is an agential act committed within a particular set of relations and topological deformations, or what Bryant designates a *regime of attraction*.[8] Importantly, these conditions admit not just putatively "real" objects (champagne glasses, manatees, and

Air Force One) to the plane of ontological being, but any entity that obtains existential independence of human consciousness. Ergo, fictional objects, like Harry Potter or Pikachu, make the cut, creating a pathway for re-ontologizing 9/11 semiotic simulacra and textual formations deployed in their remembrance. In so doing, OOO, like Sloterdijk, takes seriously the need to think through space and time, emphasizing what might be called *OOOspherology*, in which objects generate their own dynamic spatiotemporality at multiple scales, rather than existing within a purely Euclidean spatial framework.



Tolka Rover. 9/11 Memorial. Creative Commons.

• Watch Out for Colliding Entities •

Drawing a line between objects and events, one can say that while the events comprising 9/11 are not fully objectal, the coded signifier "9/11," on the other hand, exists autonomously and enacts material effects that do not depend upon any single being for predication. Baneful objects, therefore, are theorized alongside their benign counterparts. It is important to note, here, that OOO does not compel specific normative claims. Instead, it speaks only to ontological foundations and substance

metaphysics. Signifiers that have been critiqued as aesthetic simulations, linguistic nihilism, or explosions of normative force within the space of abjection are shown to be fully agential things-in-themselves. In the case of the assault on New York City's skyline, 9/11 came to represent militarized nationalistic myths: that everything had changed, terrorism posed the greatest threat to democracy, and collective trauma bestowed upon the United States citizenry a revitalized sense of self. Alternative ways of coding the 9/11-event were suppressed by the 9/11-signifier, cleaving space for the production of new objects (Department of Homeland Security), relations (security checkpoints at airports), and ways of managing relations (mass deployment of banoptic surveillance systems) meant to maintain the state's homeostatic equilibrium and arrest the becoming of entities that challenge the ability of the state – itself an object – to matriculate through space and time.

Rather than denounce the reality of 9/11 as an event recursively correlated to a perceiving subject, object-oriented thought holds that the 9/11-signifier exists independently of any given subject position, despite the limited verisimilitude of its discursive spawn. By extension, one can conclude that the ideological liquidation of 9/11 imagery terminated the reflexive potential of such signifiers as *a priori* politico-aesthetic instruments, contravening the performance of (il)liberal security regimes by dissolving the intimate coupling of essence and appearance. If recognition of the Other is always a recognition of the self inside the Other, then in the 9/11 event, Americans were faced with the projection of humanity into a nonhuman alterity, as familiar objects – planes, mortar, steel – became momentarily uncanny, escaping the full measure of anthropocentric dominion. Unfortunately, the emancipatory objectal potential released by 9/11 was almost immediately ensnared within the semiotic world of the 9/11-signifier, mediatically replicated and dispensed to homogenize traumatic affect under a martial umbrella.

In Bryant's regime of attraction, manifested properties only remain in a constant state when the conditions under which an assemblage of objects interact remain the same over time.[9] To explain the agential colonization of one object by another, one could posit the complementary idea of a *regime of detraction*, whereby one object, or assemblage thereof, commits ontological violence upon another object by falsifying the colonized object's enacted potential, negating its primary inhered power, namely the possibility of becoming. Critiquing the appropriation and instrumental redirection of a nonfictional object's agency by a fictional

object, a process I've elsewhere termed *superimposition*, requires a move away from the rapturous *hyperrelationality* that magically conflates all objects into an endlessly interconnected aggregate. And this is precisely the gesture that the 9/11 Memorial attempts to make.

Tom Hannigan. The 9/11 Memorial. Creative Commons.

• The Object of Space, Time, and Memory •

Put simply, hyperrelationality connotes the idea that everything is related to everything else, infinitely and recursively. In the United States, hyperrelational thinking is most explicitly pronounced in the holy trinity of liberal governance, composed of God, commodities, and the Consitution. This three-in-one triumvirate forms the core of liberal ontopolitics, in which being is propounded by quasi-meritocratic capital accumulation, said to be the highest aim of human life. Not even skyscrapers are exempt from capital divination, for what more are corporate towers, after all, but the end of a populace's efforts to exploit industrial objects and labor in pursuit of political exceptionalism and the ability to touch the face of God? Ironically, hyperrelational objectal assemblages, by definition, curtail motility and agency, since complete interconnection renounces the ability to break with old relations and craft new ones, such that action always exists for-everything. The trauma of 9/11, it follows, stems not just from

loss of life or destruction of property, but also from the unmasking of hyperrelationality as a barbaric meta-aporia about signification that incites ideological utterances to normalize its assertions of power at multiple distances from the event, grinding all objects into a single, deified relational scheme.

When they are materially displaced, security fictions, mementos, rubble, and rubble-cum-artifact all evince an agonistic space of translation between entities noncompliant with predeterminative epistemic arrangements. Preserving the reality of such an encounter necessitates an acknowledgement of the nontraversable spatiotemporal gulf within which objects relate. As in Einstein's theory of general relativity, which demonstrated that gravity is the objectal warping and curvature of spacetime, objectal encounters involve a distortion of relational space, that subset of general space in which aesthetic sensibility is repartitioned as an affirmation of radical difference. The point is that, in the case of the 9/11 Memorial, each of the objects involved in memorialization – from the placards to the trees to the people – subverts preordained exegesis of what meaning is or should be, recasting becoming as an ontopolitical negotiation of an object's spatiotemporally common withdrawn being as it relates to itself, other objects, or larger assemblages of which it may be a part.[10] Granted, the 9/11 Memorial was born out of the same sense of statist suffering that the fictional 9/11-signifier seeks to uphold. Gazing into the gaping voids amidst the concrete jungle of lower Manhattan, however, one is made keenly aware that the substantiality of ontological difference precedes epistemological knowledge of an event, as the artificial familiarity of the event in question is washed away by the waterfalls flowing into the reflecting pools. What is left is the concurrently horrifying and sublime feeling that when the Twin Towers crashed to the ground in 2001, the centrality of human agency fell shortly thereafter, leaving both in a state of processual ruin.

• Notes •

[1] Details contained in this description come from the National September 11 Memorial and Museum's website: *http://www.911memorial.org/memorial*. Accessed July 3, 2012.

[2] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 41.

[3] Sloterdijk's characterization of spherology is derived from *Bubbles: Spheres, Volume I: Microspherology* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2011), as well as "Against Gravity," an interview conducted by Bettina Funcke that was published in the February/March, 2005 issue of BookForum, in which he states, "Even German semantics plays a role in my choice of terms, since between Goethe and Heidegger the word sphere is employed as an approximate synonym for the circle of life or world of meaning and of course this already goes a ways toward accommodating my search for a language appropriate to animated, interpersonal, or surreal space."

[4] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 5.

[5] Graham Harman proposes the equalization of all metaphysical relations as a radicalization of Martin Heidegger's famous tool-analysis. In his groundbreaking work on the subject, Harman claims that Heideggerian readiness-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*) indicates the withdrawal of objects from both practical and theoretical action, meaning that the reality of an object cannot be exhausted by practical usage or philosophical investigation. Thus, for Harman, objects "never encounter one another in their deepest being, but only *as present-at-hand*; it is only Heidegger's confusion of two distinct senses of the as-structure that prevents this strange result from being accepted." See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Being* (Peru: Open Court, 2002), 2-3, emphasis original.

[6] Specifically, object-oriented ontology's anthrodecentric project downplays the prioritization of the human-world correlate in Immanuel Kant's Copernican Revolution, whereby reality is only epistemologically accessible through cognitive structuring, reducing philosophy to an asymmetrical exploration of how humans engage with reality, at the expense of reality itself. In maintaining the Kantian insight that relations distort their relata, however, object-oriented ontology extends the phenomenological limitation of finitude to all objects, human and nonhuman. See Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (London: Zero Books, 2011), 44-47.

[7] Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 89.

[8] Ibid., 169.

[9] Ibid., 170.

[10] An object's withdrawn being is "common" in the consistency of its capacity for becoming across time and space. While an object will change as it undergoes internal and external relations, its capacity for becoming and differentiation is, in my view, an unmitigated potential that precedes action and appearance. In other places, I have called this *differential becoming*, describing difference as a positive effect of objects mapping their own spatiotemporality and the fundamental power of objects existing equally on an immanent plane of being.

• Bibliography •

Bryant, Levi. *The Democracy of Objects*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011.

Funcke, Bettina. "Against Gravity," *Bookforum*, Feb/Mar, 2005. Accessed July 6, 2012, http://www.bookforum.com/archive/feb_05/funcke.html.

Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. London: Zero Books, 2011.

——. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Being*. Peru: Open Court, 2002.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency*. New York: Continuum, 2008.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *Bubbles: Spheres, Volume I: Microspherology*. Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2011.

COLLISION

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics,* the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.

Nakano, Alan. "The Incidental in the Work of Inouk Demers."
***Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2012): 33-40.**

ABSTRACT

Incidents are peripheral, rather than central, phenomena. This Collision considers sound and installation artist Inouk Demers, whose recent work explores the incidental in both its geographical and conceptual relationships to the megalopolis of Los Angeles. In *Zine-o-file*, *Conveyance*, *Wireless Landscape*, and *Custom Audio Products*, Demers offers the incidental as an alternative to straightforward themes and fleshed-out narratives.

KEYWORDS

Inouk Demers, zines, installations, sound art, incidental

The Incidental in the Work of Inouk Demers

Alan Nakano

Incidents are peripheral, rather than central, phenomena. We usually bracket them out of our experience of art, but I don't think we're obliged to do so. Neither does Inouk Demers, a sound and installation artist whose work I've recently come to know. I found an issue of his zine, *Zine-o-file*, in a coffeehouse in Redondo Beach, California. Now, I've been reading zines for years, and have strong opinions about them. A zine is a self-published pamphlet – "zine" is short for "magazine" – and usually contains some mixture of text with images. Most zines are heavy on the text. Many contain multiple paragraphs; some contain enough prose to count as novellas. But *Zine-o-file* is positively laconic: short sentences and fragments from unknown local contributors (or perhaps just Demers himself). They obliquely speak of exhibitionist neighbors, rude neighbors, worried neighbors, and stoned neighbors. The photos capture elements familiar to me as a lifelong resident of the South Bay (a collection of beach towns just south of Los Angeles): washed-out, shabby stucco condos; shitty cars; junk piles on sidewalks and in streets – all this smack up against million-dollar homes. The stories, if you could call them that, seemed too short given what I was used to. So I read it once, threw it on a pile of papers, and forgot about it.

A few weeks later, I saw in the same coffeehouse some of Demers' recordings next to *Zine-o-file*, with the title "Sounds of the South Bay" in a super-1970s-disco font. No liner notes or track titles, no text, just field recordings of grocery stores and Muzak. After I listened to the disc, I began to discern the quality that makes Demers' work distinctive: his interest in the fragmentary, in the unresolved tangent. Demers' biography sheds light on this interest in the incidental. He is Canadian, grew up in Toronto, and attended university in Montréal before moving to the States. For reasons that remain unclear to me, he now lives in Redondo Beach. Now, we all hear stories of artists who move to LA. And those artists usually end up in craptacular hipster havens like Echo Park or Silverlake. The South Bay is not hip. It's not a destination. It's for sort-of rich whites, middle-class Asians, Christian singles, and anyone with dreams of one day moving to La Cañada or Palos Verdes. The South Bay, with its mixture of wealth and the working class, its relative irrelevance to opulent Hollywood and the West Side, is incidental to Los Angeles.

Demers achieves what Gore Vidal does in a moment that has long haunted me, from his novel *Julian*. The book is a series of recollections about the fourth-century Roman emperor Julian, who fought unsuccessfully to repaganize the empire after his uncle Constantine imposed Christianity as the state religion. One of Julian's friends describes the imperial campaign against the German barbarians who then occupied Gaul:

> ...while riding outside the walls of a Gallic town, I saw a cemetery where several of the graves were covered with fishnets. I asked one of the native soldiers what this meant. "It is to keep the ghosts of mothers who die in childbirth from stealing back their children." There is a lot of interesting folklore in that part of the world and I hope some latter-day Herodotus will record it before the people become so completely Romanized that the old customs are forgotten.[1]

I was perplexed the first time I read this. Why flash this beautiful, dark pearl of a story, only to let it drop? Why not give us more, even just one sentence more, to explain this bizarre custom?

But that's not the point. Exhuming this bit of Gallic superstition would dull the pearl's glow. This digression haunts me because it is brief, comes out of nowhere, and then disappears. It is not central to the story,

only peripheral, and there lies its power, for the peripheral is the site of the uncategorized, that which has not yet been contained or neutralized. And like Vidal does with his Gallic-folklore throw-away, Demers gives us a passing glance at places that are unexplainable, then closes the door before our curiosity has the chance to sate itself. He thus reminds me of how unsettling the South Bay is, something I haven't felt since I was in grade school.

But the South Bay lies in the shadow of the beast Los Angeles, and that's where two more of Demers' works point. *Conveyance* treats a subject that might seem all too familiar thanks to films like Polanski's (1974) *Chinatown* – water policy. Los Angeles is in the middle of a desert. Natural water supplies barely sustained native and preindustrial populations in Southern California. What made the construction of Los Angeles, San Diego, and their suburbs possible were gargantuan water relocation projects like the LA Aqueduct, and the manmade flood that led to the creation of the Salton Sea, projects that deprive local farmers and communities of badly needed irrigation. Today, water redirection has made both Southern California and the agriculturally critical Central Valley fantastically verdant and fertile, as well as vulnerable to drought, climate change, and terrorism. Water wars, disputes over water rights, are already vicious and will prove even more so as demand increases while supplies remain constant or diminish.

This is all old news, and any artwork treading on this subject risks sanctimoniousness. But *Conveyance* is respectful enough to assume that readers and listeners will make the necessary connections, and otherwise stays out of our way. *Conveyance* is a hybrid: it's a stand-alone audio work with field recordings of dams, reservoirs, lakes, and storm drains, interspersed with brief voiceover texts. It's also an ongoing serial work currently available to Facebook subscribers, in which audio excerpts are available alongside written texts, photographs, and maps.[2] *Conveyance* offers cryptic facts on the careers of water boomtown industrialists like William Mulholland, Faulknerian antiheroes who schemed to supply their real or coveted constituencies with life-giving water. One of its voiceovers states: "Before heading the LA Department of Water and Power, William Mulholland worked in San Pedro digging ditches." Underscoring this statement are source recordings of some coastal location (perhaps San Pedro, although it's never made explicit), with foghorns, seagulls, crows, and water listing on a dock. Sounds of the periphery are the centerpiece of *Conveyance*: microphones inserted in a storm drain that opens onto a

street grate. Every time a car drives by, the drain vibrates cavernously. Demers' voiceover about the Machado Lake revitalization project lists mysterious improvements, including "bio-swail" and "smart irrigation," ending with the ominous observation that Machado Lake lies next to a golf course and oil refinery. *Conveyance* is replete with such moments of intimation. Its sounds are never clearly beholden to a particular source or location, so the piece avoids identifying one person, policy, or region as the aggressor or villain in water policy. Rather, *Conveyance* reiterates what every Angeleno knows: there is no center to Los Angeles, no obvious scapegoat on which to heap the blame for the city's problems, just countless incidental neighborhoods, each with its own secrets.

Inouk Demers. *Conveyance*. Used by permission.

To make sense of Demers' work, we can turn to Hal Foster, who speaks of the turn in recent art towards ethnography.[3] The artist here assumes the role of an ethnographer who addresses cultural alterity rather than traditional subjects, techniques, media or narratives. Modern-day ethnography patterns itself on the hard and social sciences, and thus ethnographies within artworks assume the dimensions of targeted

investigations, permitting no room for data incidental to the subject of inquiry. Not so, though, with the father of history (and ethnography), Herodotus, whose *Histories* never had to answer to such disciplinary mandates. Herodotus can spend pages recounting engrossing stories like that of the king Candaules who, so boastful of the beauty of his wife, forces his best friend Gyges to watch her undress. The queen discovers what has happened, and summons Gyges the next day to tell him that he must either kill Candaules to usurp the throne and marry her, or else be killed immediately. Gyges chooses the former, wins the kingdom and the beautiful queen, and the story comes to an end. But not quite…for Herodotus then leaves us with a coda describing the bowls that Gyges later gives to the oracle at Delphi as recompense for having recognized him as the true king. Why on earth are these bowls important? How could bowls serve as a fitting epilogue for such an arresting story? Again, there are no answers to such questions; the draw of such moments is their inexplicability, their strangeness.

It is this older form of ethnography that is at play in Demers' *Conveyance*. Most people are already well aware of the tortured, contested relationships between water, cities, people, and people's bank accounts; and Demers knows this. What are not so obvious are the accidental, incidental, bizarre connections that give these machinations meaning, sense, or at least reaffirm their incomprehensibility.

•

Here, then, is the center of Demers' work: the off-center. He takes this quite literally in terms of space and location. If cities and urban exigencies are the usual fare of art, public policy, and culture, then what occupies Demers' art are the places incidental and adjacent to the city. For *Zine-o-file*, this is the South Bay. And for his installation *Wireless Landscape* (2011), this is the desert somewhere outside Los Angeles, sparsely populated by extremists, addicts, and cellphone towers. *Wireless Landscape* consists of a diorama containing a truck camper, a discarded television set, and four cellphone towers strewn amid brush-covered mountains. Alongside the diorama, two speakers play a random collage of shortwave radio transmissions of conservative talk radio, static, and noise.

As in *Conveyance*, sound in *Wireless Landscape* engenders space, or rather vacuum, in the sense that the exurban desert emerges as a lunar wasteland, a no-man's-land. It is not the ecological oasis we might imagine in our more optimistic fantasies, because it is littered with detritus, poles, and transmitters. And there is no grounding narrative that would make the desert *make sense*. There are merely details, grace notes that reveal the melody to be just a bit off.

Inouk Demers. *Wireless Landscape*. Used by permission.

Recently, Demers shifted his focus from the city and its discontents to mechanisms concomitant with urbanity. *Custom Audio Products* is a set of techno-inspired music loops composed for any instrument. Each lasts only a few seconds, and can be realized in any order, successively or simultaneously. CAP is legalistic Muzak, and it is packaged as such with its accompanying Licensing Agreement. Here is an excerpt:

> "Custom Audio Loops" may embody the Licensed Material as any product in any format, sensory, printed or otherwise, heard or unheard, known or unknown, yet to be devised or never to be devised.

The center or focal point of the piece is not the music itself, for as Demers implies, there is no longer any such thing as "music itself." In the wake of postmodernism, New Musicology, and social networks, we have relinquished any claim on music for itself. What remains is music for use value, music for expressing one's taste and cultural identity, and most depressingly, music for filling up the void that cannot be filled. In a more honest world, CAP would be broadcast in shopping malls and call-centers, to perk up workers deadened by monotonous and dehumanizing corporate procedures. It sounds like music fit for consumers and big box employees, because like those disenfranchised worker bees, CAP owes its existence to its monetary value, its potential to accrue income, and not to any innate aesthetic or spiritual value. For the record, the loops in CAP are catchy, groovy, and well-written. But that's incidental, too, because music, aestheticism, and happiness have become incidental. And that's where Demers excels – at underscoring the things that have fallen by the wayside on the road towards the big city.

• Notes •

[1] Gore Vidal, *Julian*, New York: Vintage, 1992, pg. 221.
[2] See www.facebook.com/conveyance.
[3] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). pp. 181ff.

• Bibliography •

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Herodotus. *The Histories*. Trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt, Ed. John Marincola. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Vidal, Gore. *Julian*. New York: Vintage, 1992.

COLLISION

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics,* the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.

Magee, Carol. "Experiencing Lagos Through Dis-stanced Stillness."
***Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2012): 41-49.**

ABSTRACT

This essay offers distance and stillness as means by which to access and understand the dynamism of cities. I reflect on stillness as an unexpected aesthetic within artistic projects that represent urban environments, and as a vital approach to engaging with such artworks. Focusing on Lagos, Nigeria, I consider one photographic series by Abraham Oghobase and one sound work by Emeka Ogboh. I read their work in light of philosopher Jeff Malpas's conceptualization of place as "existential ground." In considering this relational aspect of place, I ruminate on the way distance facilitates the careful looking and listening that connects artist, object, and viewer/listener through stillness.

KEYWORDS

stillness, photography, cities, soundscapes, Emeka Ogboh, Abraham Oghobase

Experiencing Lagos Through Dis-stanced Stillness

Carol Magee

Thinking about place in unexpected ways has been on my mind quite a bit, because my work explores photographic cityscapes by contemporary African artists who investigate emotional, physical, psychological, or philosophical experiences of place. In almost every instance, I engage with this work in a location that is not represented in the pieces at which I am looking. At the photography biennial in Bamako, Mali, for instance, I see photographs of Lagos, Cairo, Sfax, Johannesburg. This distance affords me a possibility for thinking about these places differently than I would if I were immersed in the hustle and bustle of their streets, with myriad sounds and smells surrounding me, the grit of the city on my skin. My distanced reflection on these artistic projects brings me to an unexpected way of thinking about the cities they represent: it brings me to stillness as a concept, aesthetic, and experience vital to a sense of these places.

Stillness is probably not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about or experiencing cities, for it is in many ways the antithesis of urban environments; stillness is a lack of motion, a lack of noise, a lack of tumult, which cities have in abundance.[1] Nonetheless, a photograph of a city transforms its movements into stillness. The artist chooses a

meaningful spot amidst the dynamism and stands still to take a photo. And the camera inserts a momentary, often unconscious distance between the artist and his subject. Such distance comes from and enables stillness. I realized this when I looked at photographs of Lagos, Nigeria by several different artists, including Abraham Oghobase. In this essay, written from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I reflect on how I experience Lagos through Oghobase's photographic series *Jam* (2007) and Emeka Ogboh's sound work *Lagos Soundscapes* (2008–present).

Abraham Onoriode Oghobase. *Jam (Series Installation View)*. 2007 C-print. Used by permission.

By focusing on objects that seem to ask their audiences to isolate particular senses, visual and aural, I distance myself from the overstimulation of the multisensorial experiences a city offers. This allows

a more refined focus that further textures my understanding of Lagos. Such distanced consideration allows me to perceive an aesthetic of stillness in representations where stillness might seem unexpected. Lagos is, after all, a megacity that has been described with notions of chaos, nervousness, anxiety, suffering, invention, and ingenuity, none of which immediately bring stillness to the fore.[2]

I come to understand Lagos through stillness because of the relationship I have with these artistic representations of the city. As Jeff Malpas argues, we experience and articulate our existence through place.[3] To understand place as an "existential ground" is to understand its relational character, for it is from the place in which we "are" that we relate to the world around us and give meaning to a locale. Indeed, it is the act of relating that is critical here for my consideration of distance, stillness, and the making-present of Lagos. Malpas, exploring the spatial qualities in Heidegger's conceptualizations of being-in-the-world, notes:

> "Dis-tance" [*sic.*] refers to the way in which specific things take on a certain relation to us from out of the larger structure in which they are situated – finding a word I need to check in my reading, I glance over at the bookshelf to find the dictionary, but discover I cannot quite reach it from my chair, so it is brought close even before I take it from the shelf, in a specific way that also allows its distance from me to be apparent.[4]

Malpas follows Hubert Dreyfus, who explains that Heidegger's use of the hyphen in dis-stance (*Ent-fernung*) emphasizes the "negative sense of *ent*...literally...the *abolishing* of distance."[5] Dreyfus elaborates, noting that this abolition in fact brings an object "within the range of...concern."[6] At the heart of dis-stance, then, is a reorientation. In abolishing a stance (negating a certain type of relationship we have with something), we open up space to enter into a new or different relationship with it through awareness of both the distance and the relationship.[7] In this bringing-close, this overcoming of distance, a thing can come into presence, become present.[8] Place, then, as "existential ground" is significant because it is where "things are gathered and disclosed [presenced]."[9] Thus, although I am geographically far from Lagos, a distance that might hinder my knowing the city, the city is brought near to me as I relate to it through photographs and sounds of it. Distance is abolished. It is made present, and in that presence I become aware of stillness.

When I first viewed the photographs of *Jam* (see p.43), their subject seemed to be the various people depicted between the jambs of a doorway. Yet, the more time I spent with the photographs, the more the location itself stood out. Each photograph depicts the same doorway. The people change, but there is always the same pock-marked wall, blue light, and assertion "This house is not for sale" scrawled above the door. It is the jam of Lagos's "face me I face you" housing, and the jam of people that inhabit it, that are the subject of this series.[10] By subtly emphasizing Lagos's ongoing problems of inadequate housing and congested urban space, these photos make present this place and the continuous flow of people throughout the city.

Yet the stillness within the photos, the calm of the people depicted in them, elides the chaos that can be Lagos. The overcrowded city is not visible here; the close proximity with one another that marks people's lives is absent. The bodies in the doorway block our access to the interior of this home, maintaining it as a place of refuge in and from the commotion of the city. Here, home offers a place of stillness away from the movement of the city. At the same time, the depiction of different people in the same doorway underscores the movement of people through this place, a place Oghobase himself once inhabited.[11] These photographs personalize a broad phenomenon, and reveal how Oghobase *is* in this city. In photographing this place, and in viewing the photographs of it, Oghobase brings Lagos into a "range of concern."

In contrast to the photographic project, the overwhelming aesthetic of Ogboh's *Lagos Soundscapes* is one of movement: people coming and going, vehicles in transit, engines revving, horns honking.[12] Because sound orients us within and to our surroundings, recognizable urban sounds in the multiple pieces that comprise this ongoing work, render Lagos familiar. The duration for which I hear a vehicle or the loudness with which I hear voices opens or closes the space for me, creates a here and a there. But, at other times, Lagos's sounds are not recognizable, and the city seems foreign, yet those sounds still orient me to the city. The sounds, as were Oghobase's visual presentations of the "face me I face you" housing, are linked to specific locations.[13] Understanding "sound as *situated*" is vital, for listening to these sounds enacts a dis-stancing.[14]

In several of Ogboh's soundscapes, we are privy to conversations that took place on a bus or in the street. Or, as may happen on a bus, we are subjected to the orations of an individual from whom we cannot

escape. One piece offers for consideration the cacophonous noise of the traffic jams for which Lagos is so famous. Throughout the four minutes of "Monday morning in Lagos" (2010), a child sings – or at least that's what I imagine I am hearing. Not knowing exactly what I am hearing emphasizes my distance from the subject; but at the same time, my prior experiences in African cities allow me to relate to them in *some* way, diminishing my sense of distance from them. In other words, the sounds of Lagos are dis-stanced.[15] They bring the city near to me, it becomes present, even though it is far away. Throughout this piece, the child sings, then stops, several times. In the stillness between her vocalizations, other voices come to the fore. These voices are layered, some further away, others closer. The child starts again, and the layering thickens, making the pauses, the stillness between the verses of her song, all the more poignant. The pause in her animated voice creates stillness in the sounds of the city, even as other sounds continue, denying silence.

I listen to the sounds of the city. I am part of it, situated in it, yet removed from it for there is no interaction. I do not, cannot, speak with the people whose voices I hear; the little girl cannot see the smile her voice puts on my face. Moreover, as Joanna Demers observes, soundscapes encourage listeners to interrogate their listening.[16] I focus on the act of listening, attuning myself to what I am hearing and *how* I am hearing it. Each of Ogboh's pieces conjures a bustling environment that seems to deny stillness; yet, my careful listening suggests that to make each piece, the artist positioned a microphone in one spot, with movement going on around it.[17] Ogboh chose stillness. I become aware of this central stillness as I listen. It becomes part of the aesthetic experience of the soundscape. I hear the non-movement around which all other sounds flow, and I know this stillness, not just as a technical aspect of the making of the piece, but as a vital component in disclosing the presence of Lagos. Indeed, it is from this central stillness that I develop my dis-stanced relation with the place.

My distant engagement with Ogboh's piece also becomes part of the aesthetic experience. I am still as I listen to these soundscapes on my computer, sitting on my screened porch, five thousand miles from Lagos. Despite, yet also because of, this distance I am immersed in that city. Such immersions underscore the experiential and relational aspects of place. Generally in sound art, it is believed that the listener "shar[es] time and space with the object or event under consideration."[18] Languages I do not understand mingle with those I do, and these co-mingle with the sounds

of my immediate environment: wind blowing through the trees; birds chirping. The noises of vehicles in Chapel Hill intermingle with those in Lagos. This place merges with that place, offering just one more instance of the ever-entwining local and global. And I arrive at this intersection through stillness.

Moreover, whereas in the preceding paragraphs I characterized stillness as an absence when juxtaposing it with movement, here I must acknowledge that stillness is more complex than that. It is, by any measure, an intervention and interruption. Stillness can interrupt movement, much as the stasis of the people in *Jam* inserts stillness into the movements of Lagos, or as Ogboh's stationary microphone inserts stillness into the moving soundscapes of the city. In addition, the movement of these artists throughout Lagos is suspended as they stand still to record, visually or aurally, a location. And each project results in discrete, unchanging objects (photographs, sound clips), which bear their own stillness. Stillness is also a way of being present. Being still, pausing in our activity, allows us to be in a moment fully. Stillness thereby heightens our senses and focuses our attention. It is, in fact, this active quality that makes stillness such a vital component in understanding cities. Careful looking and listening attune us to the many elements of the objects with which we engage. We hear noises we might otherwise tune out, see details we may have missed with more cursory glances. The city is made present. Stillness facilitates this perception, offering a productive means for engaging the complexities of urban environments.

The immersive qualities of sound art suggest a lack of the distance that has so long been seen as integral to the aesthetic experience of visual arts. And yet both forms offer dis-stanced relationships. While I have arrived at these insights through engaging particular works of art, this dis-stanced experience is not exclusive to them. Indeed, what I want to highlight is the potential this analysis offers for broader approaches to thinking about place in general. Through dis-stance, I am made aware of stillness, and in this stillness Lagos is made present in Oghobase's and Ogboh's work. From Chapel Hill, I experience Lagos through stillness. In stillness I gain perspective on the dynamics of a city that focusing on that city's stirrings alone cannot provide. It is this potential of this interplay between distance and stillness that can help us to understand place through art.

• Notes •

I would like to thank Carolyn Allmendinger, Joanna Grabski, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on, and suggestions for, strengthening this essay.

[1] The work of Jonathan Friday, Debbie Lisle, Yve Lomaz, Andrew Murphie, and Girard Perez offer insightful considerations of stillness both as it relates to photography and as a concept in and of itself. They have been particularly useful for my thinking about the productive nature of these artistic projects, about how they engender a sense of place: so too has the generative nature of movements within a city articulated by de Certeau.
[2] See the essays on Lagos in Enwezor, Basualdo, Bauer et al., eds. as just one example of this.
[3] Malpas, "New Media," 205.
[4] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, 91; Malpas develops his theorization of place in dialogue with Heidegger's philosophy of being, *Dasein* (being-there), arguing for the centrality of place to all philosophical thinking (7).
[5] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 130.
[6] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 131, 132.
[7] Prior to Malpas's need for the dictionary, his stance in relation to it is physical; the dictionary is simply one of many books on a shelf. Once the dictionary is needed, he has a mental relationship to it that marks its difference from the other books on the shelf, a relationship that has abolished his former stance to it. Similarly, when I am in Chapel Hill, I may be relating to Lagos as a city that is located on a different continent, as something having physical distance from me. Yet, when the stance that is grounded solely in geography is conceptually and experientially negated (dis-stanced), Lagos is brought close mentally or emotionally.
[8] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, 15-16; Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World,* 131.
[9] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology,* 31.
[10] Abraham Oghobase, personal communication, January 13, 2011. As people move into the city, they need to find places to live, to remake their homes and lives. But Lagos's infrastructure cannot keep up with the ever increasing demand for housing and jobs. Unsuspecting individuals purchase properties from seller's who have no legal right to the property. To prevent this scam, owners mark their buildings as "not for sale" (Amanda Carlson, personal communication, February 18, 2011).
[11] Abraham Oghobase, personal communication, January 13, 2011.
[12] See http://soundcloud.com/search?q[fulltext]=lagos+soundscapes. Accessed August 27, 2012. Hyperlink is courtesy of Emeka Ogboh, and used by permission.
[13] Demers, *Listening through the Noise*, 120.
[14] Demers, *Listening through the Noise*, 114, emphasis original.
[15] Space does not allow me to elaborate on the complexities of this as articulated by Dreyfus, Heidegger, or Malpas, and therefore this reading necessarily elides the larger implications of dis-stance for the way an individual relates personally to the world, and relating to the world in a more ontological sense.
[16] Demers, *Listening through the Noise*, 119.
[17] This placement was confirmed by Emeka Ogboh, personal communication, July 22, 2012.
[18] Voegelin, *Listening to Noise*, xii.

• Bibliography •

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Demers, Joanna. *Listening through the Noise: the Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World: a Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time, Division I. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

Enwezor, Okwui, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya, eds. *Under Seige: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002.

Friday, Jonathan. "Stillness Becoming: Reflections on Bazin, Barthes, and Photographic Stillness." In *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, edited by David Green and Joanna Lowry. 39-54. Brighton: Photoworks and Photoforum, 2006.

Lisle, Debbie. "The 'Potential Mobilities' of Photography." *M/C Journal* 12, no. 1 (2009). http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/125.

Lomax, Yve. "Thinking Stillness." In *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, edited by David Green and Joanna Lowry. 55-63. Brighton: Photoworks and Photoforum, 2006.

Malpas, Jeff. *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

——. "New Media, Cultural Heritage and the Sense of Place: Mapping the Conceptual Ground." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14, no. 3 (2008): 197-209.

Murphie, Andrew. "Be Still, Be Good, Be Cool: The Ambivalent Powers of Stillness in an Overactive World." *M/C Journal* 12, no. 1 (2009). http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/133.

Perez, Gilberto. "Atget's Stillness," *The Hudson Review* 36, no. 2 (1983), 328-337.

Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York: Continuum, 2010.

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

Boros, Diana. "Public Art as Aural Installation: Surprising Musical Intervention as Civic Rejuvenation in Urban Life." ***Evental Aesthetics*** **1, no. 3 (2012): 50-81.**

ABSTRACT

Surprising artistic interventions in the landscape of the public everyday are psychologically, socially, and politically beneficial to individuals as well as their communities. Such interventions enable their audiences to access moments of surprising inspiration, self-reflection, and revitalization. These spontaneous moments may offer access to the experience of distance from the rational "self," allowing the irrational and purely emotive that resides within all of us to assert itself. It is this sensual instinct that all we too frequently push aside, particularly in the public realm, for the sake of our responsibilities. Urban communities in particular are persistently accosted by visual and aural advertisements and consumerist lures, that further discourage individuals from accessing their non-rational selves. Yet, I argue that it would improve the health and vibrancy of our communal lives if we encountered among others in public, even for a moment, the strong feelings of sudden elation or confusion that we generally consider to be private. I also argue that an addition could be made to the already diverse oeuvre of artistic approaches that comprise the realm of "sound art" and that it may be termed "musical intervention art" – or, simply put, music played in a circumscribed area in the form of an outdoor installation, that is designed to accost, surprise, overwhelm, and through this, actively engage. This article will describe an imaginary example of musical installation art.

KEYWORDS

public art, self-awareness, artistic interventions, High Line, music

Public Art as Aural Installation: Surprising Musical Intervention as Civic Rejuvenation in Urban Life

Diana Boros

• The Need for Surprising Aesthetic Interventions in Public Urban Spaces •

Surprising creative interventions amid the business of daily life yield an important opportunity to all individuals: the opportunity to access an emotional, sensual, and spiritual self in the public realm, alongside other members of the community, rather than in private as is most often the case. Such public-space interventions encourage necessary pauses that lead first to spontaneous moments of too-rare stillness, then to connection with uncensored memories and buried emotions, and finally to reflection, self-discovery, and the accompanying disorienting yet revitalizing feelings. While surprising artistic interventions in daily life may include everything from an interactive performance that takes place amid a rush-hour crowd at a train station, to a passing car that has been decorated in an unusual, striking way, the key to the interventions under consideration here is that they are created apart from the needs of

the market. Such works seek to intervene in a daily life that is dominated by aesthetic experiences which are – however exciting or beautiful or even surprising they may be – primarily supportive not of individuals, but of the capitalist system.

Surprising artistic interventions in our most frequently traveled public spaces, and the aesthetic experiences they inspire, are distinguished from the purview of what thinkers from Henri Lefebvre to Yuriko Saito have called "everyday aesthetics." Everyday aesthetics calls attention to the possibility that we may experience aesthetically, and thus be significantly affected by, everything from standard-issue street signs or telephone poles to cafeteria-issued silverware or door handles. In this, it takes seriously all aesthetic experiences that do not occur in reaction to "fine art" as it is traditionally conceived. While the notion of everyday aesthetics is fundamental to what is being argued here, surprising creative interventions are, contrastingly, designed to shock, to obstruct, to interrupt, to disrupt, to disorder, and thus aggressively alter the everyday landscape.

Inspirational interventions in the landscape of the public everyday are psychologically, and ultimately socially and politically, beneficial to individuals as well as to their communities. They are valuable in that they enable people to more frequently access moments of surprising inspiration, self-reflection, and revitalization in public, especially in our busiest public places in which so many have become comfortable that they largely navigate their daily experiences "on autopilot." Contrastingly, in these spontaneous moments, akin to the disorientation we often feel when adjusting to foreign cultures and languages, people may experience a feeling of distance from the rational "self" that enables access to the irrational and purely emotive aspects that reside in all of us. It is this sensual instinct – i.e. pertaining to our raw, emotional senses – that we too frequently push aside, particularly in the public realm, for the sake of our schedules and responsibilities. This experience of "taking a pause" is often considered unnecessary in the practical sense. Yet I argue that it would improve upon the health and vibrancy of our communal lives if we encountered among others in public, even for a moment, the feelings of sudden elation or confusion that we generally consider to be private, but that so many humans have experienced.

More frequent opportunities for creativity, and the independent thinking that creative activity revitalizes within the individual, can increase our awareness of our selves and our surroundings, as well as our desire

and ability to engage more empathetically with those we walk amongst. Independent thought can indeed translate into deeper understanding of others. We typically distinguish ourselves from those with whom we share our communities according to such "external" characteristics as our occupations, our religions, and our wealth. But the more we are able to access ideas and feelings gleaned from within, from our natural, irrational instincts – our "inner" selves – the more that we can view others as similar to ourselves. It is in our instincts and emotions that we are most like other humans.

Much of the human desire to segregate and separate is borne of conceptions and impressions we have gained not only from the hierarchies of collective social life, but also from the values of capitalism. While any neighborhood would benefit from creative interventions, and rural life creates its own unique needs and concerns, urban communities are more persistently accosted with visual and aural advertisements and consumerist lures that further discourage individuals from accessing moments with their non-rational selves.

Such moments are simultaneously quiet (as in conversations with ourselves) yet stimulating, and function as a medium for revitalizing knowledge about oneself. Such increased self-awareness is vital to the development of an empowered and engaged individual, each of which is, in turn, a building block of an empowered and engaged public. I do not intend to argue that art is entirely redemptive and encourages only positive attributes. Rather, my argument is that powerful artistic experiences hold the potential to expand self-knowledge and thus enable liberation (from given ideas) and empowerment. This provides the possibility for the individual to become more aware of his or her own true self, as well as, therefore, increasingly open to, and interested in, connection with others and the spaces we all share.

This link between inner development of the individual and a more energetic public sphere goes far beyond the assertion that music can encourage productive emotions. While this is the first step in my argument, the key is that a "public" consists of individuals – many of whom, at least in the United States, are constrained by the kind of liberal self-interest that is encouraged by American democracy and the accompanying political culture.[1] This focus on the individual, and on "possessive individualism," provides a haven for a "lazy" public sphere in which meaningful interaction and debate are rare.[2] Capitalist pursuits tend

to emphasize work responsibilities, societal divisions along those lines, and material success. If more individuals could experience moments that are untouched by either the market or rationality, and where there is a concentrated focus on the senses and the needs of the "spirit," then individuals would be, at the very least, more equipped to approach the world in a manner attuned to needs that do not concern merely daily tasks, standard labels and distinctions. At most, individuals would gain genuine connection to a notion of self-interest that intrinsically includes an interest in the community.[3] Inner development does not directly give birth to more empathetic socialization, but it can pave the way to developing understandings of ourselves and the world that prioritize human emotions and associations which transcend the dictates of the market and simple self-interest.

Theoretically, frequent experience with a variety of public interventions may, over time, aid in the development of new "needs" within the individual and her community: specifically, creative, emotive, and sensual needs may gain priority over rational, market-sanctioned, and societally-approved needs. It is the hope of this author that at the very least, the presence of surprising artistic and sense-based interruptions of our city streets will combat some of the redundant advertisements, their unsolicited corporate "advice" that instructs us on how to amplify our looks or our lives through various products, and their societal "warnings" that implicitly teach us what is "sexy" or "normal," with which we are bombarded with every day in media-saturated, twenty-first-century urban life. Surprising artistic interventions may initially provoke the very same senses that advertising aims to tweak, but unique creative moments are more likely to guide you into your truly independent inner world, as they aim to be fresh, unusual, obtrusive, and thus more difficult to ignore. Surprising artistic experiences are intended to force you to think about the current moment, and the space, and yourself, in a more thoughtful way than is generally needed to filter through billboards and posters. It is also important to make the point that it is a different (and usually surprising) experience in and of itself to engage in a creative installation that you know serves no clear "purpose" in our market-based economy, that is clearly not persuading you to try anything that requires a purchase. This is valuable in and of itself.

By providing an outlet in open public space wherein one can indulge freely in emotion, individuals could momentarily encounter the vastly unexplored terrain of the inner self that may often be revealed through seeing, hearing, touching, even smelling or tasting, powerful stimuli. Thus,

creative experiments in public space enable simultaneous release and self-education within the individual. Our irrational and thus truly free responses to the various provocations of life are often repeatedly put on hold or left veiled, as contemporary society enables us to be quite successful without needing to feel those parts of ourselves that neither the market nor societal rules and ethics speak to. These inner realms – our uncensored and yet-to-be-ordered thoughts and feelings, values and ideas – are often ignited through aesthetic experience. When, for example, we stand in front of a breathtakingly sinuous sculpture that seems like it could bend before you, or hear the strains of a bittersweet melody, art can tug at those often unstirred nooks inside of ourselves which we subconsciously put on reserve so that we can engage our daily responsibilities and focus on our goals – which for most of us, tend to revolve around the ability to earn money, to keep a job, to buy a house, and other such financial markers of success.

Savvy marketing techniques and various forms of propaganda aim to tug at the very aspects of our inner selves that I am describing here. We know through historical events, as well as the seemingly immeasurable strength of our ever-growing consumer system, that these methods of persuasion are often fascinatingly influential on the human psyche. They are thus manipulations of our inner selves. Such powerful propaganda preys on the vulnerability of the parts of our personalities we believe to be most private, through both the natural excitement of inclusion and the power of want, by creating longings for certain goods and capabilities. The potency of the ostensibly non-threatening nature of mass opinion in American social life demonstrates this.

Popular opinion, with its elusive boundaries and far-reaching tentacles, is a form of both marketing and propaganda rolled into one. It is far too easy to access a watered-down understanding of powerful emotions, of our needs and desires, when it is thrust at us in countless ways – from television commercials to the romantic comedies of Hollywood – in contemporary life. It is much more difficult, and there often seems little immediate reason, to take the time and energy to attempt to ascertain our own true passions. It is in fact not a mere manipulation of emotion that accesses our true "inner" selves but rather sensual (of the body), and spiritual (of the ever indefinable "spirit") experiences – particularly when such experiences are surprising – that intervene in our quotidian emotional lives and reveal a more complicated, more thrillingly exhausting inner world.

Being struck by unfiltered emotions that have yet to be understood can be temporarily debilitating, and it can be vividly exhilarating, but it is always a rare opportunity for seeing the world anew. When surprising collisions with beautiful art set a light to such powerful emotions, it can overtake us so suddenly that we are literally unable to control it; we may feel uncomfortable or confused, as well as perhaps sweaty or red in the face. At some point or another, we have all been overcome by emotion in a way that has forced us to shield our face from others, or run to the nearest bathroom to throw cold water on our hot skin. It is this sort of temporary loss of control that is the vital desired response to public experiments with creative stimuli, and a valuable "good" in the creation of self-aware individuals and publics. It is not that, for example, beautiful music in public is intended to bring tears to all who hear it, although this may happen, but rather that a public intervention employing music would hopefully not be able to be ignored in the way that we are so easily able to avoid and push into the background so much of urban noise.

Instead, the force of an aesthetic moment in "grabbing" you as you go about a "regular" day could provide you a potential moment of true distraction, a private world of raw emotion experienced among so many others in the streets. This enables a chance to feel deeply, suddenly and without explicit preparation, unlike the planning for emotion that often takes place when attending a wedding or a funeral, or a spiritual or religious place of worship or contemplation, or even a museum exhibit or concert. It is key that we are able to come into contact with such out-of-place collective opportunities for the very private disorienting feelings of joy and pain and suffering and loss that are largely universal to all humans. These sorts of public experiences will enable interaction and understanding among a diversity of urban inhabitants who share city streets, but often not much else.

Thomas L. Friedman's recent op-ed in *The New York Times*, entitled "This Column is Not Sponsored by Anyone," called attention to the increasing ways in which our everyday lives and its institutions are decorated with corporate logos. This is an unfortunate truth all across America as well as the globalized world, but is even more true in urban contexts where the influx of both information and various forms of advertising is far more frequent and densely situated than it is in suburban and especially rural environments. Friedman discusses Michael Sandel's new book, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets,* and its astute reminder that markets are not neutral beasts determined simply by pure economic forces, but are rather powerful and elusive mechanisms that

play a considerable role in our public spaces, interactions, and relationships.[4]

Friedman writes that:

> Throughout our society, we are losing the places and institutions that used to bring people together from different walks of life. Sandel calls this the "skyboxification of American life," and it is troubling. Unless the rich and poor encounter one another in everyday life, it is hard to think of ourselves as engaged in a common project. At a time when to fix our society we need to do big, hard things together, the marketization of public life becomes one more thing pulling us apart.[5]

In other words, we should be working together on immense projects like seeking ways to fix the inequalities in our society and the ongoing threats to our environment. The need to accomplish those universal goals becomes even more an uphill battle when citizens, on both the local and global levels, fail to easily identify themselves with a diversity of others. This is exacerbated by the leveling quality, or the lack of creativity and independent thought, encouraged by corporate advertising.

"Skyboxification" refers to the ways in which even widely-appealing public activities, like attending a sporting event in America, have become sites of de facto segregation between the more and less privileged segments of society – the 1% sits in the skybox, while the rest of us shiver or bake in the outdoor elements. As we separate into classes in even the most theoretically democratic of public spaces, it becomes even more difficult to increase vibrant connectivity – that enables, or at least paves the possibility for, a desire for, discussion, and compromise within the public realm.

What Friedman and Sandel call attention to here is not only the actual income inequalities between classes that are by all accounts growing steadily in the United States, but also the psychological, emotional, and ultimately political divide that this creates among a diverse public. If our public spaces are becoming less vibrant for exchange and interaction, then it would be greatly beneficial to renovate our communal environments so that they can transcend the stifling economic realities of 2012 and beyond, and encourage dynamic conversations and activities to flourish on our streets and in our parks.

Sandel's explanation for why consumerism has enveloped even the most intimate or traditionally civic-centered activities concerns the results of the Cold War, Friedman argues. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the consummate end to both the ideology and practice of communism in most parts of the world, it seemed in the popular mind that capitalism had prevailed and with it, the accompanying belief that market forces could and should determine and create societal good. Friedman also brings our attention to Sandel's assessment of the particularly disturbing trend that this market-centered development tends to now begin at a young impressionable age, "market values are crowding out civic practices. When public schools are plastered with commercial advertising, they teach students to be consumers rather than citizens."

I argued above that creative experience and independent thought is required in order to question the ever-more-natural-seeming inequalities and market virtues of contemporary popular life. In addition, diverse and interactive social activities are the foundation for individual interest in community life and democratic life. One such activity can be seen in what Jacques Rancière terms "relational art." Rancière's definition of politics – culled from a contemplation of the role of aesthetics in public life – is useful here:

> In "relational" art, the construction of an undecided and ephemeral situation enjoins a displacement of perception, a passage from the status of spectator to that of actor, and a reconfiguration of places. In both cases, the specificity of art consists in bringing about a reframing of material and symbolic space. And it is in this way that art bears upon politics. Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience...[6]

Relational art, also termed relational aesthetics, and identified as such by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics*, refers to an approach to art practice that experiments with creating active environments that viewers can participate in, rather than objects which the viewer merely looks at. Practitioners of relational art attempt to create a communal atmosphere through the design of the artwork so that the boundary between creator and observer is reduced or eliminated. Relational art is in this sense inherently political and democratic in that it encourages any potential audience to become a decisive actor – an active participant rather than a passive observer. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*

(2004), Rancière argues that art is intrinsically political. He elucidates how both art and politics – our collective lives in the public – create social environments; they are forces that shape how we look at our world, and how one can interact within it. He believes fundamentally in a radical aesthetics, according to which we can transform ourselves as well as our everyday realities through artistic experience.

If indeed politics concerns primarily the arrangement of public spaces and institutions, the relationships between them, and the relationships between all of us who inhabit and experience them, then the feelings we access in public spaces are vitally important to healthy political life. Rancière believes that aesthetics that engage individuals and the spaces in which they live and interact, hold valuable potential for initiating change within our understanding of the political. Friedman concludes his own thoughts with Sandel's main lesson in navigating and revitalizing the contemporary, advertising-saturated public landscape: "Democracy does not require perfect equality, but it does require that citizens share in a common life...For this is how we learn to negotiate and abide our differences, and how we come to care for the common good."[7]

To aid in envisioning the power of a surprising artistic intervention, the last section of this paper provides a detailed example of an imagined artistic intervention in urban public space that uses particular pieces of music, arranged in the overlapping manner of a collage, to access the powerful emotions that all aesthetic experiences have the potential to evoke.[8] The aim of this imaginary sound artwork, and others like it, is to first arrest passers-by and then encourage them to feel deeply amid many others listening to the same musical sounds. This would be achieved through the creation of a compressed, encompassing environment within a larger outdoor area. Generally speaking, music that is played in public spaces is intended not to extract listeners to a "private world" that encourages alertness to one's own ideas and desires, but to put them in the mood to buy various commercial items or to subdue them while they wait for an appointment. But someone walking through an outdoor installation such as I have proposed, where the need to sell and persuade is clearly absent, would be able to more likely feel as though they have entered a new land where music suddenly and seemingly effortlessly drapes over them, abruptly heightening sensations and, accordingly, cognizance of oneself. Such occurrences would potentially aid urban dwellers in experiencing moments of self-awareness in public space.

It should be noted that what is argued here is not that only public interventionist art can achieve the goal of spontaneously, deeply, engaging people in public spaces, or that the imaginary project I will propose is the best way to achieve this goal. Rather, the most valuable idea put forward here is that creativity can provide us access to our inner terrains – those realms that are untouched by logical processing and the unavoidable rational order of civilized daily life. As we have all experienced after a moment of spiritual revelation, or a moment of awe in the vastness of nature, or when encountering a buried recollection, or having a good cry after a loss or disappointment, or a sweaty celebration filled with laughter and dance, strong feelings of the private self can awaken, revitalize, and renew. It is the importance of encouraging these feelings that I want to emphasize here. There are certainly many approaches to inspiring aesthetic experiences and the accompanying independent thought they can yield, and public art is only one of these avenues. I highlight it here as a way to democratically confront people amid the business of everyday life with opportunities for rejuvenation through connection with the sensual, the purely emotive, the abstract, the truly free.

• How Public Spaces can be Sources of Sensual and Spiritual Awareness •

While considering the need to increase both self-awareness and communal connectivity in our urban public spaces, I came across a gem of an article in the travel section of *The New York Times*: "Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer." In this piece, Eric Weiner, author of *Man Seeks God: My Flirtations With the Divine,*[9] describes the feeling of losing oneself in the quiet, grandeur, or inarticulable "spirit" of a physical space, and identifies such an experience with the discovery of a "thin place."[10] The article's primary message, developed in the context of travel and the disorientation often produced by temporary displacement from the comfort of the everyday, spoke to me of feelings that we can encounter most anywhere, not only on distant journeys. I believe these feelings are of great importance to the invigoration and development of the public sphere.

A public is built first on individual behaviors and passions, and second on the desire and ability of those individuals to interact often and in

a variety of ways. The public , viewed as a complex and active machine, is essentially tantamount to the individuals who live in it and develop its intricacies. While collective phenomena such as historical narratives and ideologies are often the noticeable "costume" of a public, it is the sweat and tears of those wearing that clothing that truly develops a public pumping with activity. In other words, just as a relationship is made stronger through the actions that result from love, not simply through its verbal profession, a public must be reborn often and consistently through individual behaviors and interactions.

The more that individuals can relate with energy to a space, and move through a space with their daily blinders lifted, keenly aware of their own bodies, their movements in space, their every sensation, every spark of emotion, the more that public spaces can become less "thick" in Weiner's terms, and increasingly "thinner" for a greater diversity of people. "Thinness" conveys a sense of lightness – a feeling that you have suddenly lifted a load off of your shoulders as you take a breath from the "thickness" of the everyday world and encounter yourself in a slower, more tactile and cognizant way. In other words, thin experience equates to a spiritual experience that is encouraged or brought on by physical space. When a public space becomes something we cannot simply run or drift through, cannot easily relegate its structures and amenities to a view through logistical lens, cannot just encounter without becoming alert to our presence within that space, then that communal place has gained the ability to distract us, to engage us, to temporarily wake us from our usual responses and thought processes.

One of Weiner's key points is that thin places are not always obviously identifiable. They can appear in the most surprising locales, and one person can experience "thinness" where another may fail to find it. Still, some places – whether overtly "spiritual" or overtly not so – are almost universally experienced in such an arresting manner. Places like this might include the Wailing Wall, or Mecca, or St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, or quite differently, the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. Still, there will always be some surprising places that catch us completely off guard in their ability to strike us with a sharp prick of sensation, to shake us up, to make us want to sit and think and stay. Nonetheless, well-known public spaces that are not overtly spiritual by design can and should be made to be more supportive and encouraging of "thin" occurrences. This could potentially be achieved through creative interventions in such places. "Thin" experiences in "thin" places make us temporarily and spontaneously

leave our rational selves. In the ensuing limbo between pure passion and logical understanding, we forget a little bit about who we are in our market-and schedule-dominated everyday lives, and learn more about who we are when suspended from the defining pressures of our rational goals and desires.

Weiner reminds us that a "thin" place is encountered organically, and often by accident. It is not a rational experience. He argues that when we do experience such intangible "thinness," we become momentarily disoriented; we may forget where we are, feel a disarming but often fulfilling change in our moods and attitudes, and otherwise replace our routine and characteristic behaviors with a fresh approach to the world around us, and to our role in it. Weiner attempts to define the slippery outlines of what he terms such a "thin place":

> I'm drawn to places that beguile and inspire, sedate and stir, places where, for a few blissful moments I loosen my death grip on life, and can breathe again. It turns out these destinations have a name: thin places...They are locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we're able to catch glimpses of the...transcendent or, as I like to think of it, the Infinite Whatever.[11]

The potential for us to find such a feeling of disorientation and invigoration without having to leave for a distant unknown land, but rather among the landmarks of our daily responsibilities, can yield great rewards in the revitalization of our public lives. The transcendence that Weiner finds in thin places equates to the self-knowledge (learning about who we are) that, I argue, one locates in thin places. Although transcendence commonly describes something far beyond, whereas connection to our senses and emotions concerns realms deep within the individual, the feelings yielded are parallel. Looking far beyond the world is in at least one important sense the same as looking deep within oneself. Whether we are looking "up" (beyond earthly conditions) or "down" (beyond earthly reason), the key is that we are temporarily "leaving" the confines of civilized, material life.

The experience of "thin" places is akin to the experience of surprising artistic intervention. Moments like these (which can be brought on by certain places or riveting artistic moments, as well as by a vast diversity of other experiences) encourage us to become disoriented, and in this, to take the time to think more deeply and thus more independently.

As we slow down and engage with our inner selves (we transcend the veil of civilization that drapes over our emotions), rather than take for granted who we are already established to be among our families, neighbors, and at work, we may gain increased ability to interact empathetically with other people. Once the labels are shed, and we can feel, at least for a moment, without the burden of the rational knowledge of who we are in the world, we can recognize our most base and vulnerable qualities and thus our inherent connectedness to others.

Weiner also points to the paradox of spiritual experience – however we may define it: theoretically we may experience the spiritual anywhere and anytime, yet we usually pursue it in certain expected places during certain expected rituals. It would be beneficial to more actively encourage spontaneous spiritual moments in our everyday lives as these temporary transcendences are a source of knowledge for a more empowered populace that is the foundation to a vibrant and inclusive public sphere.

Spiritual moments in the sense described here can be accessed through powerful aesthetic experiences. In the early twentieth century, John Dewey argued that we can only understand the nature of aesthetic experience by first considering those observations, feelings, and interactions that inspire the creation of art in the first place. Art is inspired by our universal human experiences; the tools and materials of artworks are sourced from life itself – and especially those aspects of life that we share across all cultural boundaries. In line with Aristotle who famously declared in his Politics that man is by nature political, Dewey adds that human experience is inherently social: "the material of aesthetic experience in being human – human in connection with the nature of which it is a part – is social. Aesthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization, a means of promoting its development..."[12] The first aim of engagement with art is solitary experience with "our spiritual selves." Yet, as I argued in the previous section, this very much supports what Dewey believes to be the ultimate goal of art: to incite fulfilling social interactions.

Weiner's attempt to "loosen his grip on life" counterintuitively supports the importance of engaging life as it demonstrates how vital it is for all individuals to experience such an interruption of conscious daily life, in order to access the inner subconscious self. Our "inner" selves to which I refer here are composed of a unified tension between the spiritual (as opposed to the material) and sensual (as opposed to the rational), thus our

most inner beings can be ignited by such "spiritual" moments. Although rationality is a part of our inner worlds, it is the realm most emphasized and revered in society, and thus it has become "external," and is the least in need of reawakening or strengthening.

Through public art interventions, we can encourage such "thin" experiences that enhance our self-knowledge. Such awareness of one's own true needs and emotions ultimately enables a richer understanding of the plight of others, and thus a more satisfying communal existence. Artistic interventions interrupt our earthly lives in order to provide an opportunity to look at our daily choices from a distanced vantage point. There is great potential that exists for public spaces – even those most utilitarian or disregarded – if experiments with public art are able to breathe new energy and disorientating capabilities into them.

• Musical Intervention in Public Life: Sound Art •

A surprising joyful intervention in the experience of walking through a public space would help to increase the access to a spiritual, sensual, and emotional life within the expected and pragmatic everyday of our public. I have argued that this becomes even more beneficial to community building in increasingly advertising-filled visual landscapes, especially our urban centers. A musical intervention is an interesting variety to consider for several reasons. First, it is least often encountered in the ever-growing movement in public art design, which is still most commonly characterized by freestanding sculptures and performance-based works. Second, the fact that surprising musical public art is not an everyday experience provides it the ability to function even more effectively as a truly interventionist work that is intended to actually confront passers-by, not simply decorate or emphasize our shared spaces. Third, sound, with its ability to literally wrap around you like a blanket, sometimes stifling, while other times welcome and cozy, is inherently more difficult to ignore or avoid than a sculpture in a park or square that we can simply turn our eyes away from. This is particularly true for urban hubs and especially for inhabitants of cities like New York, who are provided with enough regular appearances of public art that it becomes more and more difficult to catch them off guard and provide an experience that truly jolts them awake. It is

worth examining such a public's reaction to an unexpected musical journey encountered in a restricted section of the public outdoors.

A surprising musical intervention could be categorized under the genre of what many call "sound art." What some musicologists have termed "sound art" is by nature a cross-disciplinary endeavor, and thus does not fit neatly into either the musical or fine art realms.[13] It most commonly, and narrowly, refers to sound sculptures, sound installations, and sound happenings or events, though it may also refer to electronic and experimental music of all kinds. Although many in the Western tradition, including the Dadaists and the Surrealists, have long experimented with sound art, the genre developed its legs among the performance and installation art ideas of the heady 1960s,[14] and was formally designated as "sound art" by composer and artist Dan Lander in the mid-1980s.[15]

The writer and sound artist Alan Licht argues that sound art can be divided into three basic categories: an installation of a sound environment that is able to be put on exhibit, and in that sense, treated just as a visual work of art would be; a sculpture that produces sound; and sound created by visual artists that complements their visual art.[16] He views sound art as fine art made with sound, but sound that is not organized in a melodic fashion like music. However, this thesis has been importantly refuted by some contemporary theorists. John Cage famously argued that all sounds are music, and I too struggle with accepting a strict distinction between music and sound art, as so much of "experimental" music is not "melodic" or linearly organized. Joanna Demers argues convincingly for a different point of view in her book *Listening Through the Noise*. She examines the relations between electronic music and sound art and demonstrates through example that there is considerable reason to doubt a true artistic division between the two. She does, though, agree with Licht that sound art and experimental music are not entirely identical; still, many artists of the form view their own works as both music and sound sculpture, and thus consider them to be at least similar and often tantamount.[17]

Leigh Landy's work on sound art led him to argue that the widely disparate field that examines sound as art uses terms that are less than useful, and often even confusing and misleading. Thus he chooses to refer to much of the practices in this realm- where the basis of the music (or art) is the sound, not musical notes- as "sound-based music."[18] He argues that all sound-based art is also, accordingly, sound-based music. Some sound artists believe that sound should paint an abstract picture, while

others argue that sound is figurative and thus emblematic of ideas in the world. Brandon LaBelle argues that Cage played a major role in the movement in experimental music that has shifted from the musical to what he calls the "extra-musical." This, he explains, "can be thought of as a shift away "from music and toward sound, and, more important, from the symbolic and representational (music) to the phenomenal and nonrepresentational (sound)."[19] The imagined artwork I attempt to bring to life in the last section of this article functions on this vibrant borderline between representational music and nonrepresentational sound. The imagined project aims to temporarily disconnect participants from their regular perspectives so that they can transcend earthly concerns and gain energy for communal life through the relief and contemplation provided by the aesthetic experience. It attempts to disrupt and engage through both the overwhelming inclusion that loud compressed sound can provide, as well as through the emotional triggers that more traditional music can often offer.

Landy discusses how some varieties of sound art pursue connections between art and everyday life by employing sounds familiar from daily life. In this way, everyday sounds, taken from our public spaces, are reappropriated and reshaped. In a complementary point, LaBelle argues that sound and space have a particularly vibrant connection with one another. Sound has the capacity to shape and alter our attentiveness to physical space, and our navigation of the situations bubbling around us. Although how music is interpreted – and consequently the effects of music – depends on the concrete circumstances of the individual listener, music retains the potential to transport the listener by enabling a deep reflection and a transcendence of both time and reason: "Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates; it leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonizes and traumatizes; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating. It seemingly eludes definition, while having profound effect."[20] This exemplifies the way in which sound installation creates relational interactive artistic experience. Whether music invites you to gyrate your hips, retreat to a private corner, or both, it engages with our uncensored selves through its often unavoidable tickling of the senses.

Sound is inherently relational without the need to correlate sound to any image or set of images. A show titled "Sound/Art," curated by William Hellermann, was presented at The Sculpture Center in New York City in 1983. Art historian Don Goddard, in that show's catalogue essay, argued that:

> It may be that sound art adheres to curator Hellermann's perception that "hearing is another form of seeing," that sound has meaning only when its connection with an image is understood...The conjunction of sound and image insists on the engagement of the viewer, forcing participation in real space and concrete, responsive thought rather than illusionary space and thought.[21]

This argument, that sound must connect with an image in a conscious, rational way in order to produce meaning, is misleading in several ways. To connect sounds with a visual story is a reasonable approach to both education and art, but it neglects so much of the natural power of sounds to push us through a narrative we can't quite understand – one that does not necessarily require a beginning or an end, but rather an influx of thrilling or debilitating emotion.

Every day, we are flooded with ample opportunity for "concrete, responsive thought." We are required to engage in such deductions in order to achieve success in our many rationally driven endeavors. It is not reasoned experiences that we are generally lacking in our hyper-productive twenty-first century. Our visual worlds are dominated by the rational, as to see is primarily a cognitive process of aligning colors and shapes with learned concepts. In contrast to this, hearing music is rather another form of feeling.

Since 1974, Bill Fontana's art practice has focused on the creation of aesthetic experiences through urban sound sculptures made for site-specific locations all around the world. He argues that moving the presence of a sound or a series of sounds from one ecosystem to another[22] provides them new definition, a reborn existence: "I began to realize that the relocation of an ambient sound source within a new context would alter radically the acoustic meaning of the ambient sound source...the act of placing this sound would have considerable aesthetic importance."[23] It is this idea that surprising musical interventions in public outdoor space pursue, to create a spontaneous and invasive concert hall in an unexpected place.

Fontana's contemporary, Max Neuhaus, also worked with sound installations in public urban spaces, in notable pieces like *Drive In Music* (1967), *Times Square* (1977), and *New Work (Underground)* (1978). Early in his practice he made the conscious move to create his

compositions in public settings in order to reach, "the uninitiated, in the time of their movements, within the spaces of the everyday."[24] Both Fontana and Neuhaus experimented with the decontextualization of sound and the unusual placement of sounds within urban landscapes. Although their work is key to understanding the development of both sound art and public art practice, both of their approaches centered on placing ambient sounds in various nooks (often underneath the ground). The effect is that people walk over and around a continuously emanating sound. It may certainly confuse them or thrill them, but ambient sound reflects the many noises of city life, from the screech of brakes to the whir of the subway. The goal of the imaginary sound installation that I describe below is to directly oppose the hum of the city with a collage of musical pieces one would likely not hear on a city street.

The experience of unassumingly walking along and suddenly being enveloped by beautifully composed harmonies while still inevitably entrenched in the many layers of urban noise that are unavoidable when stepping outside in a bustling city, juxtaposes the noises of the everyday – the ones we all train ourselves to ignore and override to some degree – with the strains of orchestral melodies that we usually hear either in private or in concert halls. "Collage...combines the foreignness of aesthetic experience with the becoming-art of ordinary life. Collage can be realized as the pure encounter between heterogeneous elements..."[25] Rancière's point here exemplifies the goals of creative intervention projects such as the one I will describe. These spontaneous and unexpectedly inspired moments are intended to conflict with the rest of the urban happenings surrounding them. They are designed to be an intrusion, not a subtle layer of sound to add to the many already in existence. They inject the normal and commonplace with the unusual and intriguing so that one is beckoned to take note, to engage, to participate more actively and consciously, even in their most habitual environments. Too often we are merely passively engaged in the activity of our shared public spaces, missing opportunities for both internal and societal development, and taking our collective interactions for granted: "many do not actively listen...often turning the musical product into...background music. Music becomes a pacing device, a screen to block out noises of the environment."[26] Partly to combat this concern, I aim to pursue public installations using sound that are designed to conflict with, and thus stand apart from the many sounds of daily life. I would like to include within an understanding of sound art, the quite simple notion of playing and hearing melodic music in shared public spaces. While I would aim to include

interventionist projects that use music in public spaces within the realm of public sound art, perhaps it would be both more useful to term the sort of interruption that the project described below exemplifies, "musical intervention art."

In contrast, active participation encourages independent thought within the individual and thus is part of the pursuit of an increased sense of true freedom in our contemporary world, which is dominated by commerce and the power of popular opinion. It is key that this sort of intervention is made available in our most highly-traveled public outdoor circumstances. Public art in the sense that I mean here must truly be "public" in that it should not privilege those who either already regularly engage with art, or those who have the free time to explore unique projects in out of the way (though technically public) places. These sorts of interventions should easily complement diverse paths in the daily rush of life.

• Case Study: Public Sound Installations on New York City's High Line •

In contemplating an imagined example of a surprising artistic intervention that could be easily visualized by readers, I came to the choice of a musical project in a newly revitalized, formerly abandoned chunk of public land that is of such unique dimensions that it would likely stand out in the mind.

New York City, and in particular Manhattan, as it is a densely-developed and aggressively-populated community with strict boundaries of water that encapsulate it, is composed of a largely unrelenting grid that leaves little space for the creation of new urban architectural opportunities such as public squares. As a result, city developers and activists have in recent years approached the issue of new public spaces with heightened creativity. Among other projects in Manhattan, the last decade has seen the renovation of the Broadway intersection of Times Square into a pedestrian-only nexus in 2009, the rebirth of Governors Island into a mecca for both arts and recreation in 2010, and, also in 2009, the facelift for an abandoned stretch of railroad track on the far west side of the island into the vibrant and uniquely shaped elevated space that is now known as the High Line.

The High Line is a mile-long park and walking area, a unique strip of public land resembling an elevated concrete boardwalk, built on the neglected remains of a former railway trestle along the lower west side of Manhattan between 10th and 11th Avenues.[27] The original track of the New York Central Railroad had been built in the 1930s and closed in 1980, after which it was abandoned and later healthily overgrown into an urban jungle of sorts.[28] By the 1990s, what many considered a useless eyesore, more adventurous others enjoyed as a playland for urban experiments and explorations.

Under threat of the demolition of the High Line, the non-profit Friends of the High Line was formed in 1999 by local residents Joshua David and Robert Hammond, who fought for the area to be preserved and transformed into an inviting public space.[29] The first and southern section of the park, from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street, officially opened as a city park on June 9, 2009. Almost exactly two years later, on June 8, 2011, the second High Line section from West 20th Street to West 30th Street was revealed and opened.[30] Friends of the High Line work with High Line Art (founded in 2009) to fill the various nooks of this designated strolling area with interesting artistic and environmental stimulus. High Line Art curates this outdoor museum of sorts with frequent site-specific commissions as well as performances and videos projected onto the walls of neighboring buildings.

I recently spent some time observing the goings-on in this relatively new public space. I witnessed the interaction between the space and the people experiencing it, the interactions among the people as they strolled or lounged, and the various artworks and creative architectural features that the unique space had to offer. Along with the commissioned works that are described below, there were also a couple of grassroots creative interventions around the High Line's entrances to the street below that served to further enliven the area. I began to think about the many possibilities for intervention in this space through music, and specifically about the potential for a public sound project that would use outdoor speakers hidden on the ground and among surrounding walls to produce a collage of carefully chosen musical pieces that would unfold one after the other like a collapsing row of dominos within a tightly-restricted portion of the walkway.

Detailed below are several recent public artworks created in New York City that were based on the ability of sound to captivate and transport. Perhaps the one that stands out the most is Stephen Vitiello's *A*

Bell for Every Minute. This project was initiated in 2011, commissioned for the High Line, and curated by Meredith Johnson of Creative Time, the New York City public art organization. It was installed along the 14th Street Passage, a semi-enclosed tunnel that runs between West 13th and West 14th Streets, on June 23, 2010 and remained in place until June 20, 2011. Vitiello recorded sounds of various and widely diverse bells from all over New York City and a few more from just beyond its boundaries. He documented many interesting bells, from the New York Stock Exchange bell to the United Nations' Peace bell to more quotidian bells like those of diners, churches, and even bicycles.

Vitiello wanted to use bells as a way to encompass the entirety of the city within one site-specific installation. He focused on bells as they work to punctuate the events of our daily lives – they mark celebration as well as emergency, beginnings as well as endings. High Line Art describes the project in more detail on their website:

> During park hours an individual bell will ring each minute from speakers placed throughout the tunnel, the overtones fading out as the next bell begins. A chorus of the selected bells will play at the top of each hour, filling the space. The sounds will be represented on a physical sound map that identifies the location of each bell, allowing the listener to follow the geographic journey of the recordings. Collectively, the bells are a microcosm of the urban landscape as they relate to the sounds captured throughout the daily life in New York City. The site, much like a bell tower, becomes activated by the composition, inviting the passerby to engage with the High Line and its connection to the city around it.[31]

Julianne Swartz's sound installation, *Digital Empathy* (installed at various points along the High Line between June 8, 2011 and June 1, 2012), is unique in that it actually speaks directly to High Line visitors. According to their site,

> At some sites, computer-generated voices speak messages of concern, support, and love, intermingled with pragmatic information. In other sites, those same digitized voices recite poetry and sing love songs to park visitors. Installed in 11 different locations throughout the park, the sound is transmitted through the park's bathroom sinks, water fountains, and elevators. These sites are not only unexpected places in which to encounter public art, they are places designed for individuals or small numbers of people, allowing for intimate encounters within an otherwise sprawling, communal space.[32]

A parallel example of a public art endeavor on the High Line that does not make use of sound but does employ the power of surprising intervention in unique fashion is Kim Beck's work. In October 2011, she used a skywriter to write messages in the open sky above the High Line that she gleaned from advertising signs around New York City. She filled the open-air canvas with common phrases that work to persuade the consumer to take notice such as "Last Chance" or "Now Open." Both the fact that these expressions were decontextualized from their capitalist purposes into open-ended statements without clear meanings, and the fact that they temporarily "hung" in the sky above the fury of everyday life, created ample opportunity for contemplation, both of our everyday language, and of the processes of advertising and the market in general. This work reflects the sort of surprising interruption – albeit via "falling" words rather than sounds – of the ordinary landscape I am arguing is most supportive of reinvigorating passers-by in busy cities.

• An Imagined Musical Intervention in Public Urban Space on NYC's High Line •

I now ask my readers to allow me to take them along on a journey into the imagined surprising musical intervention to which I have previously made reference. The setting is a weekday afternoon in New York City, lower West side, sprawling formerly industrial avenues, the Hudson just beyond, and you have decided to enjoy your lunchtime sandwich on a bench situated on the perimeters of the newly opened elevated street near your office. Or perhaps even more easy to imagine in our never-enough-hours-in-the-day world, think of briskly walking along the carefully designed concrete promenade, avoiding the heavy fumes of the traffic in the street below, breezing through while running late to an appointment. You are checking your texts or making hurried plans on the phone, when suddenly, at first almost imperceptibly, you hear the first striking notes of a melancholy musical tune from an indiscernible nearby source. The volume level of the grand bittersweet music is far beyond that of a single street musician or even a roaming band. The music suddenly fills the air around you, forcing you to consciously acknowledge its presence.

As you walk, the music swells and fills the space around you and you feel transported, completely enveloped and warmed by the sounds, jolted from your momentary concerns and routines, from your ordinarily reserved demeanor on such a busy public walkway. As you start to pay attention, to really hear it, and you continue to walk along as you were – though now more slowly, curiosity pacing you – the envelopment will slowly loosen its grip and the sounds become softer and more distanced. Just as the piece of music you had just started to become accustomed to, fades back into the invisible record player of the earth and sky, another piece, again noticeably lilting with pain and hope, emerges from the untouchable walls of sound around you.

As reflection on the musical moment just passing could start to tweak your mind – as we are always desperate to process and organize – the new sounds begin to tickle your ears and you are back in the sensual grip of emotions and dreams. The crescendo of the next piece quickly fills your immediate environment, and as you walk, the journey that you didn't immediately realize had begun immerses you in the sensuality of the music. This process of blooming music that is rapidly followed by a fade out and then another bloom would, in this particular example, happen three times within a distance approximately equivalent to one city block.

I imagine that each piece of music would play for around three minutes. The idea is for the pieces of music to be just long enough to draw you into a moment, but just short enough that you can hardly become too used to it before it fades. Based on my own experiments, I have concluded that the use of three-minute pieces is one way to achieve this effect. The music would be intended to play through the air via hidden speakers placed both high and low. It would be designed to feel as though beautiful sounds were playing mystically from the insides of the earth and the tears of the clouds, growing heavier and closer, becoming almost tactile before receding back into the ground again.

One could choose to walk back and explore the musical tunnel in whatever direction they desire. They could choose a moment – the points along the walkway where each of the pieces of music are playing at their loudest – and go back to stand or sit there. Or they could walk through it again in reverse so that the sounds will lead into each other in an inverse fashion, or walk back and forth rapidly to again hear the musical installation in yet a new way.

Imagine that the sequence of musical interventions would consist of three short pieces, heard separately yet also together, with one fading out as the next one begins, leaving brief overlapping cacophonies. The pieces chosen for this example are famous works with which many listeners throughout history have claimed strong connections. A wide variety of combinations of musical pieces would work, with each set of pieces creating its own unique atmosphere. For this exercise, imagine that the first piece (or the last, however you may approach the installation) is the oft-covered song "Gloomy Sunday."[33] The version that I think of for this public sound project is the original "*Szomorú Vasárnap*," as heart-wrenchingly sung in Hungarian by Pál Kalmár. This piece is about two minutes and forty-eight seconds long. It became colloquially known early in its existence as "The Hungarian Suicide Song." It gained its infamous reputation after a high number of people committed suicide, usually jumping to their deaths, after or during listening to the song.

This song would be followed by the prelude from Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suite No. 1. Composed in the early 1700s, this intimate baroque piece embraces the uniquely personified voice of the unaccompanied cello, and I imagine a version played by Yo-Yo Ma. The last piece would be the *duettino sull'aria* from the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*, composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. A short duet of tangled passionate voices that blend in and out of each other, this piece has been performed beautifully by many over the years, but I hear in my mind the version performed by the Berlin Choir and Orchestra. This project could be installed and "performed" using a wide variety of musical works. The three pieces selected and described here are only one possible iteration of this potential project. Many interesting choices could be made in picking music that either works well together (similar genre and or style), or noticeably does not. Each set of potential choices would form their own unique collage, and thus experience.

The idea behind this imagined outdoor installation would be to create three separate, and concurrently one overarching, "self-less" moment(s) where the individual is drawn into their irrational and sensual unconscious. This would combine for an intended overall experience of release and rejuvenation through sharpened emotion. Emerging from the sensory overload of this musical tunnel, one is likely to feel more keenly aware of the relative silence of our public spaces, and at the same time, more alert to the musical sounds of the everyday. This installation relies on drawing you into a tunnel of collaged musical pieces, on pulling you away from the music of every day, which includes music emanating from

cars, the sounds of the cars themselves. The way that good music can make you cry, and make you dance, and shake with stirred memories, comes from the momentary leaving of our reasoned understanding of self and the world, and the concurrent immersion into the emotional abyss we all contain yet consistently push away for the sake of a calm, productive daily existence.

This project also highlights an unavoidable condition of contemporary life – that anyone can be listening to a powerful piece of music at any time, on a variety of personal technology equipment, without ever allowing those who share the public outdoors with them, to indulge with them. In those moments, individuals are having a personal experience among unaware others. Within the realm of the environment that this project constructs, individuals would be able to take part in a personal musical experience alongside others also engaging in a similar personal musical experience. All would be reacting to the same musical creations, in their own way but in an also inherently interactive way as they would likely not be alone. Just to be in the near presence of other warm bodies in a public outdoor space, even if not actively and productively engaging with them, is a substantively different experience from being alone and in private. This is important to one's awareness of sharing space with others. Just as the aim of the music employed is to serve as a contrast to the din of city life, the secondary purpose of the project's public-ness (the first being that public placement enables democratic access to the experience) is to encourage us to feel in private ways among those we do not personally know but yet with whom we share our community. This may often be viewed as undesirable or intimidating. In this sense, the work encourages not only new understandings of our selves, but also new relationships to fellow inhabitants, without the need to even exchange words.

People would be able to see each other, would be physically standing and walking and sitting among each other in a relatively confined street space. Imagined as a collection of private moments, individuals may naturally react to others, and be inspired by others and their reactions. They will be together in their concurrent personal experiences, and thus this project will create a constant (so long as people are pausing in it or walking through it) flow of new group experiences, as various configurations of individuals experience the outdoor music. The experience would be different each time the same individual walked through the installation – firstly, because of course they would never truly

be the same person each time (as Heraclitus has said, we never step into the same river twice), but also because those around them would change, and thus the collective happening as well. The music would not change for some time so that participants could listen to the same works in a variety of ways – in a different order, on different days, with different people.

The difference between this imagined artwork and the music that is habitually played over loudspeakers in a store or restaurant is of significant value. Firstly, such a musical installation would take place in the outdoors on an open street. This is itself out of the ordinary, as recorded sound, curated as a collage of several pieces of music, is not often played in the middle of a city street, with no walls or evident boundaries of any kind. Second, this imaginary work would not merely make use of recorded music as background atmosphere, but rather, it would use the music to be intentionally invasive and create a feeling of overwhelming envelopment where walls do not exist. Sounds would fall from above and below, their sources unclear, draped like musical curtains. As a result, the participant is suddenly swept into the temporary vortex of a passageway of sound and then almost as suddenly, released from the experience back into the busy street. Although some establishments, from stores to restaurants to clubs, will often play music loudly in order to attract the attention of passers-by, it is evident to all that the goal is to sell and to persuade. When individuals walking along a public street notice an artistic installation, a potential moment or experience that is free of self-interested motive and manipulation, it is inviting in a more truly disruptive way, and that is a large part of the goal of surprising creative interventions – to distract, unsettle, and hopefully renew.

• Conclusion •

I argue in this paper that an addition could be made to the already diverse oeuvre of artistic approaches that comprise the realm of "sound art" and that it may be termed "musical intervention art" – or, simply put, music that is played in a circumscribed area in the form of an outdoor installation, that is designed to accost, surprise, overwhelm, and through this, actively engage. The idea behind "musical intervention art" is to lift musical works of art out of its many expected realms such as the theater, concert hall, museum, store, restaurant, and of course the home stereo, and into the

open and public venue of our streets and parks. Such surprising interventions are not intended to merely decorate or beautify the atmosphere (though this may too be a result of such projects), or otherwise make the public that is passing through the work, comfortable. Rather such installations would seek to sharply disrupt the habitual behaviors and thought processes of daily life and provoke unfiltered emotions and sensations through largely unavoidable immersion in sound. Such experiments would seek to stimulate and invigorate the diversity of individuals in various public locales, as well as the life of the public space itself.

The imagined artistic project described above is intended to supplement the theoretical claim made in this paper, that creativity encourages access to raw emotion, self-reflection, and the according independent thought. It is argued here that such depth of sensation and free thought is a healthy benefit first to the individual psyche, and second, to our local, as well as our global communal lives. Specifically, the benefits of experiencing surprising rejuvenating moments within the public realm lie in its ability to reawaken the truly free inner lives of human beings, enable the identification of needs and desires independent of economic life, and in this, encourage more engaged and reflective interactions with the physical public space itself, within the intellectual and emotional realm of how we understand the public, and among a diversity of individuals with whom we co-exist in our communities.

• Notes •

[1] See Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. H. C. Mansfield & D. Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also, among others, James P. Young's *Reconsidering American Liberalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

[2] See C. B. Macpherson's work on this concept, as exemplified by the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[3] See Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract and the Discourses*. trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: Everyman's Library, 1993), for an explanation of what he calls "*pitié* " or empathy as a natural passion of man that co-exists with basic self-preservation.

[4] Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

[5] Thomas L. Friedman, "This Column Is Not Sponsored by Anyone," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2012, SR13.

[6] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 23-24.

[7] Friedman, "This Column Is Not Sponsored by Anyone," SR13.

[8]"…[A]ural stories preserve [culture] too. They preserve not only the story, but also the access to that story by making me complicit in its narration again and again. Sound evokes the permanence of participation and production." Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London: Continuum, 2010), 100.

[9] Eric Weiner, Man *Seeks God: My Flirtations with the Divine* (New York: Twelve, 2011).

[10] Eric Weiner, "Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2012, TR10.

[11] Ibid.

[12] John Dewey, *Art as Experience.* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 339.

[13] "Sound art," as a term for a category of art making, has been used more and more in the contemporary art scene, especially since the late 1990s (Alan Licht, *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 9), but it refers to so many different experimentations with music that it is difficult to argue that it has one comprehensive definition, that covers the diversity of art that is made with sound.

[14] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006), xii.

[15] Licht, *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories*, 11.

[16] Ibid, 16-17.

[17] Joanna Demers, *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[18] Leigh Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 17.

[19] LaBelle, *Background Noise,* 9.

[20] Ibid, ix.

[21] Hellermann, William, and Don Goddard. 1983. Catalogue for "Sound/Art" at The Sculpture Center, New York City, May 1–30, 1983 and BACA/DCC Gallery June 1–30, 1983.

[22] The concert hall traditionally served to present the "sounds that are separated from the outside world…a closed space separated from the outside world and the sonic domain of everyday life," in the words of Brian Eno. Licht notes importantly that the boundaries of the concert hall itself were questioned even before the advent of recording. R. Murray Schafer has traced the evolution of the concert hall as "a substitute for outdoor life." (Licht, *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories*, 73). In the twentieth century, Licht writes that while some composers experimented with using the outdoors as the concert hall, "Cage, Wolff, and Stockhausen are still thinking in terms of a performed concert with an audience, not music as a free standing installation that would attract visitors." (Ibid., 75). Licht cites Stuart Marshall's and David Dunn's work in the 1970s as examples of placing sound sources or instruments in a natural outdoor environment.

[23] Bill Fontana, "The Relocation of Ambient Sound: Urban Sound Sculpture"

http://www.resoundings.org/Pages/Urban%20Sound%20Sculpture.html

[24] LaBelle, Bibliography of Max Neuhaus, http://www.max-neuhaus.info/bibliography/BrandonLaBelle.htm

[25] Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 47.

[26] Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization*, 22.

[27] http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/high_line_nyc/index.html

[28] http://www.oldnyc.com/highline/contents/highline.html

[29] http://www.thehighline.org/about/friends-of-the-high-line/

[30] http://www.thehighline.org/about/park-information/

[31] http://www.thehighline.org

[32] http://www.thehighline.org/about/public-art/past-commissions

[33] This is a song originally composed by Hungarian pianist Rezső Seress and published in 1933 as "*Vége a világnak*," which translates as "The end of the world"). After lyrics were written for the song in Hungarian by László Jávor, the song was retitled "*Szomorú vasárnap*" or "Sad Sunday." Pál Kalmár was the first to record the song in the original Hungarian in 1935. In 1936, it was first recorded in two different English versions, one by Hal Kemp and the other by Paul Robeson. Five years later in 1941, Billie Holiday made her own version, and it was her beautiful recording that brought it to popularity in America and other English-speaking countries.

• Bibliography •

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. ed. and trans. H. C. Mansfield & D. Winthrop, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Demers, Joanna. *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience.* New York: Penguin Books, 2005.

Fontana, Bill. "The Relocation of Ambient Sound: Urban Sound Sculpture" http://www.resoundings.org/Pages/Urban%20Sound%20Sculpture.html

Friedman, Thomas L. "This Column Is Not Sponsored by Anyone," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2012, SR13.

Hellermann, William, and Don Goddard. Catalogue for "Sound/Art" at The Sculpture Center, New York City, May 1–30, 1983 and BACA/DCC Gallery June 1–30, 1983.

LaBelle, Brandon. *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art.* New York: Continuum, 2006.

——. Bibliography of Max Neuhaus, http://www.maxneuhaus.info/bibliography/BrandonLaBelle.htm
Landy, Leigh. Understanding the Art of Sound Organization, 2007: MIT Press, p. 17.

Macpherson, C. B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics and its Discontents*. trans. Steven Corcoran, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and the Discourses*. trans. G.D.H. Cole. New York: Everyman's Library, 1993.

Sandel, Michael J. *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art.* London: Continuum, 2010.

Weiner, Eric. *Man Seeks God: My Flirtations with the Divine*. New York: Twelve, 2011.

——. "Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2012, TR10.

Young, James P. *Reconsidering American Liberalism: The Troubled Odyssey of the Liberal Idea*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

COLLISION

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics,* the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.

Ilic, Ljubica. "To Listen or Not to Listen?" *Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2012): 82-89.

ABSTRACT

In 1965, Claude Chabrol created *La Muette* – a fifteen-minute homage to Paris's sixteenth district. In this short movie, Chabrol uses silence to ask some fundamental questions about the nature of human coexistence: the movie is seen, or better heard, from the perspective of a boy who, ignored by his parents, does not manage to say a word throughout; provoked by this imposed restriction, the boy decides to become not only "mute" but also "deaf." His decision, however, results in tragic consequences. In *La Muette*, Chabrol reminds us that the question of coexistence already posed by Virgil in his *Eclogues*, and signified by sound that freely resounds, has never ceased to be asked. In this *Collision*, I use the term "post-pastoral" to connect Virgil and Chabrol, and to open a discussion on sonically signified freedom.

KEYWORDS

Chabrol, silence, (co)existence, Virgil, post-pastoral

To Listen or Not to Listen?

Ljubica Ilic

• *La Muette* : Paris Heard by Claude Chabrol •

In Virgil's first eclogue, Meliboeus, exiled and dispossessed of his farm, complains:

> You, Tityrus, under the spreading, sheltering beech,
> Tune woodland musings on a delicate reed;
> We flee our country's borders, our sweet fields,
> Abandon home; you, lazing in the shade,
> Make woods resound with lovely Amaryllis.

Tityrus responds with humble gratitude:

> O Melibee, a god grants us this peace –
> Ever a god to me, upon whose altar
> A young lamb from our folds will often bleed.
> He has allowed, you see, my herds to wander
> And me to play as I will on a rustic pipe.[1]

Virgil reminds us that the freedom to create and exist, or to "play as one will," has always been difficult to attain and dependent on powers beyond one's reach: the farmer Meliboeus shares the destiny of the thousands of victims of Roman civil wars exiled by emperor's forces, while the freed slave Tityrus (who may be Virgil himself) has the option to stay in his homeland. For Virgil, Tityrus's freedom is best conveyed by sound: his playing echoes through the woods, conquers space, and sonically describes a possibility of unconstrained existence. Simultaneously, it reinforces the sense of Meliboeus's misfortune.

I reencountered Virgil's idea about sonically signified freedom in a short movie by Claude Chabrol. In 1965, Chabrol, together with Jean Douchet, Jean Rouch, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Eric Rohmer, and Jean-Luc Goddard created a dedication to Paris and its various neighbourhoods and cityscapes in the omnibus *Paris vu par...*(*Six in Paris*). Chabrol's fifteen-minute homage to Paris's sixteenth district, entitled *La Muette*, portrays the everyday life of a bourgeois family. Here as elsewhere, Chabrol's obsessive vivisection of the life of Parisian bourgeoisie could be easily understood as a critique of urban life. But his directing choices, and, in the case of *La Muette*, his use of sound, tell a somewhat different story.

La Muette is seen – or better, heard – from the perspective of a boy who does not say a word throughout. It is as if he is mute, although in reality, the reason for his silence is entirely different. Chabrol sketches the boy's daily routine. The boy returns home from school, the maid opens the door, the mother chatters on the phone, the father "entertains" the maid; in the background (as if heard from the apartment next door) – the *Andante* from Mozart's "Facile" sonata is played badly; the father reminds the boy about the laws of algebra; the parents casually discuss themes like the death sentence over lunch, dinner and cheese course; their trivial disputes echo through the apartment. Bored, the boy leaves his room: he sticks two needles into what appears as the photo of an ancestor; he disposes of the mother's medications; after these acts of rebellion, he finds the earplugs on the nightstand. He reads the instructions for use:

> Form-fitting earplugs block vibrations and are perfectly sound-proof. Noise, the price we pay for modern civilization, is one of the main resources for [i.e. causes of] nervous disease. The sick and the nervous will now be able to sleep. Intellectuals will be able to work in silence thanks to these earplugs. Factory workers and all those with jobs who

> are exposed to repetitive noise, which is damaging the auditory nerve, will protect their eardrums with earplugs.[2]

From this moment, everything changes: the boy decides to become not only "mute" but also "deaf."

Now the movie seems to start all over again, only soundless. The sequence of images is almost the same: the boy comes back from school, encountering the maid, the mother, and the father; faces of his parents at the dining table now appear more grotesque because they are silent. The boy cannot hear the Mozart or the parents' bickering. It is as if Chabrol, by juxtaposing these two perspectives – the state of voluntary *deafness* and involuntary exposure to sounds – equalizes muteness with verbal nonsense. The voluntary deafness, however, poses an ecological and ethical question: to listen or not to listen? How to listen, that is, coexist, and yet do so meaningfully? For Chabrol, there is no simple answer. Sonic pollution is difficult to deal with; but shutting oneself out from the world results in tragic consequences, as the end of the movie shows. The father demonstratively leaves the house. Enraged, the mother follows him and, falls down the stairs. The concluding sounds are her moans as she bleeds to death at the bottom of the staircase. In his voluntary isolation, the boy cannot hear a thing: he grabs his coat, takes the elevator, and sneaks out of the house without seeing his mother's body. The final scene: a Parisian street, mute and deaf.

In exploring the power of silence, Chabrol uses sound to ask fundamental questions about the nature of human coexistence. For being voluntarily deaf only appears to be equivalent to being exposed to meaningless conversation: Chabrol's tragic ending demonstrates that the answer is not silence, even though silence protects us from noise ("the price we pay for modern civilization"). This is a "lose-lose" situation: to listen, to participate, is challenging, but not listening leads to tragedy.

Chabrol reminds us that the question of free (co)existence posed as early as in Virgil's *Eclogues*, and signified by sound that freely resounds has never ceased to be asked. But the comparison between Virgil's resounding meadows and Chabrol's soundscapes of Paris somehow seems out of place, reminding us of a long-lasting Western divide between nature and culture, and between pastoral and urban surroundings. Is there a way to overcome this division in order to discuss the two works side by

side, since they both deal with sonically signified freedom? Might the term "post-pastoral" be useful for this kind of approach?

• Soundscapes of the Post-Pastoral •

Since Virgil, the Western concept of "the pastoral" comprises representations of idealized modes of existence in which the self and the surroundings harmonize in permanent consonance. The pastoral mode has been traditionally used to depict the supposed rifts between nature and artifice, and between actual and ideal living spaces.[3] Given contemporary environmental crises, these rifts between how we actually live (and often cause destruction) and how we imagine existence become ever more relevant, bringing up new questions about the relationship between contemporary subjectivity and the concept of space in its growing complexity.

In explaining new European approaches to ecocritical theory, Kate Rigby and Axel Goodbody claim that, "given the shaping impact of relatively dense populations on the land over the centuries," European ecocritics are more likely to depart from traditional dichotomy of nature and culture in order to deal with cultural landscapes and the pastoral rather than wilderness.[4] And this is the case with Terry Gifford's approach to the pastoral in literature. Gifford moves away from dialectics of the pastoral and anti-pastoral, and introduces the term "post-pastoral."[5] He discusses six characteristics of the post-pastoral. Two of them are crucial to my understanding of the term. First, nature is not merely a pleasant idyll. Second, and more important: culture is nature, not its opposition.[6] According to Gifford, the post-pastoral is not equivalent to postmodern because its meaning is more conceptual than temporal, applicable to historically diverse literatures. It is "post" because it overcomes the traps of the pastoral.[7] Gifford claims:

> "Post-pastoral" literature is that which escapes the closed circuit of the idealized pastoral and its anti-pastoral corrective. It seeks to heal the separations of culture and nature by asking, "What would be the features of writing that can point towards a right way to live at home on our planet earth?"[8]

I would like to extend Gifford's definition even further. If the post-pastoral mode negates the division between nature and culture, can we use this term to describe an ecologically-aware relationship with space in general? Is it time for a new totality based on the simple fact that we share the environment in which we live? Or is it useful, after all, to leave the issue of modernity aside?[9] All those questions reflect a need for a paradigm shift in discussions of our surroundings, as prefixes like *post*, *hyper* (as in *hyperspace*, *hyper-real*), or *off* (as in *off-modern*) suggest. Gifford's post-pastoral conveniently signifies the relationship with our environment which occurs when the rift between culture and nature becomes obsolete while the ideology of this rift still governs our collective imagination. For, all metaphors for our relationship with space, place and environment (natural vs. cultural, wild vs. peopled, rural vs. urban) still function within the frame that confirms the nature-culture divide. And the idealization of what supposedly opposes our cultured existence – including nature, wilderness, premodern and non-Western holistic epistemes – only strengthens what we are trying to overcome: the alienation of our surroundings. In reality, nature and culture are intertwined in a manner that makes it impossible to delineate where one ends and another begins. This claim does not negate our responsibility for our environmental problems. It only attests to the complexity of our surroundings. Our environment is a hybrid comprised of the wild, premodern, and holistic, as well as the industrial, technological, and mechanicized, all of which are globally interconnected. This interconnectedness warns us that there are no places to escape to or places to escape from.

The term "post-pastoral" enables us to make transhistorical connections while avoiding the traps of dialectics. By focusing on the phenomenological aspects of listening and the metaphorical power of sound to stand for freedom and (co)existence, the sonic post-pastoral allows us to hear and explore urbanity as one of the many modes of our *nature-culture*.[10] As Chabrol's eavesdropping on Paris reminds us: the answer is to listen, even if it is only to hear a dissonance.

• Notes •

[1] Translation by Paul J. Alpers in *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 23.

[2] The translation is from: Claude Chabrol, "La Muette," in *Six in Paris*. VHS. Directed by Claude Chabrol, Jean Douchet, Jean-Luc Goddard, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Eric Rohmer, and Jean Rouch (New York: New Yorker Video, 1998).

[3] Its longevity in Western culture, however, reveals more than a persistent fascination with utopian ideals: Giuseppe Gerbino, for example, in *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) explains the Renaissance pastoral as a subversive genre – a narrative strategy that uses imaginary universe of Arcadia to explain the real universe of the Renaissance court; Paul Alpers discovers its ethical origins and claims that *loci amoeni* and echoing woods "have as much to do with establishing a space for song as with man's relation to nature" (Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, 32).

[4] Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, "Introduction," in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, eds. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 3.

[5] The anti-pastoral "corrects" the pastoral by realistically representing the downsides of life in nature. It indirectly points at the advantages of human ability to conquer nature.

[6] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[7] Terry Gifford, "Judith Wright's Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral," *Australian Humanities Review*, 48 (2010): 75.

[8] Terry Gifford, "Post-Pastoral as a Tool of Ecocriticism," in *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, eds. Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad-Velásquez (Bristol, Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 17.

[9] Is Bruno Latour right when he claims that we have practically never been modern? Is it time to accept Baudrillard's proclamation of those kinds of labels as elitist? See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), and Jean Baudrillard, "The Violence of the Global," http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=385, (accessed June 28, 2012).

[10] Bruno Latour's notion of *nature-culture* reminds us that the ideology of modernity born out of the "purification" of the human from non-human still dominates our modes of thinking, while in practice we are constantly faced with the hybridization of the two spheres. The "post-pastoral" conveys the same contradiction.

• Bibliography •

Alpers, Paul J. *What is Pastoral?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Violence of the Global." http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=385.

Chabrol, Claude. "La Muette." In *Six in Paris*. VHS. Directed by Claude Chabrol, Jean Douchet, Jean-Luc Goddard, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Eric Rohmer, and Jean Rouch. New York: New Yorker Video, 1998.

Gerbino, Giuseppe. *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. London: Routledge, 1999.

——. "Judith Wright's Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral." *Australian Humanities Review*, issue 48 (2010): 75-86.

——. "Post-Pastoral as a Tool of Ecocriticism." In *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, edited by Mathilde Skoie, Sonia Bjørnstad-Velásquez. 14-24. Bristol, Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006.

Goodbody, Axel and Kate Rigby. "Introduction." In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, edited by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, 2-17. Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Vol. 1, No. 3 (2012)
Art and the City

Goldblatt, David. "Urban Shanties: Improvisation and Vernacular Architecture."
***Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2012): 90-112.**

ABSTRACT

The practice of architecture takes place in what is aptly called "an architectural practice." But, in a sense, no architecture takes place there. Unless something outside that practice is built, we merely have plans for architecture, unfulfilled ideas, but nothing that functions or shelters. In this paper, my attempt to show an important connection between improvisation and architecture is about the process of architecture as its execution of a built structure. My idea is to begin with an unheralded example from vernacular architecture, glean from it what I think is improvisational and work with issues I believe are generated from it in order to point out some things about improvisation as well as architecture. That example is the collective of buildings known as the shantytown. The shanty, like the ruin, comes about with "unintentional visual interest" to pervert the phrase of Michael Baxandall, happening as it does without foregrounding concern for architectural beauty or elegance. Philosophical investigations of vernacular architecture are not new, but one where an improvised mode of construction is a serious component of its analysis has largely been passed over. One question I try to answer can put the issue another way: What is the limiting case of improvisation in architecture?

KEYWORDS

improvisation, jazz, urban, shantytown, architecture, *favela*

Urban Shanties: Improvisation and Vernacular Architecture

David Goldblatt

Improvisational architecture and its professional contrasts can form the centerpiece of a narrative that would be a tale of two aesthetics: a tale of two cities, one often embedded in the other. In this essay I attempt to offer what I believe to be *a limiting case* of improvisation in architecture uniquely generated by the practice of building shanties. The unheralded example of the shanty, the *element* in the collective of buildings alternately known as shantytowns or squatter settlements, will help provide comparisons between its construction and standard cases of improvisation in the performing arts, in particular jazz. I choose jazz (noting it is not always improvisational) as a primary type for comparison, although I could have chosen any number of other arts where improvisation is an integral aspect, because a focus on *one* improvisational arena allows for more depth and specificity. My comparative approach will help also to draw lines between professionalism in architecture and the improvisational techniques utilized by the builders of shanties. Shanties, like ruins, come about with "unintentional visual interest," to pervert the phrase of Michael Baxandall, happening as they do without foregrounding concern for architectural beauty or elegance.[1] While the building of shanties takes

place in many parts of the world, my shanty example will focus on urban Brazil, where the shanty, the *barraco*, multiplies and repeats, to form vast neighborhoods called *favelas*, built by their occupants, *favelados*, often juxtaposing the finely manicured homes of Brazil's well-to-do. In Brazilian cities, as in the shantytowns of Mumbai or Nairobi, the illegal *favelas* have developed into facts of life in urban centers, but always risk being usurped and invaded. In short, utilizing the example of the shanties of the Brazilian *favelas*, I hope to suggest a form of urban architecture in which social and economic circumstances inform personal industrial techniques, and so generate the question of vernacular architecture's relationship with improvisation.

Matt-80. Shantytown in Soweto, South Africa. Creative Commons.

• Architecture as Improvisation •

•1•

The practice of architecture takes place in what is aptly called "an architectural practice." But, in a sense, no architecture takes place there. The old but dubious (ontological) chestnut, "There is no such thing as paper architecture," suggests that unless something outside that practice is built, we merely have plans for architecture, unfulfilled ideas, but

nothing that functions or shelters, no spaces to enter, work, live or leave. Architecture, in this sense, always lies outside its own practice, and happens only when a plan or concept is put into its material form as built structure.

Improvisation and architecture are rarely mentioned in the same breath. One reason, of course, is that no non-performance arts are *standard* cases of improvisation arts where improvisation *typically* takes place. Architecture appears as the most planned of all the arts, so that the final material work is a finished product that maintains a strict one-to-one relationship with the initial specifications. For that reason as well, architecture would seem to be the least likely artistic domain where improvisation would play a role. The pre-history of a finished architectural project — part of its *generative* performance, to use David Davies' term, is not usually understood as a performance-event even if some construction sites are spectacles of visual attention. Yet Davies' performist theory holds that a work is a particular kind of *doing*, an event in a particular history of making, whose focus is the product of that activity and completes it — the activity itself being what he terms its performance.[2]

Davies' thesis is particularly pertinent to the doings of the *favelado*, since the conditions under which he locates his building materials and executes his necessary skills, the manner and extent to which there are *ad hoc* decisions, is essential for appreciating the achievement of the *favelado* and correctly assessing the resulting shanty. The work of the *favelado* in building his or her own house is a unique kind of urban industry (borne out by the etymology of the word, where industry once stood for diligence and skill), and it is an industry on a large scale for the development of housing, one industrious undertaking at a time.[3] The process of building shanties is an industry, a branch of manufacture, one among many in the typical *favela,* that is strictly illegal but is tolerated as a de facto form of life. The industrious qualities of the *favelado* and the pragmatic exercise of those in the often difficult circumstances of improvisation, betrays the lie that those living on the margins of society are there because of their own lack of purpose.

• 2 •

The gap between architects and builders is analogous to the space between composers and musicians, choreographers and dancers — musical scores analogous to architectural plans. Music and dance require what J. O. Urmson calls executant artists, thereby suggesting that dance and music have a double set of artists where, in the usual case, the latter is given a serious interpretive role, one where improvisation happens.[4] By contrast, in professional or high architecture, builders, though they are executants, are offered plans but not usually creative possibilities.

What Garry Hagberg calls "the diversity of the very concept of improvisation as it is manifested in different art forms" suggests to me that the characteristics that would count toward marking an art form as improvisational, might differ from art to art with respect to such concepts as interpretation, audience and auditor.[5] And, since architecture seems to be outside the range of what is sometimes thought of as a pure art (as it is mixed with utilitarian concerns), we might expect that improvisational aspects of architecture might differ as well from paradigmatic improvisational forms like dance, acting and music.

Architects can, of course, improvise on sketchpads and computer screens until some workable notion takes form, later to be made into a real building. However, the kind of work I am going to consider is somewhat different, in that the improvisational aspects of the shanty are process-directed. Improvisation takes place during the activity of building, which skips the blueprints, renderings, and client/designer conferences that are essential to the generative process of professional architecture. And it goes almost without saying that layers of permission papers, the work of lawyers and insurers, have been passed over, as the very concept of property has shifted when squatters build on unoccupied land. In Robert Neuwirth's book, *Shadow Cities: a Billion Squatters, a New Urban World*, he says that in Rio de Janeiro one million people live in *favelas*, thirty-thousand homes in Roncinha alone, the largest of them. He says, "they don't own the land, but they hold it. And no one contests their possession."[6]

• 3 •

As vernacular or anonymous architecture, the shanty can be ignored only at the risk of claiming that residential architecture belongs solely to the well-off. In writing about Sprio Kostof's inclusive *A History of Architecture*, Andrew Ballantyne says, "buildings turn into architecture when we feel that we should notice them and treat them with respect, and this can happen to any building."[7] Alan Colquhoun notes professional architecture's links with money and taste. He says:

> With architecture we are so bound to the sources of finance and power, it is much more difficult for the architect than for other artists to operate within an apparently autonomous sub-culture or to retain independence from bourgeois taste that has been the ambition of art since the early nineteenth century.[8]

Colquhoun may be exaggerating the contrast here between architecture and other arts, but there have always been reasons to consider architecture a more negotiated or compromised art in the first place, making those comparisons more difficult, even among arts of the third dimension. Philosophical investigations of vernacular architecture are not new, but such investigations that include an improvised mode of construction as a serious component of its analysis have largely been passed over.

• The Shanty and the Shantytown •

• 4 •

The shanty*town* is a misnomer — a vast understatement — once it is understood that millions live in such *towns* across the globe, and that many mimic in scope and population the grander cities in which they are embedded. In terms of an aesthetics, it appears as if the shanty, magnified by the town, was a postmodern antidote to modernist formalism. That is,

in contrast with European modern architecture, the shanty is eclectic in its use of materials, ornamented by graffiti and mural painting, unclear with respect to geometrical form and often colorful to an extreme. Shanties embody the marginality of the human condition in the tainted universe that runs parallel to those of comfort and abundance. These towns, often thought of as rural places within urban areas, are obvious in cities like Mumbai (where half the city's population are squatters), Lima, Mexico City, Hong Kong, Karachi, Nairobi and the urban underworlds such as those hidden in defunct New York City subway tunnels. During the American Depression, shanties became towns called Hoovervilles and in migrant workers' housing such as Homestead or Belle Glade, where "families had constructed small shacks from scavenged tin, wood, and canvas in a swamp cane clearing."[9]

Since it is difficult to think of the shanty without thinking of the town, perhaps a word should be said about the relationship between the individual shanty and the shantytown in which it is usually embedded. Unlike Brasilia (Oscar Niemeyer) or Chandihgarh (Le Corbusier) and other planned cities and communities, the shanties in Rio, Brazil come together to form *favelas* over long periods of time, without regard for what has come before or may come after them. As with a development like Levittown or the New York City skyline, shantytowns amaze in their breadth and scope. In architecture, as in other arts, repetition and quantity are powerful aesthetic factors. These qualities attributed to clusters of buildings, form types, which may in turn come to signify socioeconomic conditions. For example, Manhattan seen from afar has come to represent urban wealth and power, just as Levittown has emerged as a prototype of suburban sameness, independent of its composing elements. The *favelas* have emerged as worlds of the underclass — a forbidden mixture of bare survival, uncertainty, and gratitude — the shanty being one factor among many in their notorious reputation. Though memorable and impacting, the aesthetic value of the *favelas* is relevant to, but independent of, the improvised individual buildings that comprise them. However, just to be clear, the shantytowns do not share the improvisational nature of the shanty although, like the shanty, they are unplanned. Unlike the shanty, there is no single builder at work for the town. So that while the shanty approaches an improvised architecture, the shantytown lies outside the category of being improvised or not, given its long-term emergence by many individuals independently, so that, while one can argue that there is an improvised element to the town as well as the shanty, it would be odd, at least to my ear, to say a town, generally speaking, is improvised.

Nevertheless, there is a certain random aspect to the constructed progress of each. Comparing an individual shanty to a shantytown is comparable in its perceptual impact to likening a snowflake to a snowstorm or a single tile to a complex mosaic.

Beauty aside, but in terms of a general aesthetic response, shantytowns, or repeated and compacted sets of individual shanties, are among the most powerful building complexes on the planet. *Favelas* provide immediate insight into living outside the law and coping with the situation of poverty. The *favelas* embody what everyone already knows — that the gap between the rich and poor is enormous. This gap is evident not only in demographic and financial figures, but also in self-built communities, living urbanity within urbanity. An outside observer, upon seeing the *favelas* for the first time, is struck hard by their crowding and vastness spread along hillsides barely safe for habitation. This impact is certainly comparable to the shock of the sublime, where all rationality is momentarily wiped away. But it is knowing the history of this architecture, the cognitive inseparable from the affective, that regulates the power of the *favelas* in outside perceivers. Part of this aesthetic package has something to do with *danger*. There is the understood peril of living on grounds that can mudslide with any sudden flood, the danger of inadequate and uncaring police and fire protection or of disease from inferior sewage and trash pickup, and the ever-present threats of demolition by forces hoping to provide additional land for tourism, developers and investors (in Rio for the forthcoming Olympics, for example) who know where land is available cheaply but located ideally in urban centers. While we can refer to shantytowns as cities within cities, the differences are clear enough. In the *favelas*, for example, no roads exist leading up the steep hillsides for cars or trucks — only *becos*, narrow dirt pathways that twist and turn, some of which are now cemented stairways but are still formidable climbs. Nevertheless, life has become normalized and stable, towns playing by their own set of rules regarding electricity and sewage, water and trash, often negotiating deals with those forces on the outside.

Nate Cull. Brazilian *Favela*. Creative Commons.

The aesthetic power of shanties came to the attention of the photographer Margaret Morgan, who shot pictures of improvised shelters in large American cities and published them in her book *Fragile Dwelling*. In the introduction to that book, Alan Trachtenberg writes:

> In 1989, Morton observed a settlement of improvised shacks and tents that had mushroomed near her home (in New York City), a community of "fragile dwellings" pieced together out of every imaginable shred of material at hand for scavengers of the city's bourgeois debris. Here was a kind of vernacular architecture that instantly caught her photographic eye...[10]

• 5 •

Favelas are models of the changing and complex reality of the individual shanty. Built by squatters on public land owned largely by the Navy, or privately owned but unused property, *favelas* have grown over many decades within urban Brazil, their illegality putting their residents at risk. The largest *favelas*, such as the Rinchoa, have evolved from primitive shanties to more permanent brick-and-mortar buildings, especially for the older residents of the neighborhood. But even these developed urban

enclaves began as simple *barracos* that resemble shanties all over the world. Here is an account of the building of an individual shanty in Rio, offered by Julio César Pino in 1997.

> The *favelados* had to reinvent themselves and devise survival strategies to keep their hard-won homes. Strangers in a strange land, they used heads and hands to fashion a home with only the basic elements of earth, water and fire...Molding clay or mud with bare fingers, they pasted pieces of bamboo together and erected walls, using string or cloth to hold the four intersections. Overhead they raised roofs made of tin cans, zinc, cardboard, and, for the lucky ones, tile...Beams overlapped, angles failed to meet, and the structure seemed to have been built by a blind person or an architect with a malicious sense of humor. The shanty was never finished — its construction was a constant chore, and its features changed from one week to the next...Squatters improvised city services easily available to the middle and upper classes...Ask anyone who saw a *favela* only from the outside for his or her most memorable impression, and the likely reply is "garbage."[11]

For the most part, in that shantytowns are usually unsanitary, overcrowded, and unorganized — they are a far cry from the emptiness or purity of a modernist ethos. One thing that warrants the shanty's place among the improvised arts is its composition without plan or preparation — certainly without the kind of lengthy or meticulous preparation practiced in architecture generally — a point I will try to embellish later. As all improvisations are informed by their *constraints*, shanties must satisfy the laws of gravity and strength of materials while lying outside the laws of building codes and property taxes. Politicians will let *favelados* be, as compromises for and electoral favors from the poor. Regular tours of the *favelas* are offered at Rio's five-star hotels and other tourist centers, except when conditions are too dangerous due to drug wars or mudslides. From one point of view, the shanty is a third-world structure with a first-world audience.

The year 1960 saw the opening of Brasilia, Brazil's new capital on its Planalto Central. With Lúcio Costas as its main planner and Oscar Niemeyer as its primary architect, the intent, in part, was to open the vast interior of Brazil to its heavily populated coastline and to help centralize commerce and tourism. Many gems of modern architecture adorned the city, attracting visitors and helping to persuade government officials to live the life of the new capital and to keep from running back to Rio and Sao Paulo at every opportunity. The opening of Brasilia also saw at its

periphery new shantytowns, built with discarded materials from their construction sites, by the very workers who had built the spanking new capital and who sought menial jobs there. The shanties were not part of the original city plan. Laid out for the automobile and those who owned them, the long boulevards of Brasilia are empty of people in comparison with the bustling life of the squeezed shanties.

• Comparisons with Jazz •

• 6 •

Favelados are hands-on builders, *bricoleurs*, whose materials are whatever they can get – ad hoc assemblers with a multiplicity of resourceful skills. Jacques Derrida notes that Levi-Strauss uses the word *bricoleur* in contrast with the word *engineer*. Discussing mythologies in *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss , holds that *bricolage,* as distinct from engineering, "builds its castles out of debris."[12] Derrida, objecting to a sharp distinction between the two, especially in the context of discourse, says:

> The idea of the engineer breaking with all *bricolage* is dependent on a creationist theology. Only such a theology can sanction an essential difference between the engineer and the *bricoleur*. But, that the engineer should always be a sort of *bricoleur* should not ruin all criticism of *bricolage*.[13]

I take this to mean that a comparison of the two terms should not imply that the engineer (of which the architect is a species), while attempting to plan each and every detail of construction, is not entirely independent from whatever is already there for him: the technology, the availability of purchased materials, the tradition into which he or she enters the business. However, the *relative* distinction between the two should now be clear.

It would not be difficult to imagine musical improvisation as something of a *bricolage*, playing into form the unorganized notes and phrases with the available instrumental technology. Like musical

improvisations, but unlike the sorry Manchester slums described by Friedrich Engels, shanties are self-constructions, immediate in the sense that there is no other builder than the dweller, no intermediary between builder and built, as there is none between Charlie Parker and the runs he improvises within precomposed tunes, where composition and construction is conflated. (It is something like the generation of dreams.) As Charlie Parker is present to his music, as we are present to our speech (unlike the architect to his architecture), the *favelado* is present to his individual shanty, where his act of composition is also, at the same time, his act of construction.

In several subgenres of jazz, like smooth jazz and much straight-ahead jazz, improvisation aims at melodic and harmonic "coherence"; whereas in the shanty, "the look" of improvisation remains eclectic and fragmentary in color and form, due to the diversity of building materials and the imperfection of the final product. However, jazz improvisation also has been called an imperfect art, and in both performing jazz and building the shanty, the appearance of imperfection adds an aesthetic element that is lacking in non-improvised practices which aim at "flawless" presentations. As Pino has noted, imperfections loom large in shanties — our response is often to note their flawed appearance. To a different extent and in another kind of circumstance, Lee B. Brown notes that "a residual imperfection can be regarded as a vital aspect of improvised jazz."[14] Brown sees this possible imperfection as a result of the adventuresome nature of some improvisations — the musician's willingness to take risks is tied to the near inevitability of mistakes. Imperfections, then, can be signs of improvised work by virtue of the risks, the chances taken in improvised performance, and are an important part of the expectations of auditors, as opposed, for example, to those using or simply viewing, bridges. In art generally, we utilize the idea of the magnificent failure, often appraised higher than a safer success.

Clearly, in attempting to show a strong resemblance between architectural improvisations and other arts of performance, I have chosen jazz music to the exclusion of most other arts only to make a comparison that is workable in a short paper. As mentioned earlier, this is not to say that a worthwhile juxtaposition could not be made for acting, dance, for stand-up comedy, or for other forms of music, for example, all of which might have done just as well. And then, one might look at the many ways improvisation takes place outside the arts and in everyday life, not the least of which are in conversation, sports and war.

Most of us, it must be said, have never heard the famous *Body and Soul*, as played by Coleman Hawkins, that is, have not heard it in person as an improvisational performance coming into being. Most of us have heard it, however, as recorded product knowing that part of its history is its improvisation, and to understand the work in that way makes a difference, just as knowing the improvised history of shanty construction makes a difference to our appreciation of shanties.

Pino says, "The shanty is never finished."[15] By this I think he means, not only "unfinished" in the sense of not polished or perfected, but also that, with the availability of newly found usable construction debris, or the opportunity of attaining materials by barter or purchase, new fragments can continually replace old ones or add to existing constructs. And, in some cases, what begins as a shanty can be transformed bit by bit into a dwelling of a more favorable nature — something more stable and livable. This might entail major renovations or simply a matter of repair and damage control, better parts substituting for weaker ones, as when an editor cuts and pastes a film montage. The shanty is, after all, an architectural montage, fragments pieced together, arranged to produce an obvious whole.

Shanties are unfinished, too, in that they are a constant chore. Interesting that William Day, writing on improvisation, cites Ralph Waldo Emerson's claim connecting the incompleteness of art with the incompleteness of self, and then says, "I have claimed that jazz improvisations are essentially incomplete in a further sense in that their ground is ordinary on-going activity rather than sculpted time."[16] While Day is rather brief on this contrast, I believe he means that during a jazz performance, there is no orchestrated ending — that the musicians can, in principle, continue playing without a finish. The tune just comes to an end at some unforeseen but appropriate point, although an auditor knows that the performance could have continued. A crude analogy might be between sports with clocks, like basketball and football, and then baseball, where the game can continue pretty much indefinitely.

Here we might recall Wittgenstein's aphoristic remark that, "Working in philosophy — like work in architecture in many respects — is really more a working on oneself."[17] By virtue of this self-created work comes a creation of self — the identity of Coltrane with his work and the identity of the *favelado* as a person with a home, a homeowner, as no longer homeless, by virtue of his or her work. What this means is that, for example, Charlie Parker will now "live" with every tune he plays as

something like an immediate if temporary legacy, in the same way the *favelado* lives in or with his own *baracco*, just as he is marked by the *favela*, the broader neighborhood that he calls home.

One of the roots of improvisational practices is resourcefulness — the appropriate use of available elements within a given structure or set of constraints, within a given context or tradition and for a given purpose. In the first stages of construction, the shanty exhibits the resourcefulness of the *favelado*, displaying whatever building materials are randomly available — typically plywood, corrugated metal, plastic sheets, abandoned blocks and the like. Building shanties is making of these unordered items a livable shelter. The found materials, industrial bric-a-brac for the most part, can be pieced together in a montage of shelter where metal or plastic can be roof or wall or floor and then, later, interchanged. The similarity of materials generates a certain serious similarity among a community of shanties while details of construction vary according to circumstance, making each shanty different in some small way from every other. The jazz musician finds affordances in a limited set of possible notes, chord sequences, rhythms, tones, moods, even instruments, in a way not entirely unlike the *favelado's* identification and use of simply available . And, it might be noted, the more the available material — the more the musician is capable of playing or the more building materials available to the builder — the greater the possibilities of creation.[18] It has been suggested, by Philip Alperson among others, that spontaneity is an important ingredient in improvisation.[19] It would be difficult to understand what "spur of the moment" creation might mean for architecture even in the temporality of the building process, and it may well be that spontaneity has no role there as it does in acting or jazz. Let's see.

Spontaneity has two conditions — an epistemic or referential one and a temporal one. In improvisational music, the musician doesn't quite know what will happen next in the sense that there is no set plan to which he or she can refer. Put another way, if spontaneity is defined referentially, that is, as having no reference to a prior *set* of plans or directions, then the shanty can well be spontaneous in this sense. It is building without specifications — no plans, elevations, cross-sections or renderings. Spontaneity involves, as Curtis Carter puts it, "suspension of set structures for a practice and the introduction of nontraditional elements."[20] Spontaneity is production that is unplanned or unrehearsed. While building a shanty calls for a certain on-the-spot deliberation, the

distinction between specified conception and practical execution disappears.

In architecture, there is nothing equivalent to the temporal conflation of creation and making that takes form in improvised music, dance or acting. However, within the confines of architecture, the immediacy of shanty construction minimizes the temporal gap between conception and construction relative to say, the World Trade Center "rebuilding," a subject of prolonged debate and competition, or an iconic architectural residence that results from exchanges between architect and client. In the shanty, the immediacy stems not from something like instantaneous self-expression but rather from an urgency to stay out of the weather, to be unhomeless as quickly as possible. For that reason, shanties may be put together by utilizing available materials when they are available — putting to use what may be gone before too long. From one perspective, this reuse can be understood as a form of recycling, as the extent to which castoff materials constitutes a serious percentage of the elements of building.

Nonetheless, in the making of the shanty, composition and the act of composing occur roughly together, but it is composition and performance in the general sense of putting elements together while the work is being performed — performed in what I had previously mentioned as David Davies' sense of performance: the total process of achievement, not just the finished product, counts as "the work."

·7·

Davies distinguishes between *improvisational interpretation*, *improvisational composition* and *pure improvisation* in musical works, such that the first, but not the latter two, involve a pre-existing instantiated work.[21] I am interested in how Davies' distinctions apply or do not apply to professional architecture and the shanty, keeping in mind that the later is something else entirely.

In improvisational interpretation, Davies is interested in an already existing, performed work, and so simply assumes that an improvisation of a work, most often of the same name, would be an interpretation of that

work.[22] Here, improvisations are shifts or pivots from something that may be familiar, a stated melody for example, toward something new, perhaps even only nominally related to the original work, but which may soon take on the appearance of a new work, something unfamiliar that is not so much an interpretation as a continuation by other means.

Clearly, what I am calling interpretation is neutral with respect to improvisation. In the case of attempting to match an architectural typology, for example building a recognizable church, the professional architect may interpret, but would not improvise. It is a matter of planning and forethought, with the usual divisions of labor between planner and builder. That there are improvisational aspects during the planning stage is quite another matter. In professional architecture, traditional or cultural typologies sometimes determine the next instantiation of a building, as with a Catholic church or state capital. Architects intend to build churches that look like churches. So it can be said, that although with different site conditions and programmed needs, the architect, in building a church, would be interpreting "church" for the clients, informed, one might say, by previous churches. Here, a pre-existing body of work or tradition is generalized or cartooned as a type of work.

However, Davies says, "If a performance-event is a genuine instance of *pure improvisation*, then no degree of similarity in a subsequent performance-event renders the latter another performance of the same work."[23] For the typical shanty, only similarity of circumstances, such as the availability of similar materials, skills and tools, would account for a similarity of results. Analogous with available shanty material are notes and instruments as musical material, instruments or tools for building musical compositions. What is interesting is that while the builder of shanties is aware of other shanties, if not of a long tradition of such structures, he or she does *not* intend to build another one like those that exist but instead aims to build an inhabitable shelter. The *barraco* builder, for example, is composing but not imitating or interpreting and so, if anything the shanty would fall under the rubric of Davies' *pure improvisation*, even if there were a well known, easily recognizable type called "the shanty." What it lacks is an intention to be part of that tradition or to copy instantiations of that tradition — the construction being only the best it can be under the (often difficult) circumstances.

• 8 •

Martin Heidegger has noted that houses, buildings as dwellings, constitute acts of concealment — being at home conceals the uncanny, the unhomely. Domestic comforts, he says, repress authenticity. While Heidegger draws conceptual and etymological lines between building and dwelling, the occupants of shanties live the intimacy of dwelling in what they've built. According to the architect Mark Wigley, Heidegger's speculation means that "[i]t is therefore the homeless who come nearest to the essence of home that can never simply be occupied."[24] The *favelados* may have come as close to homelessness as anyone in a home may do, and so, if Wigley is correct, to understanding what constitutes dwelling, homeliness or being at home. And it is exactly what strikes us when we are present to these shanties — that these are dwellings as close to homelessness as it gets, temporally and materially, and that part of our morbid fascination is that such houses *exist at all* — a feeling we get about Christo's wrapped structures or prehistoric cave drawings, for example. That people actually live in such places, that life takes place under such conditions is part of the impact of the shanties. Of course, this raises questions of just who "we" are, as the issue of who the appropriate auditors of particular artworks are, prevails throughout art. The answer is less likely to be the *favelado* — a participant in the improvisation — than one comfortably estranged from the slum-like circumstances of the *favelado's* eclectic, but often ingenious, constructions. It is the "we" of the other. We know the improvisational nature of the history of these buildings — how they came about. Part of *our* response, as I've tried to suggest, is as unrehearsed as the buildings themselves, and is not unlike our response to improvised music. In a variety of ways, then, shanties make a formalist view irrelevant.

• Improvisation and Other Matters •

Following a serious riot in the Morro da Providência, Rio's oldest *favela*, the French artist JR used the sides of shanties that overlook the heart of that city to emphasize architecturally the idea of the other. His works, covering the facades of several shanties and staring down at another social class, "were women's eyes, printed in black-and-white and pasted on

shanties made from brick and concrete. Some of them were framed in extreme closeup, some in shots that revealed faces that were melancholic, dignified, implacable."[25] In addition to the shanties' material representation of the abstraction of class, the murals of JR emphasize, by virtue of their decorative and explicitly political content, the breach with modernist formalism.

To take a cue from Arthur Danto, one can imagine that an improvised piece, like a dance performance, is perceptually indiscernible from a non-improvised one. Ontologically, they are two different works. Part of our response to a work has to do with our expectations — with the history or narrative of the tradition, performer, choreographer and the like. But expecting improvisation or knowing that it is or will be a part of a work changes the way we appreciate the piece. Not to see shanties this way would be to repress a portion of their strong aesthetic power.

• 9 •

Jeff Wall's *After Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue* (1998-2000) is a large (5' 8 1/2" x 8' 2 3/4") backlit Cibachrome photograph. It is of a constructed, contrived scene, a man crouching in a room without windows —Wall's interpretation of the astonishing first pages of Ellison's seminal novel. The depicted room contains the 1,369 light bulbs that line the walls and ceilings — the light that generates the antithesis of invisibility. In the novel, the lighting is an act of self-construction, an invention built beyond function. The protagonist tells us, "I've wired the entire ceiling, every inch of it...An act of sabotage, you know. I've already begun to wire the wall. A junk man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets...When I finish all four walls, then I'll start on the floor. Just how that will go, I don't know."[26] The protagonist considers himself in "the great tradition of American tinkers," while Wall imagines the room filled with objects of all other sorts that seem arbitrary, disheveled and out of place — draped, hanging objects, things lying on the floor and over furniture, seemingly without practical purpose.

Wall shows us this "warm hole" as an unorthodox room alienated from its original purpose. It is hyperbole for the everyday transformations in which "stuff" meddles with original plans and built places. It is like the

realm of ordinary improvisations, which sometimes regulate our conversations, shopping, sports worlds, writing and dressing. In the endlessly repetitive architectures of suburban developments and apartment houses, it is often ornamentation (not always, but often) — the yard ornaments, the landscaping and barbeque pits, the house-painting and Christmas lights, that constitute attempts to set neighbor apart from neighbor that are not found in any blueprints. These, too, come close to architectural improvisations — shifting aesthetic response, constructing new identities as if they were variations on, interpretations of, the buildings they adorn. Similarly, Neuwirth says of the inhabitants of the shanties, "The squatters, by building their own homes, are creating their own world."[27] In his "warm hole," the Invisible Man creates his identity as he improvises his own world.

Wall's photograph displays a room antithetical to the so-called "neutron bomb" effect that generally characterizes architectural photography, especially modernist depictions of architectural spaces. Explaining this effect, Mary Woods says, "The buildings are intact, but almost all traces of human presence are erased."[28] The decorum or absence of human activity, emphasizing a formalist ethos, and uniformity of objects of style, are nowhere to be found in Wall's *Invisible Man*.

• Some Concluding Remarks •

• 10 •

In 1988, Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley curated an exhibition of Deconstructivist Architecture at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The term "deconstructivist" refers to the art of the Russian avant-garde Constructivists, not the deconstructionist work of contemporary Europe associated with Jacques Derrida, but similarities and overlaps abound. The show documented the work of such architects as Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and the firm Coop Himmelblau. In the catalogue, Wigley writes:

> Architecture is a conservative discipline that produces pure form and protects it from contamination. The projects in this exhibition mark a

> different sensibility, one in which the dream of pure form has been disturbed. Form has become contaminated. The dream has become a nightmare. It is the ability to disturb our thinking about form that makes these projects deconstructive. It is not that they derive from the mode of contemporary philosophy known as "deconstruction"...[rather] deconstruction gains all its force by challenging the very values of harmony, unity, and stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure.[29]

I cannot resist adding that whether deconstructivist or deconstructionist, the architects in the MOMA show, many of whom have since risen to the top of their field, have produced buildings that in certain respects resemble features of the shanties. One might think of the fragmented, twisted titanium on Gehry's celebrated Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Architectural deconstruction may consider itself a threat to the status quo of orthodox architecture and its perceived architectural essence, but shanties are threats in a deeper, more powerful sense, to the middle-classes and to the cities they occupy.

Throughout this paper, I have tried to offer comparisons between standard cases of improvisational performance and the building of shanties. In doing so, I believe I have put forth an analysis of a process of construction for an important and powerful aspect of vernacular architecture, one unusual as an object of aesthetic interest. From the particular case of the shanty as it continues to appear in the *favelas* of the urban areas of Brazil, I generalize in order to foreground what I believe is a limiting case of improvisation in architecture, an example remote from the planned and moneyed professionalism of high architecture. Taken in vast numbers, the shanty has come to form functional neighborhoods as communities for large urban populations, and deserves the attention of philosophers who are concerned with issues of cultural importance. So then, I think of this paper as an account of improvisational building — widespread construction that comes into existence by a process significantly resembling, in several respects, improvisation in the performing arts, particularly jazz where it is often at the core of understanding the music.

• Notes •

[1] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 41-73.

[2] David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

[3] The Middle English word *industrie* meant skill and the Latin *industria* meant diligence.

[4] J. O. Urmson, "Literature as a Performing Art," in David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown, eds, *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005), 346-347.

[5] Garry Hagberg, "Forward: Improvisation in the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 95. I am particularly grateful for this Special Issue of the Journal as an excellent source for improvisation.

[6] Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World* (Routledge: New York, 2006), 3.

[7] Andrew Ballantyne, ed., *What is Architecture?* (Routledge: New York, 2002), 12.

[8] Alan Colquhoun, "Postmodernism and Structuralis: A retrospective Glance," *Assemblage* 5: 7-8.

[9] Mary N. Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 194.

[10] Alan Trachtenberg, "Introduction" in Margaret Morgan, *Fragile Dwelling*, (Reading, PA: Aperture, 2000) 5.

[11] Julio César Pino, *Family and Favela* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 52-54.

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 139.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Lee B. Brown, "'Feeling My Way': Jazz Improvisation and Its Vicissitudes — A Plea for Imperfection," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 119.

[15] Pino, *Family and Favela*, 53.

[16] William Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 105.

[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by G. H. von Wright, trans. by Peter Winch, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 16e.

[18] We can compare, for the moment, professional architecture's binary opposition of architect and builder to the Cartesian mind/body opposition, the spatial existence of the builder being subjected to the will of the architect, neither doing the work of the other. Moreover, in the usual case, neither architect nor builder remains as dweller. The comparison here becomes more complex if we extend the imagined separation of mind and body of the architect and builder to mirror the relationship between those living outside the *favelas* and those on the inside. The outside, or body, doing the work of the inside or mind--leasing by the well-to-do doing the menial labor that they themselves

find undesirable. On the other hand, to push this exaggeration further, the improvised labor of the *favelado* in building and directing his or her own home, within the limits of circumstance, is an anti-Cartesian unalienated process in which the dislocation of builder and built does not occur. It is a crude Lockean model of transforming, by virtue of one's own labor, what is found, into what is rightfully the laborer.

[19]See, for example, Philip Alperson, "Improvisation" in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 478.

[20] Curtis Carter, "Improvisation in Dance," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 181.

[21] David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 225-226.

[22] In architecture there are many cases of nearly identical buildings. Contemporary developments set off by the first Levittown in 1948 may be one example; the McDonald's restaurants, another. These, however, are intentionally copied via the intermediary of an identical or similar plan and program.

[23] Ibid., 229. Emphasis added.

[24] Mark Wigley, "The Domestication of the House," in *Deconstruction and the Arts*, Peter Brunette and David Wills, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 221.

[25] Raffi Khatchadourian, "In the Picture," *The New Yorker Magazine*, 28 November, 2011, p. 56.

[26] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1952),10.

[27] Neuwirth, 306.
[28] Woods, xviii.

[29] Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 18.

• Bibliography •

Alperson, Philip. "Improvisation," in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. ed. Michael Kelly. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Ballantyne, Andrew, ed. *What is Architecture?* New York: Routledge, 2002.

Baxandall, Michael. *Patterns of Intention*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Brown, Lee B. "'Feeling My Way': Jazz Improvisation and Its Vicissitudes — A Plea for Imperfection," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 113-124.

Carter, Curtis. "Improvisation in Dance," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 181-190.

Colquhoun, Alan. "Postmodernism and Structuralism: A Retrospective Glance," *Assemblage*, 7-8.

Davies, David. *Art as Performance.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Day, William. "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 99-112.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Signet Books, 1952.

Hagberg, Garry. "Forward: Improvisation in the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 95-98.

Khatchadourian, Raffi. "In the Picture," *The New Yorker*, 28 November 2011, 56.

Urmson, J. O. "Literature as a Performing Art," in *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*. eds. David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010.

Wigley, Mark. "The Domestication of the House," in *Deconstruction and the Arts*. eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value.* ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Woods, Mary N. *Beyond the Architect's Eye*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.