

The Politics of Sound / The Culture Of Exchange

Online Panel Discussion

Live from January 31 – March 23 2005

with Kenneth Goldsmith, Douglas Kahn and John Oswald

Moderated by Lina Dzuverovic

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: The Politics of Sound / The Culture Of Exchange

Posted: Jan 31, 2005 2:12 PM

The practice of cutting-up, appropriating and repurposing existing content in the creation of new artworks was central to 20th century artistic practice. From Marcel Duchamp's 'Erratum Musical' (1913) which spliced together dictionary definitions of the word 'imprimer' with a score composed from notes pulled out of a hat, via William Burroughs's and Brion Gysin's 'cut-up' technique used to allow new meanings to 'leak in' by re-cutting existing texts, to John Oswald's releases which mixed and altered several musical sources, the history of the 20th century avant-garde can be read as the history of appropriation.

The availability, immediacy and ease of use of digital networked technologies in the last decade has made the link between the notion of 'the original' and artistic value more tenuous than ever, ushering in a new chapter in the debate around appropriation and the role of the author.

The early years of the Internet enabled independent musical and artistic networks to flourish and operate somewhat 'under the radar' of commercial production, often establishing their own gift economies and adhering to rules decided by the network participants themselves. But this brief period of 'making it up as we go along' when it comes to file sharing, distribution and exchange is coming to an end in the face of endless attempts by the music industry to understand, co-opt, capitalize on and engage with cultures of exchange introduced by online networks and grassroots initiatives.

Borrowing, file-sharing and re-purposing have over the years caused vicious lawsuits involving corporate lawyers vs. small music labels, artist collectives and college kids. But in an unlikely twist, today we are beginning to see an apparent openness towards non-commercial models of production from some unexpected sources. Tracks constructed by remixing, repurposing and sampling are now as ubiquitous on MTV as they are on releases by home-grown labels. Major labels tendency to appropriate strategies used by bedroom labels, such as releasing records on white labels in an attempt to launch a supposed anonymous release are now regular features across record shops. Last year David Bowie's website launched a competition in which fans were

invited to remix tracks from his new album. The prize winner walked away with a prize including an .mp3 release of their track on Bowie's website plus the handsome reward of a brand new car. The very fact that the 'mash up' phenomenon of recent years almost immediately became embraced by the commercial music industry points to a new strategy – that of 'if you can't beat them, join them'.

From endless copyright lawsuits on the one hand, to winning a new car for remixing David Bowie's album – the issue of repurposing other people's work is a contentious one positioned between the flourishing open source culture and commercial interests of the content industry.

'Open source' models of sharing and exchange promise to not only affect future models of production, exhibition and distribution but to radically redefine the future of cultural production at large. With this steady stream of new models and ideas comes a constant redefining of ways in which we produce, commission, exhibit, distribute and archive artworks. The murky waters of copyright, authorship and ownership are constantly being re-examined by cultural producers, consumers and the industry alike.

This forum comes with a wealth of resources featuring a broad range of examples, positions, and views gathered from recent talks, events and discussions held at Tate Modern. These files are aimed at illustrating the current landscape of sonic production and offering varied historical perspectives. I hope that we can use these resources as a starting point in the discussion of the longer term ramifications of these issues on artistic practice.

I would like to begin the forum by asking the panelists a very basic question:

WHY NOW and WHY HERE:

It seems to me that arts institutions have 'woken up' to issues mentioned above fairly recently (in the past few years). Why are discussions around sampling and sound of particular interest to us at this point in the context of Tate Modern?

John Oswald

Subject: Burroughs and Burrows

Posted: Jan 31, 2005 5:35 PM

Lina writes:

"via William Burroughs's [sic] and Brion Gysin's 'cut-up' technique used to allow new meanings to 'leak in' by re cutting existing texts, to John Oswald's releases which mixed several musical sources,"

Nice to see these connections mentioned in the same sentence. In the early '70's i spent an inordinate amount of time constructing some miniature tape pieces, which i call Burrows, based on texts as read by Bill Burroughs. My first attempt at audio publishing, in 1975, was not vinyl or cassette but a set of 10 of these Burrows on reel-to-reel.

In 1972 or '73 i purchased my first cassette deck, an Advent 201. The interesting thing about the Advent, as relates to this discussion, was that it was marketed in conjunction with a label of cassette tapes (of mostly classical music) which were all first generation dubs, onto Advent machines naturally, from a master tape, done in what is called real-time; to differentiate from high-speed cassette manufacturing which became the prevalent form of pre-recorded cassette during its heyday.

The advantages of this one-to-one dubbing, other than the possibility of more accurate reproduction (an aspect that was not always considered an advantage by the cassette networks of the '80's) was that it could be done with two relatively cheap machines, and that an edition of any size could be manufactured at any time at home. This was so different from vinyl records which couldn't be economically made in quantities of less than 500 (and the cost of this would be equivalent to buying two cassette decks and becoming your own manufacturer).

Many of the Burrows pieces had an odd characteristic – they were reversible compositions, incorporating things like acoustic palindromes (when you play Burroughs saying "I GOT" backwards it still, amazingly sounds like "I GOT"). I realize now i could have made cassette tapes which you could flip over at any point and hear the piece backwards, but at the time i was technically quite literal, and i dubbed full-track (one mono track that is the full width of the tape) reel-to-reel tapes, and edited leader between the pieces (this is the reel-to-reel form of indexing) which, when played on any reel-to-reel playback machine in either direction would give the desired results, as long as it was played at the right speed. There was also a bonus tape loop that came in the box.

I made a few of these dubs but i never managed to sell one and i don't remember giving any away, so as a publishing venture it was a bust. But, probably the same thing would have happened at that time if i had gone the cassette route.

As a side note, the Burrows have never been republished, but we are currently looking at web-based formats where a listener can very visibly play the pieces backwards or forwards.

Meanwhile, back in the '70's, i concentrated on making records, which had a whole existing system of distribution. The next cassette label, after Advent, that i became aware of was Voicependence, produced by Clive Robertson at a place called Artons in Calgary Canada around 1976. I had one release on that label entitled Mrs. Schultz Overdubbing (1977).

As you can see my attempts at historical perspective will be inevitably egocentric, because i have always had the fault of being pre-occupied with what i'm doing when i probably should be paying more attention to what's going on in the rest of the world. Hopefully others, in particular Doug, can give a broader sense of the history of the creation and dissemination of audio artifacts.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Burroughs and Burrows

Posted: Jan 31, 2005 8:36 PM

Hello everyone. Good to be part of this discussion. My sense of Wm Burroughs' cut-ups is that they were parlor entertainments if not, at times, magical devices. The two are not mutually exclusive, and neither parlor nor entertainment should be taken in a derogatory manner. The tape recorder he was working with was in a long line of phonographs and radios that had replaced the 19th century piano as the main piece of entertainment furniture in many homes. The musical and song stylings on the piano ran the whole range, and much of it was produced by the females of the family as a type of domestic production.

For Burroughs it was similar, with the home here housing an extended family of friends and acquaintances. It's similar to the first audiotape cut-up he heard or, rather, as he remembers as such: Jerry Newman's Drunken Newscaster. Newman was a jazz recordist, going to clubs with a wire recorder before tape became available. He was also Jack Kerouac's school boy friend and adult drinking buddy. Newman was an unreconstructed lush like Kerouac and there are pictures of the two smashed, draped over each other. A slurring, Freudian slipping, drunken newscaster would have fit right in. There's conflicting testimony so it's not clear whether the tape was in fact a cut-up or merely a recording of a drunken newscaster, or a cut-up by someone besides Newman. The tape is not extant and the only citations of it are from people who visited him. If it was circulated or broadcasted in any way, there would be some trace in the anecdotal record.

Henri Chopin did put a couple recordings of Burroughs in his Revue Ou (I'm home right now so I can't state which ones exactly), but I remember them to be from the late-60s or early-70s, and they were readings, not manipulated or

more performative pieces as with some of the other inclusions over the years in Revue Ou.

John, when and how did you first run into Burroughs' cut-ups: as propositions within his writing and/or as audible pieces.

Actual recordings were difficult to locate and at times fairly expensive, especially on a bohemian budget. For underground in literary experiments (similar to Burroughs' genre), apart from Revue Ou, I remember S-Press (still operating) from Germany was a good source. I also remember spending too much money on an LP of Kurt Schwitters' Ursonate from a gallery in England. The other source was Source: Music of the Avant-garde, edited by Larry Austin and others around the University of California at Davis (my current digs) in the latter-half of the 1960s. Alvin Lucier's I am Sitting in a Room was first pressed there. It represented the grassroots of experimental music, who otherwise would have had some difficulty in gaining attention by record companies (there were some exceptions here). This is from my personal perspective, and is not meant to represent a nicely detached and researched historical account.

I was lucky enough to live in the SF Bay Area during the latter-half of the 1970s when Charles Amirkhonian had a morning show everyday on KPFA where he'd play a great range of modernist, avant-garde and experimental music, sound poetry, text sound, etc. College and community radio stations at the time, and to a great extent now in the U.S., were the main distribution channel for this type of work. The internet is definitely a major player now, especially with the remarkable Ubu (I assign the whole thing in one of my classes). Charles is moving increasingly on-line with Other Minds

Cassette culture was excellent for putting practitioners, collectors and interested others in touch with one another, but limited in its ability to expose those not already in the loop to new work. That's where radio came in. Some of the work did make its way onto the airwaves and there were plenty of people recording cassettes (and reel-to-reel before that) directly off the radio. I still have several of Charles' programs sitting on my shelves. So I guess if we're looking at distribution, we're actually talking about complementary aspects of a system of distribution.

To spin this more personally, during the mid-1970s I did my own cut-ups while I was an MFA student at Cal Arts. There were tapes as part of my grad exhibit and they were "exhibited" in San Francisco, where I was living (it was a wicked commute), at a couple art venues. Charles also played them on his radio program. I went from gallery work to audio because I wanted to get my work out to more people. More people would encounter your work it seemed with one time on radio than a couple years of gallery exhibitions.

Later, after I'd moved to Seattle, I did a cut-up of Ronald Reagan being interviewed by Bill Moyers before the election. I sold copies of it at a slightly inflated price and used the money to help send copies free to community and college radio stations. Most of the money, however, came from my own pocket, working at temp jobs. For the Pacifica stations I sent multiple copies and said I'd send more if requested. It became something of an underground hit, my one hit.

I had actually taken my cue from George Grosz and Wieland Herfelde (brother of John Heartfield, and publisher of Malik Verlag). They would sell Grosz portfolios to art collectors for the going-rate in order to fund publication of an edition which could be sold cheaply or passed out free to a greater number of people.

"Reagan Speaks for Himself" was also published on an early SubPop cassette (pre-pre-Nirvana) which was part of the cassette underground we're talking about. I would also "perform" it and others at poetry readings in Seattle, which were really nice gatherings, and in art talks; I remember one with the comic artist Lynda Barry, who was also living in Seattle at the time with her poodle with a Mohawk.

The underground comic artist Spain Rodriguez, who had been a house-mate (along with Justin Green, author of Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary...known as the Citizen Kane of Catholic guilt comics) when I lived in San Fran, suggested I send it to his friend Art Spiegelman at RAW Magazine. RAW pressed it onto a flexidisc for RAW No. 4 and, with the help of a little "banned-in-Boston affair" (Evatone, the flexidisc manufacturer, wanted an actor's clearance from Reagan, who was by then in the White House, or from "one of his agents"), it got pretty good publicity. It also got distributed on a folk music LP with Si Kahn (no relation), Barbara Dane and others, called Reaganomic Blues, and the Fine Young Cannibals did a disco dance mix with it, before marketing drive steered them toward motown.

I can get back to more historical footing next time.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: Re: Burroughs and Burrows

Posted: Jan 31, 2005 9:42 PM

Lina sez:

It seems to me that arts institutions have 'woken up' to issues mentioned above fairly recently (in the past few years). Why are discussions around sampling and sound of particular interest to us at this point in the context of Tate Modern?

Kenneth replies:

Have they really? Judging by the way the Tate has handled the Bruce Nauman show, I'm not so sure. For all of the institution's professed interest in "sampling" and "alternative modes of distribution," the Tate, for example, doesn't offer a single downloadable sound sample from the Nauman installation on its website. Furthermore, if you wish to officially "possess" the show, you can purchase a CD with the complete soundtrack on it for £12.

When I visited the show, I saw many people going right up to the speakers and holding either a portable recording device or a cell phone right up to them. No one was stopping anyone from doing this, and the recordings have invariably they have made their way out into the world. Nick Currie (aka Momus) offers a gorgeous live-time document of the installation on his blog <<http://>.

But this is all really beside the point. Right after the CD was available, it appeared on my favorite file-sharing group. Guaranteed that people are remixing the hell out of it right now.

My point is that -- and you'll hear me come back to this again and again -- artist's audio works are generally worthless on the market. That's why Nauman's "mass-produced" CD sells for £12 and his "unique" artworks sell for thousands, if not hundreds of thousands times that much. I can't imagine that for the sake of public education, the institution releasing MP3s of the Nauman disc is in any way going to impact Mr. Nauman's lucrative market (his current "artist ranking" is currently #4, behind Picasso, Warhol, and Klee <<http://>.

But in other areas, The Tate shows incredible initiative. For example, this past Christmas, the Tate put on a spectacular show of artists like Christian Marclay and People Like Us remixing Christmas records. Fortunately, MP3s of this show are available on the website, but they're buried deep and I had a lot of trouble finding them. Which brings up another point: What is the difference between the Nauman exhibition and the Marclay performance? (I'm reminded of my wife, the video artist Cheryl Donegan, whose videos were acquired by MoMA, but are not officially considered part of the MoMA collection.) Are documents of performances somehow less important than those which physically reside inside the institutional space?

I don't mean to single out The Tate; New York's MoMA is no better. As a matter of fact, I'm hard-pressed to find one museum-based site that are offering artists recordings on an abundant and consistent level.

It's easy for the institutions to raise the issue, but when it comes to practice, they're falling on their face.

John Oswald

Subject: Re: Burroughs and Burrows / and sound at the Tate

Posted: Jan 31, 2005 11:15 PM

Doug Kahn writes:

"John, when and how did you first run into Burroughs' cut-ups: as propositions within his writing and/or as audible pieces. "

I had read his cut-up manifestos and the cut-up influenced novels, but in fact i was more fascinated by the sound of his speaking voice than any ideology; i used little bits of his reading Call Me Burroughs. And i remember being quite conscious of how what i was doing was so different from what he espoused: i.e., the cut-up technique as a way of breaking down language and losing control of it, as a way of letting it randomly create new relationships. Instead of doing that i was meticulously placing his words and phonemes in new orders, often in order to have him sound like he was saying what i wanted him to say, just like you [Doug] did so well with that other familiar voice in "Reagan Speaks for Himself". In fact we both also diverged from pseudo-real rhetoric into making those two guys into sound poet sound-a-likes.

One of the strangest meetings of my life up to that time was with Burroughs himself; we were sitting behind a movie screen at a cinema where he was about to give a reading, and he was giving me permission to freely use the recordings of his voice (in spite of this being a successful transaction, it was the last time i ever asked someone for permission). The strangeness for me wasn't so much Burroughs' spacey aloofness and right-through-you look but the fact that that same voice, which i had spent a couple of hundred hours working with as a disembodied recording, was now addressing me by name and responding to me conversationally. There was no way i could make this seem real.

Perhaps i should point out now that i am aware that we haven't answered Lina's question about the Tate Modern and sound. I was waiting for someone else to say something about this first, before i go into another anecdotal divergence.

And as i write this Kenneth Goldsmith (have we met?) has uploaded some comments which i can comment on: It seems that all the sound art examples you are mentioning (i.e., recordings that fit on a CD or mp3) are things that don't really need or benefit from a gallery environment (and i will argue at a later date about how little the typical gallery environment benefits from them).

If there is indeed more to these sound shows at the Tate than the recordings, then there is no need to use the existing real estate to exhibit them, and the networked dissemination of sound files is something which, as you point out, others do quite well, so it really doesn't make much difference if the Tate or MOMA make the effort to distribute soundfiles or not.

I checked out the site you mentioned describing the Bruce Nauman show and listened to the soundclip there, along with the postage stamp photos. These are like a postcard of a painting you'd find in a gallery giftshop. It gives you a glimpse of what the art is like, but it is not the art thing itself, whether that's an oil painting or an arrangement of loudspeakers in a particular place; postcards and mp3s are not what people go to galleries to experience.

What i visit an art gallery to experience is a fairly long list of things. What i personally wish to avoid there most often includes audio and video recordings which are merely that, and therefore much more easily accessible or ignorable elsewhere.

Douglas Kahn

Re: Re: Burroughs and Burrows / and sound at the Tate
Jan 31, 2005 11:52 PM

Kenneth's remarks regarding the Tate's handling of Nauman's show are very interesting. I'd like to throw this up another contextual notch to the question of democratic communications in general. It's good to valorize underground networks, but it's also good to know why they're underground in the first place. Among a number of perfectly fine reasons, there is also the fact that so much information and communication has been driven down by the lack of a democratic media. This is particularly obvious in the U.S., where there is no semblance of democracy remaining in mainstream media, where conservative corporations call the shots and state propaganda and lies affectionately known as spin rule the day. Democratic institutions have been sequestered to local transmissions and networks and narrowcasting, and have influence to be sure but negligible standing in people's daily lives. "Public" broadcasting with National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System is culturally conservative and lacking any political backbone, with what few redeeming moments that exist being broken up and scattered by its syndication system.

It's different in other countries, when I was living in Sydney, a well-known American academic came to my university and was bubbly and effervescent about how the internet was going to put intellectuals in contact with the public (he was also enthusiastic about the political promise of CD-ROMs, but that's a different story). The lackluster response was due in large part to the fact that there were people in the room who had regular access to national radio and television. Eva Cox, a social theorist, was on the tube or radio three or four times a week. When Chomsky came to Australia for two weeks, it was in effect The Noam Chomsky Show, with daily newspaper coverage, prime time interviews and a nationally televised speech in prime time directly criticizing the sitting Australian government. One of the world's most notable political

thinkers has been kept from American airwaves as though he had a bad case of anthrax breath in a country bent on minty fresh.

In terms of the arts of sound, there were two or three weekly programs broadcast on ABC radio, one of the national broadcasters, at decent times of the day dealing with new music, audio and radio arts. Moreover, people were commissioned and paid. Nobody was going to make a living from it, but it helped support the creation of work by a wide range of artists, musicians, theatre people, writers, etc., and did offer a living to the folks working at the stations putting these shows together who were practitioners in their own right, and important members of artistic and cultural communities. It helped make Australia a hotbed of activity and helped generate a true artistic depth in the arts of sound, with outstanding individuals like Jon Rose, Joan Brassil, Joyce Hinterding, Paul Carter, Rainer Linz, Virginia Madsen, Rick Rue, Nigel Helyer, Julian Knowles, Roz Cheney, Tony MacGregor, to name a few of a particular generation. Some of these people are simply not on the international radar screen, subterranean or otherwise, but are nevertheless responsible for work of substance that outstrips much of the work holding people's attention. When I left about three years ago, some of this (as well as other elements of democracy and sanity) was being attacked and dismantled under pressure from the conservative government who have been in power since 1996 under Little Johnny Howard (if Blair is Bush's poodle, Howard is the flea).

The existence of a national broadcaster guarantees nothing, of course. Several years ago I was at a conference in Sunderland called "Hearing is Believing" which was held explicitly to try to get something going in terms of radio and the arts of sound. There were a few representatives from the BBC, but they were totally outnumbered by people testifying to how stodgy the BBC was, and there was little reason not to believe them. It may have changed, but other countries have had a longer and worthy tradition in the area

Other contexts for the subterranean networks we're discussing are closer to the action: the organs of discourse. They are responsible for plucking subterranean events from obscurity, if only for a moment and if only for a little lift, but often for invaluable and sustained support. Musicworks, for instance, has done a great service to Canadian artistic and musical communities and individuals for a very long time. In terms of the arts of sound, the institutions and organs of discourse in "the art world", in particular powerful ones in New York and London, have finally begun to recognize the work that has been going on internationally for a long time. However, there are just too many artists who have been doing great work for a long time who have been excluded. We can be generous and say that this has been an oversight, or we can be more cynical if not realistic, given the number of people and exhibitions and nations excluded, and say that it's been an appropriation by latecomers to the scene, from classes, institutions and positions of power skilled at appropriations called

“discoveries” and selective amnesia singularly called “history.” In terms of discourse, have a look at the jaw-droppers on the recent Artforum online forum on sound art. It seems you’re meant to believe that sound art started in earnest around 2000. There was certainly some of the same hype around Sonic Boom in London.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: If It Doesn't Exist on the Internet It Doesn't Exist

Posted: Feb 1, 2005 9:00 PM

As someone who has been doing a show on WFMU for a decade, I can only say that the state of radio in America is dismal and getting worse all the time. And this includes college radio as well as commercial radio. There really is no hope for radio on the FCC-controlled airwaves as we know it in America. As much as I detest Howard Stern, I can sympathize with his jumping ship to go to satellite radio, where not only will he be paid a shitload of money, but can say what he wants, unhindered by the FCC. It seems today in the US, that if people truly want freedom of speech, they are going to have to pay for it (satellite radio, cable television). What would The Sopranos be without the word "f**k?"

However, just as the airwaves are dying, the web is rising. Doug mentioned with skepticism of the professor in Sydney who "was bubbly and effervescent about how the internet was going to put intellectuals in contact with the public," but this was several years ago, no? I'm not going to say something that I used to say only as hyperbole, but is fast becoming true as a rule:

IF IT DOESN'T EXIST ON THE INTERNET IT DOESN'T EXIST.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: If It Doesn't Exist on the Internet It Doesn't Exist

Posted: Feb 1, 2005 9:47 PM

And furthermore, because John's "Burrows" and Doug's "Reagan Speaks for Himself" don't exist on the internet, they don't exist.

Coversely, because John's "Kissing Jesus in the Dark" and "Plunderphonic" is available on his website, it does not only exist, but is thriving with new enthusiasts (such as myself) enjoying, sampling, playing, etc. the work every day.

It is networked; it is alive

John, you could easily realize a reversible web-version of "Burrows" with Flash. UbuWeb would be thrilled to host it. Doug, the offer for stands as well for "Reagan Speaks for Himself."

I think the cassette-underground network is one of the great lost treasures of recent innovative music. And the reason it's lost is due to its moribund medium. We recently put up the whole run of PhonoStatic cassettes from the mid-80s, with the hopes of greatly enlarging UbuWeb's cassette-network holdings <<http://>. Hopefull we can, in time, fully document much of the movement in open-source MP3s.

John Oswald

Subject: But it does Exist...

Posted: Feb 1, 2005 10:27 PM

Kenneth G. writes:

"And furthermore, because John's "Burrows" and Doug's "Reagan Speaks for Himself" don't exist on the internet, they don't exist. "

I probably should not be replying to this because by Kenneth's definition i personally do not exist : it was not i who put tracks you mention on the net; i have yet to upload anything, although i've been thinking about it.

But i did find "Reagan Speaks for Himself" yesterday at : <www.diymedia.net/c

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: But it does Exist...

Posted: Feb 1, 2005 10:34 PM

John sez:

But i did find "Reagan Speaks for Himself" yesterday at: <www.diymedia.net/c

:) This makes me *so* happy. I'm glad it exists!

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Re: But it does Exist...

Posted: Feb 2, 2005 12:30 AM

It's good Reagan Speaks for Himself was found, in a dark and dusty corner of the internet, existing. It had its day when Reagan had what wits he ever had available to him available, when his dim half-witted opinions morphed effortlessly into national policy and international relations, and when people in the States and around the world, especially in Latin America, lived or died depending on what he had for breakfast. The tape had since been relegated to the same degree of amnesia as Reagan himself, with the exception of enthusiasts, who would correspond in this case to accidental synaptical activity,

perhaps resembling the incoherence of a dream. And fair enough. We all have our days, some better than others.

The tape became revived because of the Showtime mini-series on Ron and Nancy (with the remarkable Judy Davis playing Judy Garland playing Nancy Reagan playing herself) and because he croaked, finally. The person from Truthful Translations wanted to post the tape and I said sure. I believe he had found an mp3 already floating around the internet. With this newfound interest I egosurfed Reagan Speaks and found that it was on the playlist for a number of college and community radio stations around the U.S., as a counter to the psychotic elevation of Reagan to great statesmanhood chorusing at the time in the U.S. mainstream media. I'm just guessing, but I imagine that more non-enthusiasts and aspiring-enthusiasts heard the tape on the radio than those who hunted and pecked their way to Truthful Translations. No doubt several of the radio jocks grabbed the mp3 and played it over the air. Whatever works.

And it's true, the "bubbly and effervescent" American academic spoke about four years ago, long ago perhaps for the democratic media in Australia to deteriorate enough for people to begin believe him now. His enthusiasm for the prospects of the internet in the United States was not the problem. The state of public intellectuals in the States was indeed pathetic, so any alternative held out some hope. He ran into a problem because he confused the situation in the U.S. with that of Australia. If it was someone from say Greece that had given the talk there probably would have been no problem, but people around the world tend to get fidgety when people from the U.S. are confused in this manner. It's like George in *Of Mice and Men* when he wants to pet the rabbits. The academic no doubt thought he was being visionary but the people in the room were thinking more "not applicable" with a hair-trigger suspicion of cultural imperialism.

Which gets me back to a point from my earlier post, it's important to think of distribution, information, and communication in terms of a system and not to put all the eggs in one basket. I'm not ready to write off radio broadcasts. It would be more beneficial to fight for their livelihood and figure out how better to integrate them in a more systemic way. The FCC is hopeless, that's true, but they were forced by rampant pirate radio to accede (no matter how compromised the number) to LPFM (low-power FM) stations around the country.

Kenneth, does UbuWeb have any current activities, plans or desire to integrate with broadcast media? It seems like it could be a fruitful relationship, given the increasing size of your holdings. Perhaps you could even form conduit for institutions as the Tate, MOMA to reach aspiring-enthusiasts.

Finally, since I'm holding down the last time slot here on the West coast, I forgot to mention that, once when I was invited on national radio in Australia, I

played my Plunderphonics CD in its entirety, without commercial interruption, as well as Negativland's U2 shindig. The regular announcer and I gave listeners plenty of warning so they could get their recorders in place.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Radio

Posted: Feb 2, 2005 4:54 AM

Doug sez:

Does UbuWeb have any current activities, plans or desire to integrate with broadcast media?

Yes. UbuWeb is on the verge of launching a 24-hour web-stream, which will be automatically programmed, with a bot randomly rifling through Ubu's storehouse of MP3s, and continuously piggybacking them one after another. The ID3 tags will tell you what is playing as its being played. We will launch this before the summer.

Doug, I am still deeply committed to the idea of innovative airwave work. I still do my WFMU show every week and relish the freedoms that WFMU offers particularly in this unprecedented climate of fear and repression, combined with corporate media consolidation. I feel the same way as you do, that the airwaves are loaded with magic and the serendipitous connection with an unknown and / or unsuspecting public can foster the most incredible bond between programmer and listener. It's the difference between the magic of stumbling upon something whilst spinning a dial late at night on a long car ride as opposed to the predictability of clicking on something you know will be good.

While LPFM is a great thing, the web is better.

Douglas Kahn

Re: Radio

Posted: Feb 2, 2005 3:34 PM

Kenneth. You make quite a bit of sense until you get to your last sentences. If you think "If it doesn't exist on the internet it doesn't exist," then you really need to get out more. Ice doesn't exist on the internet and the cold air can feel good on the faces of the people you get to talk to. And now "LPFM is a great thing, the web is better." It's not a horse race. There are many things that LPFM can do, in certain places for certain people, that the internet can't do as well or at all. And that's okay too. They are not mutually exclusive. Because of different media systems in different nations around the world, many people don't have to jump on the keyboard to find sensible political discourse or interesting

cultural events to the extent that is required in the United States. But, dear moderator, I think we're spinning our wheels. Omigod, it might be internet ice!

John Oswald

Subject: Re: Re: Radio

Back when i was still in high school i managed to finagle having a radio show at each of the two university radio stations in my home town. The biggest attraction for me was having two turntables and a mixer. One of the shows, which i put together each week with a friend, focused exclusively on spontaneously creating what eventually came to be known as mash-ups, etc., i.e., playing two records at once, with the emphasis on matching an instrumental record with a predominately vocal record. We tried opera with jazz; tibetan chanting with heavy rock; Beatles vocals (some of their stereo mixes had all the vocals in one channel) with the Beach Boy's Stack-o-Tracks instrumentals.

We thought the results were often amazing, and eventually became curious about who might be listening to the fortuitous coincidences we were generating. We'd been doing this for several months. The phone never rang during our show. So we had an on-air contest. We asked a skill-testing question, which was : "What is the middle name of the current leader of our fair country [Canada]". The prize was an Aretha Franklin album that we happened to have a spare copy of. When no one phoned in we changed the skill-testing requirement to "Name the leader of our fair country" [answer : Pierre (Elliot) Trudeau] and we added in another album. Still no answer. We then offered a free vacation to a vaguely specified place if anyone could identify themselves. We eventually gave the Aretha Franklin album to a night watchman who walked into the control room when he told us his name.

Several years later i was involved in the creation and production of record albums. We would press 500 or a thousand of something and send it off to a distributor and usually after a few months or a year we'd have enough money to repress, if all the copies had been distributed. I had very little idea who was buying these things. I remember being very surprised when someone on another continent came up to me and said that he had such-and-such a record which i had been involved in making, and that he liked it.

A few years later Mystery Tapes International (the distribution wing of mLab, where i still am the Director of Research) began to distribute cassettes exclusively through the mail. We manufactured the tapes, sometimes one by one as orders came in (we were a bit of an anomaly in the blossoming cassette network in that we didn't trade). We often made revisions in a title, like software updates, and occasionally someone would order what would be, as a result of this process, a unique copy of a title. We made a big deal about how you could

only get the mystery tapes from us, and we discouraged making copies of them, because we said they wouldn't sound as good.

The quantities of tapes we were distributing were less than a tenth of what what i'd been selling in the record business. But instead of not knowing who was getting the music, we had an address for every one of our customers world-wide, and we often got comments from these people with their re-orders. I was particularly happy to know who was listening.

Mystery Tapes International's final release was the plunderphonics CD which was distributed for free (again to specific people) in 1989 for a little more than a month before legal proceedings endeavoured to stop its distribution. Ironically, when word got out that i was no longer in the business of distributing free CDS others on several continents, often under the moniker of Copyright Violation Squads took up the slack; usually providing a service where if someone sent a blank cassette and postage, a dub of the CD, or a dub of a tape of the CD would be returned. This was before anyone knew the internet existed. Over the next several months and years thousands of copies were made.

The nicest thing about the compact disc medium was that every CD was the equivalent of the master tape (which i had given to the opposing lawyers to destroy to keep them happy) and CDs made from CDs could be exact clones. Also because of the greater quantity of distribution and broadcast (thanks Doug) i was hearing from even more listeners than with the mystery tapes.

A few years later i put together a CD called Grayfolded. This one was for sale. Somewhere during production it became obvious that it was going to be a 2-CD set. I finished the first CD and a new record company i affiliated with just for this project sold it (through third-party distributors mostly) along with a mail-in card to subscribe to get the at-the-time uncompleted 2nd disc. The card also requested suggestions and comments. We knew that a specific audience (called deadheads) were very opinionated and often knowledgeable about the musical territory i was electroquoting (plundering). We received a large number of mailed-in subscription orders which included thousands of suggestions and opinions. This was the same type of feedback that i had enjoyed with the mystery tapes.

Fifteen years after the release of the plunderphonic CD a very similar story transpired with a release by Brian Burton entitled The Grey Album. (Coincidentally the Beatles 'White Album', the source for this project, also provided material for a track entitled Birth on the plunderphonics CD). The only difference was that when legal threats stopped Burton from distributing his CDs, the copying was mostly propagated by internet file sharing. Thousands of copies (each a clone of an mp3 master) were downloaded in one day.

<END OF PAGE 1>

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: a few strands...

Posted: Feb 3, 2005 12:14 PM

Hello everybody,

Apologies for what seems like a gaping long silence, given the volume of the discussion. I was offline (British Library) for a couple of days and was amazed to see the speed at which the discussions here are developing.

We now just have to hope the public forum takes off as well. I really hope to 'hear' some voices in there.

Thank you John and Douglas for great personal histories of the tape movement. This is really valuable, from my perspective for one, as the only tape experiments I was doing at the time involved a taping the 'Hit Of The Month' from Yugoslav TV by standing in front of the TV with a mic pointed towards it, while singing along. (Come to think of it - those would probably sound pretty interesting now in a grim sort of way).

It is also really useful to hear accounts of broadcast networks and Doug's thoughts about democratic (or lack of) media in different countries he's lived in. This is something I think we should return to at some point - the differences in local situations and what the internet/radio etc represent in different contexts (on that note - I just have to mention London's recent addition to the airwaves (and online) - Resonance.fm - which in my view transformed our airwaves beyond recognition).

In an attempt to draw out a few potential conversational threads (in no particular order):

1. MUSEUM ENGAGEMENT WITH SOUND ONLINE VS OFFLINE:

I am interested in picking up the discussion around the museum's offline and online engagement with sound works that Kenneth started:

It strikes me as unlikely that large institutions such as the Tate or MoMA will (at least not in the near future) begin to offer a truly dynamic (read: worth visiting regularly) online environment, whether we are talking about mp3 archives, a live stream or other forms of support for the 'arts of sound' (as Doug put it). I actually think it would be crazy for a mammoth museum like the Tate to even

attempt to be at the centre of online activity – I think that would be unrealistic and unlikely to succeed.

I say this partly due to the bureaucratic nature of large museums that I'm sure we're all familiar with, but also because I just don't think its ever going to be high up enough on the list of museum priorities. And my question is – should it be?

I feel like a similar discussion used to (and probably still does) exist about net art: should museums deal with it and if so how (remember when a few years back every art centre used to try to commission a net art piece). Various initiatives were started but to be honest – museum sites are the last place I'd go in search of net art.

So I don't really find it that interesting to think about whether a museum uploads an MP3 of an installation or performance quickly or if it takes them a year to get it on their site, what I find really crucial is whether that museum is engaging with the longer term implications of where that work ends up – in the public domain or not. What I interesting is that museums are now beginning to implement Creative Commons Licences, for example. That to me is something that shows a change in the right direction. Something much more important than whether the website happens to be a 'hub of' activity at any particular moment.

Also: JOHN: you mentioned your expectations of a gallery visit and announced that you will talk about 'how little the gallery environment benefits from sound works and vice versa. I'm interested to hear some more about this.

Do you really believe that sound works do not need the gallery at all? Kenneth and Doug, do you agree with this view?

2. ARTS INSTITUTIONS PAIRING UP WITH INDEPENDENT NETWORKS –DOES IT WORK?

Another thread I think is worth discussing is the model Doug proposed whereby existing networks (such as UbuWeb for example) might pair up with institutions such as the Tate or MoMA.

One model that I know of (and am curious about) is Rhizome's recent 'deal' with the New Museum. Does anyone know more about this? It strikes me (from the outside) as a good initiative but perhaps someone closer (Kenneth – geographically closer?) knows more?

One very recent example of a partnership that I have first hand experience of is Christian Marclay's Sounds Of Christmas (which took place at Tate Modern in

December, which Kenneth mentioned (I'm glad got brought up already). This is actually an example of a museum happily partnering up with the 'smaller guys' – a good model in my opinion. Sounds Of Christmas was co-produced by Electra (the agency I run) and I actually think it was a rare example of a museum showing incredible openness and flexibility and above all offering financial support and ability to act quickly. In this case the museum listened to the 'small guy' – by allowing us to do what we do best – ie act quickly, get stuff done organically without having to get caught in the bureaucratic machinery. (By the way – I had no idea the performance MP3s were already on the website?). I think this is a positive step and something I hope we'll see some more of in the future.

3. IF IT DOESN'T EXIST ON THE INTERNET IT DOESN'T EXIST.

Just briefly: I thought this was a brilliant way of putting something that I for one keep trying to work out for myself. The funny thing is that in principle I totally agree with you Kenneth about it being alive only once it's online, but in practice I turned away from curating 'online art' out of sheer frustration with the lack of real spaces, people and face to face discussion (the point Doug makes) and now I'm very happy operating in real galleries and concert spaces again...so I'll have to mull that one over some more...

And on that note...off I go back to the offline world of the BL filled with good ol' books!

Kelli Dipple

Subject: Re: sound at Tate

Posted: Feb 3, 2005 4:11 PM

Hello there – I am not going to but into this conversation very much. As the Curator of the season, my role is more tied into making a space for the debate, producing resources, negotiating with the artists and interfacing the content in a meaningful way for audiences – providing narrative and visibility. Though on the topic of 'sound at Tate' I thought I would make a few clarifications.

Lina writes:

"I actually think it would be crazy for a mammoth museum like the Tate to even attempt to be at the centre of online activity – I think that would be unrealistic and unlikely to succeed. I say this partly due to the bureaucratic nature of large museums that I'm sure we're all familiar with, but also because I just don't think it's ever going to be high up enough on the list of museum priorities. And my question is – should it be?"

I think you are right about it never being an overriding priority in a traditional museum environment, at least not in the immediate future. However as I have engaged with these issues from a number of angles through my position at

Tate and in dialogue with other colleagues. It does appear to me, that the opportunity we have, as a non profiteering, public sector organization (outside of the record label/net label/and big money music and film industries) is to work in close collaboration with artists and legal advisors to trial and present some models, which enable the public sector to grow more confidence in this area. Whilst allowing artists to engage with how it may relate to their work and practice/or not... and to do this in a non-exploitative fashion in context of an open debate and educational objectives. It can only ever be a contribution to the whole, and certainly, one would hope – not definitive.

Lina writes:

"So I don't really find it that interesting to think about whether a museum uploads an MP3 of an installation or performance..."

And on the same topic John writes:

"... the networked dissemination of sound files is something which, as you point out, others do quite well, so it really doesn't make much difference if the Tate or MOMA make the effort to distribute sound files or not."

As a Curator, I do somewhat agree with John... in that I am really not sure that recording and squashing a beautifully spatial and architectural sound work into an MP3 (or heaven forbid – a ring tone) adds much value to the work itself, and barely sounds like a useful innovation, in most contexts. However I think the nature of some work/practice (not all) can find value in these types of distributions. Given the nature of the Online Events programme that I am responsible for, it's audience, distribution and durational format (i.e. it often precedes and always postscripts associated live events) I have been looking for ways (and projects) which are specifically appropriate to finding opportunity and extended value in this context.

I will give a little background and further preview information with regard to the MP3s that are associated with the d_cultuRe season to illustrate my point...

SoundSurface by Scanner and Stephen Vitiello

<http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/soundsurface>

These artists began negotiating with me about how they wanted to be represented in the archive. <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive> I had approached them with a mind to do something particular to the work they were doing, instead of your typical live webcast of a talk. The result grew organically out of these discussions and triggered the research, which further lead to this follow on season and debate. This is not a straight recording of a performance put into Mp3 format for the sake of it. The artists were commissioned to post-produce a recording of their performance and create a unique digital object specifically for online archive, which continued to engage with the themes and structures that arose from the live event – in response to the Donald Judd

exhibition at Tate Modern. Mp3 came up as an appropriate format (over real media) - which lead to all kinds of issues around downloadable content and copyright, which we resolved with a Creative Commons license. The artists and I were interviewed by Mark McLaren for a resonance.fm show on some of the issues and the process of arriving at the piece. You can listen to an archive of that interview here <http://tinyurl.com/6l89a>

Lina writes:

"(By the way - I had no idea the performance MP3s were already on the website?). I think this is a positive step and something I hope we'll see some more of in the future."

The Sounds of Christmas by Christian Marcaly

http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/christian_marclay/

Actually the mp3s are not available quite yet (the artist talk is, and images from the performance)... Christian is still getting around to listening to it/them so we can continue a dialogue about how best to represent the work and also decide on the appropriate rights framework. I am happy to allow the right amount of time for artists to make considered and creative decisions about these kinds of things. Rest assured it will not just be a straight recording of the entire performance squashed into an mp3 -- they may well be short samples, reflecting the sampling structure of the actual performance. It will be posted at some point during the discussion.

The Sound of Heaven and Earth (Luc Ferrari, Kaffe Matthews, David Grubbs, Achim Wollscheid, Eric Roth and Olias Nil)

<http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/heaven&earth/>

This live event took place at Tate Modern last Saturday. We have recorded and negotiated rights as appropriate with each composer and musician, in order to release mp3s under creative commons of the compositional scores (which were constructed of pure audio) along side real media archives (all rights reserved) of the performances, and some of the rehearsal/instruction process between the composers and musicians. Each composition will be represented differently depending on the nature of the individual work and the composer's wishes. As, on the evening itself the scores were not to be heard - just the interpretations of those scores in performance, I recognized early on with this project that the truly interesting thing to archive in this context, was the practice and compositional technique, this is rare content, and as far as I am concerned, in juxtaposition to the performance, of great educational value -- beyond mere documentation or a webcast of the event. Working with the composers and musicians on the day was truly fascinating and I am very pleased to be able to offer some insight into that to those who were not involved in the process. Again I am attempting to take the nature of the medium and format into consideration. It seemed appropriate that the scores themselves were available for people to download, reuse and reinterpret - that is the job of a score. The

performance recordings are there to demonstrate an example interpretation. These will also be released next month.

Kenneth writes:

"... but they're buried deep and I had a lot of trouble finding them. Which brings up another point: What is the difference between the Nauman exhibition and the Marclay performance?"

I do take your point Kenny – I ask myself the same question sometimes, however I should point out that things are highly profiled on the Tate site when they are current. Unfortunately, actually once the Nauman show slips into past exhibitions on the site it will also be buried deep. Tate are aware of this as an issue across all content on the site and it is something that is being addressed separate to the other issues discussed here.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Re: sound at Tate

Posted: Feb 3, 2005 10:17 PM

I agree with John that the well-being of certain types of work doesn't require institutions like the Tate to take up their cause; yet there are other types of work that would benefit. So it's good that major museums and galleries are now attending to works involving sound in a more concerted manner. There has been a patchy history of such exhibitions, mostly little synchronic slices of who's doing what. Some of the exhibitions I've seen around the world demonstrate that there's still a steep learning curve on simple matters of presentation. There was a major sound art show at in Sydney that self-destructed because the institution didn't know how to handle a number of sound works in close proximity to one another, due mainly to a curator in a land grab for glory who alienated the community of sound artists who could have lent their collective wisdom on the matter. ZKM in Karlsruhe is one major institution that does things right in terms of exhibition design, no doubt because the media arts are noisy by nature and don't come from such solemn stock.

There is still a need for a more systematically historical approach. The secular prayer that is the hushed space of the gallery needs to be interrupted by the sound of history being brushed against the grain, in Walter Benjamin's words. The Centre Pompidou's recent exhibition was a step in the right direction, although it was obviously constrained (enabled?) and certainly informed by its own collection. Now that sound is hip, the danger is that certain blue-chip artists, already housed in major collections, will be elevated to unmerited positions of historical importance with respect to the use of sound, and the role of artists responsible to a greater extent for the genesis of sound as an artistic medium will be diminished or excluded. I'm not sure what shows the Tate has

done in the past that involve a heavy dose of sound, but the Nauman show has certainly been trumpeted in this way. Nauman has done very interesting works involving sound and especially perception relating to sound (see the last part of my essay for the Pompidou exhibition catalog), but if indeed this show is the first such show for the Tate, what are the economic and proprietary mechanisms of its genesis? There are of course a number of blue-chip gallery artists orbiting Nauman's generation not known primarily for a concentration in sound, who have done wonderful work in the area—Dennis Oppenheim, John Baldessari, Rebecca Horn, Vito Acconci and Gary Hill come immediately to mind—but I really hope such people don't exhaust the curatorial imagination of major institutions.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: a few strands...

Posted: Feb 4, 2005 7:01 PM

Lina sez:

"I actually think it would be crazy for a mammoth museum like the Tate to even attempt to be at the centre of online activity – I think that would be unrealistic and unlikely to succeed."

I disagree. Places like the Tate and MoMA are obliged in the interest of public education to share from their vast holdings that which has significant historical interest, insignificant commercial value, and travels well in other mediums. Sound art -- or at least artist's recordings -- fit all thee criteria. and I can't buy the idea that it's for a lack of resources: we all know how easy it is to digitally convert and post MP3s.

Lina sez:

"I feel like a similar discussion used to (and probably still does) exist about net art: should museums deal with it and if so how (remember when a few years back every art centre used to try to commission a net art piece). Various initiatives were started but to be honest – museum sites are the last place I'd go in search of net art."

I agree. Why go somewhere in physical space to see something that is better viewed in the comfort of your own home?

The social and political ramifications of the online environment as radical distributive mechanism are immense. I live in New York City; in ten minutes, I can see all the art I want. Most people don't have this privilege. For them, it's nearly impossible to get to a museum. In fact, for the majority of people interested in art, the web is their main source of information and exposure. In the interest of education, again, the museums, I feel, are obliged to share their wealth.

John Oswald

Subject: Re: sound at Tate

Posted: Feb 5, 2005 5:49 PM

Lina D writes:

'Also: JOHN: you mentioned your expectations of a gallery visit and announced that you will talk about 'how little the gallery environment benefits from sound works and vice versa. I'm interested to hear some more about this.'

Yes i did say that Lina [hi, welcome to our chat], but i don't think i should have said that.

I could argue with myself here, by prescribing any number of beneficial situations to embellish or transform "the secular prayer that is the hushed space of the gallery" as Doug so nicely paraphrased Benjamin.

I could also complain (as i often do to myself) about most of the attempts to add sound to gallery situations. These interruptions and maskings of "hushed space", include nattering video monitors, most sound sculptures, and the pervasive ventilation noise that is often a given in contemporary galleries.

Through the '80's and '90's i successfully declined numerous invitations to contribute work to group shows of what at the time was usually called Sound Sculpture. These group exhibits inevitably impressed me as being sonic ghettos, with individual pieces fighting to be heard over or under each other, and unhappy staff fighting to turn down or off the volume of the more persistent objects being exhibited.

In 2000 i ended up contributing to the Hayward Gallery's Sonic Boom, which was a exhibition of this sort, by accident. When curator David Toop asked me to contribute to a show of art by musicians, and mentioned a couple of the people involved, i imagined that there would be album-cover collages by Christian Marclay, sideways video images by Brian Eno, and maybe paintings or photos by some hip Ron Wood or Bryan Adams. David knew that i had always designed my own album covers and i assumed, rather narrow-mindedly, that 'art by musicians' in an art gallery would be visual. This i thought was my first invitation to be in a visual show. I eagerly contributed a time-based image i was working on, called Janéad O'Jakriel, a plasma-screen moving still chronoplunderphotic electron drawing, as i variously called it.

Shortly before i took off for London David clarified the nature of the show (i.e., it was a sound sculpture show) and implored me to add a sonic component to my perfectly mute piece. I reluctantly drummed up a separate but related audio work called Jackoscan.

Sonic Boom did seem like a big noisy sonic ghetto, which nonetheless contained some very lovely neighbourhoods of sounds in often incongruous juxtapositions. The more delicate pieces, Max Eastley's for instance, were impossible to listen to without hearing a more noisy neighbour at the same time. This was partly because the exhibition's architect (or, more precisely, interior designer) Christophe Gérard (who i should thank for conjuring up a very nice plinth for my piece) insisted that none of the exhibits would be behind a closed door. This rule had a compromising effect on several works. My neighbour–once–removed, Christian Marclay, and his Guitar Drag, was an example. The piece, which is not really in any sense an installation, but rather a wonderful traditional narrative movie, had a room to itself; a room without a door. The subject matter of Guitar Drag cried out for it to be real loud: something obnoxiously loud to some spectators would have been ideal. And it could have been much louder with a door in place, with occasional gusts of sound when someone entered or exited. But as it was, Christian either had to settle for a wimpy level, or completely drown out the Project Dark piece in the neighbouring plot.

Adapting work to the Sonic Boom show was a bit like living in a cheaply constructed hotel or apartment building and trying to get along with your neighbours who could be so easily overheard through thin walls. I do think that the organizers did a good job of distributing pieces throughout the building – perhaps the biggest advantage of that exhibit was devoting the whole building emphatically to sound. The overall environment was free to be noisy.

I personally tend to appreciate noisy places in very small doses. But, to complete my plasma image, i ended up spending long days in that environment. At first this felt uncomfortably like working in a factory full of assembly–line machinery. The same sounds would again and again recur. But during the week i was committed to that location, there was a most satisfying transformation in my mood. I began to notice that when i walked into the place in the morning i'd appreciate what a wonderfully complex melange of sound it was, and like a pop record heard several times, i grew to love it, though i continued to prefer that my contribution be mute (Lee Renaldo also had a sculpture which didn't make sound, more along the lines of what i first thought the exhibition was to be).

A week after Sonic Boom opened i was in Vienna putting up a big sound and video installation, a collaboration with designer Bruce Mau called Stress (not to be confused with Stress 2002, for which i did not participate).

The location was the annex of the MAK (museum of design) which was a building about the size of the Hayward. The big difference was, instead of having a shared acoustical space for a variety of divergent works, the MAK building was devoted to one piece. Which meant that our piece could be and

was (occasionally) extremely loud – ca. 120 decibels – the institution consulted their stress engineers to determine if it was OK for us to literally shake the building. There were also very quiet bits and, because i had designed localized elements into the custom sound system : depending where you were, you could hear quiet things while loud things were happening overall.

The only other place this piece ran in this state was in an abandoned air hanger.

I don't think this degree of loudness which is common in places like clubs will ever be a part of an art exhibit in anything other than a dedicated space.

I'm trying to think of an analogy for loudness in the visual art world – the colours in painting being too bright? Even if you are dealing with pure light, an extremely bright (id wish, as with sound that the levels, that this would be below the threshold of pain) light work could be contained and localized in some way as to co-exist with other work, but sound is much more difficult to contain.

Another analogy for loudness could be bigness. The Tate Modern is designed to compliment really big sculptures (like Louise Bourgeois's Maman) but imagine if they hosted the acoustic equivalent; something that dominated the main hall.

The opposite of loudness, quiet (and something close to its absolute state, silence), is easier to reconcile with the multi-purpose functions of museums (Bruce Nauman's Acoustic Pressure Piece, which i found at the Sons & Lumières exhibit at Centre Pompidou, is a very poorly designed attempt at this).

The only piece i ever made specifically in response to a sound sculpture installation was the only piece in my solo show at the Obscure Gallery in Quebec in 1992. It featured both an absolute negation of light and a gradual entry into very near silence.

Thinking about it reminds me that i should shut up for now.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Distributed collaboration

Posted: Feb 9, 2005 1:47 AM

As a background question for this panel: how does the art world embrace collectivity and collaboration in general? (The art world here is the one where the bulk of the institutions and markets reside and where the bulk of the discourses are generated, those major metropolitan zones where wealth, patrons and collectors are concentrated. We have to get detailed because those in the thick of it have been known to confuse cosmopolis for cosmos.) Here we are at the Tate, after all, discursively embracing various collective and collaborative practices. Has there been or will there be more than a discursive embrace?

Tracking back internet audio to cassette culture has the effect of moving us closer to mail art. Although I participated on the margins of mail art, I'm a bit fuzzy how it arose in the first place. I do know that File Magazine played an important part (then Vile) and that Canadian artists were key (I'm not sure this works, but being from the Pacific Northwest and going to drink beer and tomato juice across the border when I was 18, I'm damn near Canadian myself). I'm imagining (what a historian who hasn't done the legwork does) one reason is Canada's already-distributed character, starting with itself and then moving with momentum to the rest of the world. For an example of how cassette culture came out of mail art, see Rod Summers article VEC AUDIO EXCHANGE in *Sound by Artists*, edited by Dan Lander and Micah Lexier.

The book itself is a case in point. If there was an emblematic Anglophone starting point for sound/audio/radio art in the early-1990s (fueled by the growing activity in the 1980s), then that book is it. And it grew from the ground of distributed-Canada, from Art Metropole, Banff Centre, Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, Western Front, etc. It's similar to other distributed and diasporic cultural and political collaborations and transmissions (Hmong cassette culture, Australian Aboriginal ham radio, the fax in the first Intifada), the outreaches of communication that centers of power need not confront and thus lose an opportunity for resourcefulness, invention and distant generation of new perspectives.

Again, I lose the scent with Mail Art, but I do know that there were similar strategies with Fluxus and Intermedia. George Brecht's event-score cards were distributed through the mail, as were similar works by a number of other artists. There were numerous pieces where collaboration was distributed in exquisite-corpse-like chain or centrally and gently directed. The practice becomes explicitly global in a piece like Mieko Shiomi's wonderful Spatial Poem. It's interesting that Fluxus commanded little respect from official art world galleries and museums until collectors and institutions had assured a sufficient market, and only then when Maciunas had been constructed as the dead anti-art czar leaving a trail of Tiffany eggs. Look how long Fluxus took to break into official art world discourse in New York. I believe Liz Kotz's article in *October* was the first to broach the topic, and that appeared just a few years ago. *October* had been delectating over conceptual art for years, despite the fact that many of the ideas informing conceptual art had previously arisen in Fluxus and Intermedia, and in an often more interesting way.

So, to bring this back to an improbable loop, I doubt that Robin James will die in the manner of Maciunas in order to shoehorn *Cassette Mythos* or *Op Magazine* into the museum. Also, just a little detail work, the paraphrase of Benjamin was the brushing history against the grain, not the secular prayer: that came from a poll long ago where people compared their experience in art galleries and museums first and foremost to church.

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: Re: collaboration or participation?

Posted: Feb 9, 2005 2:54 PM

Doug says: As a background question for this panel: how does the art world embrace collectivity and collaboration in general?

I actually do believe that the artworld is very much engaging with the type of work Doug has brought up, but that its engagement is with a very different type of collaborative practice to what we are discussing here (works that may be slightly 'off topic' to this discussion):

For instance - the artworld has embraced works by artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija (whose dinners are known to list 'lots of people' as one of the materials used in the work), and the work of Tino Seghal which is based on a set of instructions executed by a group of individuals that he refers to as 'interpreters' (see the current show at London's ICA: <http://www.ica.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=13842>),

At last year's Frieze Art Fair, one of the works purchased by the Tate was Roman Ondak's piece 'queue' which consists of people forming a queue in designated spots, at a specific time.

I'm seeing a lot of work in this vein at the moment, which is very much embraced by the artworld, but I am not so sure it is truly collaborative work. I would use the term participation rather than collaboration.

And by the same token: Are Yoko Ono's Instruction Pieces, Max Neuhaus's 'Public Supply' or Mieko Shiomi's 'Spatial Poem' truly collaborative works, or are single author's works which are realized only through participation?

So my question is: is there a difference between collaboration and participation in what we are talking about, and if so, what is it?

I would argue that we are talking about works clearly authored by Yoko Ono, Mieko Shiomi, Max Neuhaus, Rirkrit Tiravanija and other artists mentioned above, which are executed with the participation of a certain community.

So I'm just wondering whether in these discussions (and much of current debates around this topic) the terms 'collaboration' and 'participation' might sometimes get used to mean one and the same thing, when in fact they are very different.

Also – I think because some of the work we are talking about here tends to be ephemeral (such as the aforementioned queue), and ‘set in motion’ by a community of people, issues of authorship and ways of collecting get raised in discussions around institutional engagement, but I am not sure that collaboration is at the heart of what we’re trying to get to.

So, for the sake of what I’m finding to be a truly inspiring discussion – what are some examples of works that could be termed truly collaborative that we can use to examine institutional engagement?

Sorry if these examples may seem slightly ‘off topic’ but I find it difficult to talk exclusively about sound work when we are surrounded by so much practice that (I feel) we need to reference when talking about collaboration and the artworld.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: collaboration or participation?

Posted: Feb 9, 2005 4:55 PM

Lina makes a good point about collaboration and participation. It seems that what is meant by “community” and the nature of their contribution can put things into a grey zone. Shiomi's Spatial Poem is certainly participation. The nature of their input is so simple, a snapshot of the quotidian, that authorship on their part really doesn't count, if collaboration entails contributing authorships. But it's participation among fairly close circles of friends, a community largely of other practitioners, and the work itself is an expression and vitalization of that community. Other participatory pieces could entail the input what would otherwise be an audience. Furthermore, in a Fluxus context “authorship” most often lacks the control with which it is usually associated and could instead be thought of as a means of creating occasions and opportunities. Shiomi frames the occasion, but the beauty is in its service of self-representation to a distributed community. I think that this is really not off-topic, but might help us get at a notion of social projects for varying types of communities, and a healthy confusion between collaboration and participation. For instance, how do we start talking about Negativland's long running Over the Edge show on KPFA radio in Berkeley, where people's contributions made over the phone are mixed real-time with onsite studio-generated materials and broadcast. OTE was a model for a type of collaboration/participation that moved onto the internet, but different than The Hub (Chris Brown, John Bischoff, Tim Perkis, Scott Gresham-Lancaster, Mark Trayle, Phil Stone...). Come to think of it, other models of participation/collaboration within music groups and within the act of mixing itself mixes things up even more.

John Oswald

Subject: Re: collaboration or participation?

Posted: Feb 9, 2005 10:23 PM

I think Lina answers her own question clearly enough : all the examples she mentions are singular artists who ask others to participate. I only use the term 'collaboration' in situations where there is equal responsibility and authorship. An established example of this in the viz-art world would be General Idea (a collaborative entity who's identity remains intact even though there is only one member still living). An example in the sound world would be any slightly democratic band, although examples of bands who share authorship are rare. Perhaps someone will disagree with this statement : there is nothing intrinsically more collaborative or participatory about sound-artistic endeavours in comparison with visual-artistic or conceptual endeavours. But there is a traditional hierarchy in most disciplines, and even in the musical realm the person in charge is seldom the person who is creating the sounds. For instance it's more common than not in contemporary opera to banish the composer from any decision making in a production of the work.

The Stress installation i described above was an example of an exhibiting body imposing a hierarchy on what was explicitly a collaborative working situation. The MAK had been informed that the work was a three-way equal collaboration (this was contractually stated, and it is something i insist upon. The actual working arrangement was a bit more complicated – André Lepecki co-initiated the project but was not active in the design or realization of the installation; and because Bruce Mau was paying for my participation i tended to think of him as my boss in order to have give him the deciding vote should we ever have reached an impasse, but that didn't happen). The MAK chose to interpret this relationship differently, so when we arrived in Vienna all the display advertising said 'STRESS by Bruce Mau and André Lepecki, [and then in smaller print] sound design by John Oswald'. This is not what we had told them and its quite clearly contrary to my conception of a collaborative endeavour, where even though the collaborators may each have a particular expertise, everyone is free to participate in all aspects of the project, rather than resorting to a departmental approach. In a sense, we are all directors.

I mention this because this is another example of the usual sensory hierarchy (brain-space-demanding visuals come in the front, sounds come in the side doors, often unnoticed) manifested in how art-making is described.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: Re: collaboration or participation?

Posted: Feb 11, 2005 3:31 PM

As I'm fated to be the net-guy, I'd like to consider collaboration in terms of file-sharing. In thinking about the way that UbuWeb (and many other types of file sharing systems) distribute their warez, I've come up with a term: "nude media."

What I mean by this is that once, say, an MP3 file is downloaded from the context of a site such as UbuWeb, it's free or naked, stripped bare of the normative external signifiers that tend to give as much meaning to an artwork as the contents of the artwork itself. Unadorned with branding or scholarly liner notes, emanating from no authoritative source, these objects are nude, not clothed. Thrown into open peer-to-peer distribution systems, nude media files often lose even their historical significance and blur into free-floating sound works, traveling in circles that they would not normally reach if clad in their conventional clothing. (iTunes delivers their files somewhat nude: your dollar doesn't get you a cover or any liner notes. In addition, they use the proprietary AAC file format and the ID3 tags are chock-full of ownership).

Believers in the inherent stability of media, regardless of its form, might argue that this phenomenon leads to little more than a tangle of disinformation. But recontextualization has been the basis for innumerable radical works of art. With the advent of file-sharing we've seen this approach explode. On UbuWeb, although we encode our MP3s with the ID3 tags -- which, on the MP3 player, identify the artist, the title of the cut, etc. -- we do not encode provenance information, such as "Courtesy of UbuWeb." Unlike iTunes, when an MP3 leaves our site it is, in essence, returned to the common space of the web: it leaves nude.

Through a curious confluence of Downtown sensibility and mass marketing, thousands of rock-loving, Lollapalooza-attending Sonic Youth fans bought their "Goodbye 20th Century" disc and were exposed to what until very recently has resided on the fringes of the historical avant-garde. Through gestures like these, the avant-garde becomes hip and well-marketed. Stroll through any good record store or museum gift shop and you'll notice hundreds of artifacts of the historical avant-garde gorgeously repackaged to be snapped up by consumers. As soon as these items are purchased, however they can be recruited as nude media, via peer-to-peer file sharing. In the case of some of this material, what was originally created as an anti-authoritarian gesture has, thanks to the Internet, been restored to its original radical intentions. Due to the manipulative properties of digital media, such artworks are susceptible to remixing and mangling on a mass scale, hence never having the one authoritative version bestowed upon these objects in traditional media. They are ever-changing works-in-progress operating in the most widespread gift economy yet known.

Such circumstances raise many questions: How does having a variety of contexts influence the cultural reception of such objects? Who or what determines an avant-garde artifact's value, both commercially and intellectually? How does this in turn impact the artist's reputation, both commercially and intellectually? If artifacts are always in flux, when is an historical work determined to be "finished"?

The web-based bootlegging phenomenon turns this into an endless giant game of telephone, with MP3s being passed off from one person to the next, remixed each time, a stunning example of collaboration.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Re: Re: collaboration or participation?

Posted: Feb 12, 2005 4:14 AM

If the purpose of this panel is to simultaneously discuss sound and networking, and the politics thereof, then Kenneth "The Fated Net-Guy" Goldsmith has hit the mark with the concept of "nude media" which is "free or naked, stripped bare of the normative external signifiers that tend to give as much meaning to an artwork as the contents of the artwork itself. Unadorned with branding or scholarly liner notes, emanating from no authoritative source, these objects are nude, not clothed. Thrown into open peer-to-peer distribution systems, nude media files often lose even their historical significance and blur into free-floating sound works, traveling in circles that they would not normally reach if clad in their conventional clothing."

This, of course, not only describes issues pertaining to proprietary rights, discussions which I find often tailspin into loops and mixes signifying not much (given the exchange climate Kenneth describes); it also describes the deracinating operations of conventional musical discourse and practice on the obvious and subtle complexity of sounds.

I can't tell whether Kenneth valorizes this or not, or whether it's big like the weather, can't do much about it short of a Kyoto Accord. On a mass scale surpassing the big weather of file exchange, appropriation is "nude media", whether it's historical amnesia, social or ecological decontextualization, lack of attribution, cultural theft and imperialism.

It's Steven Feld's "Pygmy Pop" writ large, or the globtrotting shopping trip of Brian Eno and David Byrne's "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts." It's life reduced to exchange with none of those persnickety traces of the labor of others, what every American, at least, learns with every purchase.

John's Plunderphonics was/is a direct counter to "nude media" in this respect. Its system of attribution is pitted against this class of appropriation. It offers a richness of sound where you don't have to leave your memory and intellect at the door.

When Kenneth states, "Due to the manipulative properties of digital media, such artworks are susceptible to remixing and mangling on a mass scale, hence never having the one authoritative version bestowed upon these objects in

traditional media," he is repeating Derrida's early description of what happens to the authoritative presence of speech when it circulates in the contaminating environs of writing.

It doesn't seem to me that the paltry discourses surrounding most works in this mélange of exchange would qualify as authoritative, and no doubt Kenneth would agree. The remedy is not to get oedipal about a pathetic discourse and jettison it; why not bring gramps along for the ride: there's room.

John Oswald

Subject: nude media

Posted: Feb 18, 2005 12:57 AM

The nude media effect isn't applicable to sound. It can be applied to any data. Nonetheless i think most often people prefer to put an identifying handle on every thing; and things lose their handles from laziness, theft or pranksterism. A computer-audio world example of the latter would be downloadable ditties on P2P networks which are different from their identify tags. Both major labels and musicians aspiring to be heard have posted downloads allegedly by famous pop stars; the former to render the network unreliable, and the latter so their relatively unpopular stuff might get heard. The contents of these audio files range from what the major labels would consider undesirable noise to what intrepid artists might consider desirable noise. Sometimes these files contain admonishing spoken messages.

Doug K writes:

"John's Plunderphonics was/is a direct counter to "nude media" in this respect. Its system of attribution is pitted against this class of appropriation."

Yes. But preceding the plunderphonic publications were Mystery Tapes. I mentioned the distribution scheme for these in an earlier missive. What i didn't mention is that the packaging concept: which was to obfuscate sources as much as possible. Because the tapes were physical objects, they looked like something. They were packaged in a certain way, but the packaging didn't help identify the contents. This sort of contrary appearance is not uncommon in the pop and advertising world.

A response i wrote a number of years ago in reply to that old desert island disc question contains something close to the Mystery Tape philosophy:

What records would i take along to a desert island? If one sacrifices oneself to the process of the journalistic interview, this hypothetical quandary is likely to be presented. I've been asked this question many times. My impulsive and very honest answer is that i would first of all take the records i myself have created,

plus one or two of the ones i've produced (the list is short – Alto Sax, Plunderphonic, Elektrax, Discosphere, Plexure, Grayfolded, Gordon Monahan's This Piano Thing, a couple of Mystery Tapes and Musicworks cassette magazines which i edited [...]). My list is obviously a monument of egotism, but there is also a reasonable argument which makes this selection inevitable. My recorded releases are made entirely to fulfill my own personal listening desires. I've often stated that these recordings were made to fill the most annoying gaps in my record collection. By assuming the stance of the listener in producing these things i can at-the-best-of-times come up with something that i don't hear as my-music but rather as music-exactly-as-i-want-to-listen-to-it. Experience has indicated that these things that i like are also things that others like, which is the reason i will sometimes make more than one copy of a recording.

Missing from the list are almost all of the recordings on which i play live or improvise, including those which i may have produced or edited. In fact, as much as i can rationally justify their existence, i hope that these items will land on some desert island other than the one i'm inhabiting. These recordings give me the same uneasy feeling that most people seem to have listening to tapes of their own speaking voices. The exception to this queasiness is my 1980 solo album Alto Sax which i inexplicably like very much.

There's another angle to my desert island listening desires, which goes back to my pre-teen years; long before i made my first record. At that time i felt there were too many extra-musical influences on my impressionable youthful mind. Record covers revealed either attractive or goofy looking individuals in their most groovy attire; these records were categorized in stores mostly according to the race, gender and musical education of these individuals. Publications that focused on a certain age group or race were full of opinions about the quality or social importance or the timeliness of this music.

I thought that the following solution would provide a more pure and satisfying listening experience: Upon being banished to the hi-fi equipped desert island that i'd been hearing about, i would begin to receive shipments of specially prepared records, sent by an individual or consortium who had a love of a broad variety of music. These records would come in blank jackets and all the information on the disc labels would be whited out. All i would have to go on is what i could hear. It would be in some cases impossible to decipher how old the music was, or what color the musicians were or what they liked to wear. I would subscribe to no music magazines. This would be my ideal desert island listening experience.

Years later i got involved in Mystery Tapes which was an attempt to replicate this idea without having to be exiled, and also Pitch, which are concerts of live

and recorded music taking place in absolute darkness, thereby also alleviating appearances from the musical experience. [8/23/98]

Radio, in particular, and internet audio, if the host so chooses, are free of being encumbered by appearances, and therefore more audibly pure.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: nude media

Posted: Feb 18, 2005 12:33 PM

John sez:

These records would come in blank jackets and all the information on the disc labels would be whited out. All i would have to go on is what i could hear. It would be in some cases impossible to decipher how old the music was, or what color the musicians were or what they liked to wear... This would be my ideal desert island listening experience.

It's strange that John is closely articulating Apple's latest campaign for The Shuffle -- a small iPod without a display screen. Now "nude media" has become even more stripped down: no information as to what you're listening to. It's on its way to becoming the preferred way to listen.

Mystery Tapes is also prescient predicting the return of the single, detached from the album (sometimes articulated as the "concept" or "vision" which gave birth to it). Today we collect songs (iTunes emphasis on "10,000 songs in your pocket"), not albums: yet another act of decontextualization.

And of course it all reeks of its origins: the jukebox, which was a machine that played random singles without any articulation of what was being played (if you were far enough from the machine), without anyone to guide you through what you were hearing (unlike radio), driven by the single. In a sense The Shuffle is a return to the jukebox, no?

I would like to connect this to another phenomenon John's work predicts: impurity. One of the first things that struck me about Napster was how damn impure (read: eclectic) people's tastes were. Whilst browsing another user's files, I was stunned find John Cage MP3s snuggled up next to, say, Mariah Carey files in the same directory. Everyone has guilty pleasures, however, never before have they been so exposed.

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: nude media

Posted: Feb 18, 2005 2:57 PM

It is interesting how the collaboration/participation discussion initially shot off into two different directions (online vs offline collaborative models) only to come back to what are essentially different appropriation methods and individual choices of crediting/presentation.

Going back to Doug and John's posts, to me 'nude media' (a great term, Kenneth, btw) is one way of talking about a history of appropriation whether it is offline or online. As John just illustrated – it is a question of choice, not medium.

That MP3 file 'stripped of its external signifiers' is essentially no different than a photocopied page separated from the author/title info. Are we not just replacing a pair of scissors (Gysin) with sound processing software? Perhaps the main difference is in the speed with which the 'nude media' file makes it's way back into the remixing and sampling pool and how long it stays there for (and if it ever becomes used up/finished)?

And on that note, I thought Kenneth's asked some really interesting questions a few posts back, which we all seem to have skipped and I'd like to return to those:

–How does having a variety of contexts influence the cultural reception of such objects?

–Who or what determines an avant-garde artifact's value, both commercially and intellectually?

–How does this in turn impact the artist's reputation, both commercially and intellectually?

–If artifacts are always in flux, when is an historical work determined to be "finished"?

Douglas Kahn

Subject: nude media

Posted: Feb 20, 2005 8:59 PM

Before we get on to too many other issues, I'd like to say a few more things about nude media.

John writes: "The nude media effect isn't applicable to sound. It can be applied to any data." His subsequent comments really say that nude media isn't limited to sound. True enough, but I would say that idea is more than just equitably applicable to sound among other phenomena, primarily because sound has

rehearsed such deracination on an historical scale through its subset of Western art music and its influence on the discourses and practices in the avant-garde, experimental and subcultural musics/sounds we're discussing.

Phonography, whether tin foil or mp3, pops the question on a productive basis by equalizing, so to speak, all sounds, and in terms of reception by introducing seemingly inert sounds into vernacular through repetition and dissemination.

The idea of phonography from the latter-half of the 19th C., the burgeoning reality of it through the markedly audiophonic mass media of the 1920s, film and cartoon sound across the decades of the 30s and 40s, records and radio broadcasts, etc., that should have put to rest the idea in Western art music of socially unsullied sounds.

In the mid-1950s 45s and kid-kulture radio teamed up to supply enough of a vernacular base so that Buchanan and Goodman could intercut very short grabs from certain songs and have them recognized and understood. Around the same time, radio stations ran contests where even shorter, fraction-of-a-second grabs of songs were strung together, waiting to be identified.

John explored the same territory with Plexure. For any single moment in such an exercise, familiarity can be expressed through a number of identifications: if not a song, then a singer; if not a singer, then the group; if not a group, then a genre, etc. It might happen just a through a slight moment of timbre, so ambient is not immune.

Yet this is a border test; most musical listening is not subject to such extreme conditions; most moments of listening are conditioned in environments of greater tolerance to signification.

Furthermore, "external signifiers" (as Lina puts it), do not need tags or liner notes, they don't need ink to dry or bits to pixelate, to exist. The only inscriptions they need are in vernacular, familiarity, memory, etc. In this way, the idea that nude media actually exists in sound is a perceptual fiction of the wolf child (even wolves have their codes). It presumes an individual's effective isolation from cultural signification. Don't get me wrong, fictions themselves can be very productive, the "famed ephemerality of Western art music" is busy working overtime to this very day, but failure to recognize its myth is also a contributor to its inertia.

Most theories of musical listening in Western art music, Cage's sounds-in-themselves among them, hope to make an ethic out of hearing sounds bereft of social and environmental associations. But even if they are granted some credibility and associations (and say, instruments, styles and genre are ignored

for the moment) then these theories still rely on an unstated hope that other types of listening cannot exist simultaneously.

I'm reminded of Rahsaan Roland Kirk introducing a piece where he plays two melodies simultaneously. "It's splittin' the mind in two parts. It's making one part of your mind say 'oo-bla-dee,' and making the other part of your mind say, "what does he mean?"

I would suggest that even if different listenings cannot exist simultaneously (I believe that people do in fact chew gum and walk), then they nevertheless oscillate with such rapidity, at plexurable speed, that the result is the same.

<END OF PAGE 2>

John Oswald

Subject: Re: nude media

Posted: Feb 21, 2005 9:28 PM

I will deposit yet another nude media rumination before moving on (at a later date) to Lina's questions.

On-line text, sound and images each have very different counter-schemes to foil rampant net nudity.

Text is the most digitally transparent (therefore potentially nude) because it consists mostly of oft-used combinations of blocks of data, in the form of words and phrases. (The closest sound comes to this is MIDI). Anyway, because it's so easy to digitally transport and realign these word and phrase combinations, it happens a lot. Some people copy blocks of words from the net and plug them into texts, such as scholastic papers, which they then attribute to themselves. This is commonly called plagiarism. But the very mechanisms (search, copy, and paste) which makes it easy to do this are also used to trace the sources appropriated. So, for example, teachers google suspect phrases to find some identifying clothing for the ideas students have stripped. (Amazon.com's 'search: inside-this-book function gives you access to whole books but presents the text as images of pages; so to copy something requires old-fashioned library methods : copy the phrase letter by letter, or make a photocopy of the page).

To search for an image via google, one still needs to use words. The images have file names, which are more-often than not descriptive. I just did a google-image search of the word 'sound', which resulted in a list has over a million visible items. The first image was from defenselink.mil - a dramatic photo of a jet plane stuck on a button of condensation as the plane breaks the sound barrier.

& here are the next few items depicted:

- a photo of a fjord or sound-like landscape
- a photo of a bright red/green/blue light
- a drawing of an array of loudspeakers
- a family tree of sound terms at hyperphysics.phy-str.gsu.edu
- a diagram of sound radiation from a tuning fork
- a sign that says SOUND SPACE in yellow letters
- a cartoon of a guy facing some charging wild animals on a savannah
- a photo of the control room of a recording studio called Sound Sanctuary

As can be seen from this list the tag isn't the thing.

One can also search for MIDI files or sound files, as long as they also have a tag:

one list (at the top of the google pile of such lists) called WavCentral lists its most popular soundfile of the week as '20th hq.mp3'. This turns out to be the traditional logo music for 20th Century Fox movies.

Nude media wouldn't have a tag, or like the red/green/blue light photo i found, it wouldn't have a tag that you could decipher or trace back to its source.

There has been work done on pattern and colour-recognition of images but so far no popular-as-google software, so you mostly have to search for images by name.

David Rokeby has a very clever bit of software called The Giver of Names. It has a large vocabulary and looks at objects via a video camera and describes them in often-poetic ways. It looked at me and called me a 'rusty german'.

There's a very popular and useful bit of software that puts names back on audio CDs and mP3s which are otherwise nameless (a CD track does not have an embedded name tag). It's called CDDB (for Compact Disc Data Base) and i think its found in most computers and many sound systems. The software notices how many tracks a CD has and how long each of those tracks is. It then goes online to compare this with a database of 3.5 million albums (this database was mostly created by listeners who prefer to have their sounds dressed) and over 44 million tracks. If the CD has 27 tracks, and the first one is 1'23", then it knows the album is probably the Wild Why by Wobbly.

One could of course subvert this database by creating a CD of completely different sounds that has 27 tracks, each the same length as on Wobbly's disc. The system doesn't pay any attention to what the sound is, just how it's packaged. Because its crude and recorded sound on the net exists somewhere predominantly on albums of tracks (images don't), it works almost always, while the image recognition software is more, dare i say, subjective.

I met some guys at Sony Research in Paris working on a system to analyse sound files for useful vocabulary– pitch recognition, style recognition, etc. One nice demo they had was a Janis Joplin a cappella recording transcribed completely into sounds taken from Beatle recordings. The result was an auralization of what Salvador Dali sometimes called the Paranoiac–Critical Method, with connections to Doug K's examples of R.Roland Kirk and my Plexure.

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: Networks and Sound

Posted: Mar 2, 2005 12:16 PM

As we seem to have come to the end of the ‘nude media’ discussion, I wanted to open the forum discussion to a more general question that I think has been lurking in the background of our discussions so far:

the assumed symbiotic relationship between networks and sound, that I think this forum is based on.

I wanted to highlight this assumption, and to ask where this assumption that there is a direct and special relationship between networked technologies and sound (hence a forum about it).

Because I still don't think we've ‘hit the nail on the head’, so to speak – I think we have been discussing a range of outputs of networks and/or sonic practices, but we have not actually talked about why it is that what we're referring to here as ‘the cultures of exchange’ – which is here taken to be related to networked technology, is supposed to somehow be linked to sound more than other media. (hasn't digital technology, for instance been equally beneficial to those working with video, or for that matter, text?).

Is it that sound acts as a conduit in social relations and is thus associated with networked technologies? Or does the relationship between ‘cultures of exchange’ and sound still evade us?

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Networks and Sound

Posted: Mar 6, 2005 7:31 PM

Let me see if I can respond to the question regarding a “direct and special relationship between networked technologies and sound” in “the cultures of exchange.” The answer is easy; why is more difficult. No, there is no direct and special relationship, or at least one based on any intrinsic properties of networks, exchange or “sound” (being artistic and cultural products of sound–alone, as in music and other audible arts of sound). If it were possible to make

an argument that anything was intrinsic to networks and exchange then, living under capitalism, money would be the most likely suspect. Historically, in networks of communication technologies from telegraphs to satellites, streams of finance have coursed through the skies at a greater rate than anything else. In fact, the early telegraphic codebooks for conducting business were an unwitting source of avant-garde literature. The way they strung together short, disjunctive phrases to signal longer statements generated masses of seemingly incoherent but, given the right interpretive key, ultimately understandable prose that read like L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E for pin=striped=suits.

Living amid capitalist “cultures of exchange” begs the question where are the “cultures of production.” True, people make money “work” for them, and consumption can be a secondary production for de Certeau, but somewhere, grounding the electromagnetic networks, are actual people engaged in manual, intellectual and creative labor. Tracking these relations to the artistic and cultural practices we’re talking about here is tricky, but can generate an interesting array of considerations. Among them, how does mixing and appropriation relate to production and exchange. Too much of the discourse defaults to proprietary rights and notions of free exchange of information at the expense of an examination of the productive attributes and quality of the creative labor, and I would say that there is a politics of an intensity of creative labor as an enactment of a larger set of relations, one that could distinguish parasitic acts (akin to a capitalist making his or her money work) from productive acts (like the virtuosity of certain turntablists).

Roland Barthes has a nicely crude distinction of the two musics: “the music one listens to, the music one plays. These two musics are totally different arts, each with its own history, its own sociology, its own aesthetics, its own erotic; the same composer can be minor if you listen to him, tremendous if you play him (even badly)—such as Schumann.” (*Musica Practica*) My main interest here is the development of the conditions of artistic possibility of something worth listening to. It doesn’t have to be from one composer; it could very well come from the efforts of a networked community of producers using appropriated works and appropriating each other in an improvisatory mode. In the same respect, the efforts of a networked community of producers using appropriated works and appropriating each other in an improvisatory mode might be very interesting to themselves but banal to others, and it might also be a parasitic exercise where ripping other people off who have put the labor in is seen as a form of democratic communication in action. And the ringer is that it could be a parasitic exercise ripping other people off who have put the labor in that is interesting to listen to.

I wanted to get to some of the historical reasons in the development and deployment of digital technologies to why we might associate sound and

networks as intrinsic, but it's a beautiful spring day here and we need to get some plants in the ground.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: Networks and Sound

Posted: Mar 8, 2005 9:54 PM

Doug,

I agree with you in terms of creative versus parasitic labor. We post MP3s on UbuWeb with the disclaimer that all materials on site are free for non-commercial and educational use only. Of course there's no way we can enforce it but when items for sale that are clearly poached off file-sharing appear in stores, it angers the community. A recent example of this is the scumbag who issued a 4-CD set of La Monte Young bootlegs and sold them in places like Other Music. Nothing appearing on the sets was new to anyone who had been file-sharing since Napster. And it's clear that it didn't have Young's permission; it was clearly a case of parasitic hucksterism. (Funny though, before file-sharing, his action might've been seen as making available works to a general public that weren't available before. But in this context, it's just pure profiteering).

On UbuWeb, we only post out-of-print MP3s or works that are permissioned by the artists. There are many people running small record labels putting out avant-garde works of sound art that make no money, or at best break even. We don't wish to take the small amount of money out of their pockets they're trying to make by posting stuff on UbuWeb that is in print. However, we feel it is our obligation to post works that have fallen out of print, regardless of permission. Should that work go back into print (like Charles Amirkhonian's compilation of sound poetry 12+2 that Other Minds just reissued), we take it off our site immediately.

We hope that UbuWeb will serve as a center for the "networked community of producers" and often times we find our materials have been recontextualized into new sonic environments. Take, for example, Henri Chopin's "Rouge." It's interesting to see what has happened to that work over the past half-century.

Chopin began his tape recorder experiments in the mid-50s, and "Rouge," recorded in 1956, was one of his first pieces. It's a literal sound painting, with the names of colors repeated with different emphasis, almost like varying brushstrokes. Manipulated audio techniques and track layering build up an increasingly dense surface. The piece reflects its time: think of it as an abstract expressionist canvas. It, too, is Greenbergian: its form is its content.

In its day, "Rouge" never made it to LP as an "official" release by a record label. It remained that way, unreleased and without a publisher until 24 years later when it was put out by a German gallery. Thanks to Chopin's highly visible work as a promoter and publisher of sound poetry, however, tapes of his work were making the rounds in advanced musical circles of the day.

A decade after "Rouge's" recording, it curiously appears in the first "Region" of Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1966 composition Hymnen, an electronic and musique concrete melange of national anthems. Although truncated, "Rouge" forms the basis for a short spoken-word section based around varieties of the color "red." Chopin's voice alternates with German-inflected voices reading a portion of a list of Windsor Newton paints. To listen to this excerpt alone and decontextualized, it sounds like an extension of Chopin's sound painting. But squeezed between magnetic tape deconstructions of "The Internationale" and "The Marseillaise," its meaning becomes very different. Chopin's poem is now clothed in the garments of leftist politics.

Twenty-one years later, in 1997, the sampling group called Stock Hausen and Walkman (note the group's name) brought "Rouge" into an entirely different context: that of ironic pop in a cut called "Flogging" (flogging = flayed "rouge" skin). Amidst the cheesy vocals, snappy drumbeats and appropriated mathematical recitations from children's records, Chopin's piece is snatched away from Stockhausen's political agenda and returned closer to its formalist origins. But it's an emptying gesture: finally "Rouge" is just one sample of many, part of a noisy landscape, in which sounds are easily obtained and just as easily manipulated. In such a landscape, no sound appears to have more meaning than any other.

It strikes me that this sort of use has been going on for an awfully long time: parasitic, yes, but also insanely creative... UbuWeb's take on one history of deployment of technologies as it impacts on networks spanning generations

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Networks and Sound Part II

Posted: Mar 11, 2005 6:19 AM

Kenneth, that was really very interesting and if appropriation has nothing necessarily to do with parasitism, then we do agree.

To gain a different angle on Lina's question, I'd like to leave recording and get into synthesis, and thus into simpler forms of digital technologies in both sound and computational networking, scattered across a chronology from punchcard uploads to broadband downloads.

There is no intrinsic relation between music (just music) and networks or at least digital technologies but there has been a historically privileged one based on math, music and computation, the relative technological simplicity of generating tones from code, and the ability of music to constitute itself easily through an organization expressed numerically.

That is why Jim Tenney's early computer music completed in the early-1960s while he was at Bell Labs, working under the aegis of Max Mathews and John Pierce, can still stand on its own today. Visual work produced on computers from around the same time was derivative and simplistic from the very beginning and holds only historical interest today.

Poetry fared well with Alison Knowles' House of Dust (permutational poetry as event scores), the computer poems of Jackson MacLow and others because it too required relatively simple means to realize sophisticated ends.

Nevertheless, similar text generation in these poems had already existed in combinatorial techniques in literature for several centuries, whereas the sounds and means involved in Tenney's early computer music were new and unheard-of. An equivalent development in poetry would have entailed enough computational facility to produce, say, a neology-in-poetic-action worthy of Khlebnikov.

The privileging in music just meant a technological predisposition toward a certain level of artistic sophistication: it guaranteed nothing. It was fortuitous that it was Tenney who had privileged access to this privileged situation.

There was also a privileged place for music with regard to exchange among networks we know today. As the lonely halls of institutional mainframes were broken down and the population boom began happening with microcomputers, the first digital art was music. Beginning as social and, soon thereafter, collaborative and collective, the move to microcomputers prefigured activity on a mass scale today. Again, when Jim Horton, John Bischoff, George Lewis, Ron Kuivila, Paul DeMarinis, Nic Collins, Chris Brown, David Behrman, and many others were making sophisticated music on microcomputers, the visual art was primitive and simplistic.

I remember seeing Roger Reynolds lament the advent of home computers because it invited "convenience music." What I think he was really frightened of was that some brats would suddenly have access to the type of hitherto privileged levels of technology he had enjoyed and would produce music more interesting than his own. He was certainly right to be afraid. The defining moment of this reality arrived in Bob Ostertag's statement "Why Computer Music Sucks."

The technological playing field in artistic forms began to be leveled only when speed and memory caught up to recorded forms, first in photography and then in audio and video. I think music and sound still look relatively intrinsic to exchange only because a commensurate technical quality of film and video is still lagging.

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: Re: Networks and Sound Part II

Posted: Mar 12, 2005 1:39 PM

Doug,. I agree with you and can see how the relationship between music and networks based 'on math, music and computation' works. I think James Tenney's 60s computer music stands as great example of this, but I disagree with the view that 'visual work produced on computers from around the same time was derivative and simplistic from the very beginning and holds only historical interest today'.

I'm no art historian but if animation falls under 'visual work' then I'd argue that there are, indeed, some outstanding examples of computer generated visual work around the same period. For instance the early computer animations by Whitney Brothers and Lilian Schwartz are of tremendous historical interest (and visually breathtaking). So, I think that the cases of access to computers (by the privileged few) produced some important work across the board and not just in music. John Whitney was in a similar position to Tenney in the mid 60's with a grant from IBM in, which allowed access to the advanced computer facilities at UCLA. To me, Whitney's early computer animations are no less important or impressive than Max Matthew's 'Daisy Daisy - Bicycle Built for Two' (sang by Hal years later) or Tenney's computer music.

Also, People like Stan VanDerBeek produced very interesting work around the same period while working with computer technicians at MIT, NASA, and Bell Labs, as did

Larry Cuba (maybe slightly later) and the aforementioned Lilian Shwartz.

So to me it seems that the early developments in computer music happened in parallel with similar level of investigation emerging from experimental film and animation communities. I am not sure where that leaves us in the networks/sound relationship discussions.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Networks and Sound Part II

Posted: Mar 12, 2005 6:15 PM

Lina: I know it's risky to stand like a Hindu god on a prostrate example just to make an argument; it's not something I'm prone to do lightly. [sorry] I was

indeed thinking about the animation of John Whitney and the visual art and animation of A. Michael Noll.

The same year Tenney did “Noise Study” using digital synthesis Whitney was working with an analog computer and going over artistic terrain of “visual music” or “optical music” originally generated in the 1920s. “Catalogue” and “Lapis” are beautiful, to be sure, but not huge improvements over more traditional forms of animation available at the time.

It was 1966 when Whitney started working with Jack Citron at IBM on digital gear, and that’s when you get the “visual spaghetti” or spriograph look associated with early digital animation. Compare that with digital animation now and it simply doesn’t stand up. It would be comparable to sitting some kid down with a game of Pac-Man. However, if you listen to Tenney’s work it does stand up not only with the music of its time but also music now. And all I’m saying is that this is a result of Tenney himself and of music’s deeper historical relationship to digital computing.

Where I agree with you in one respect is that “Whitney’s early computer animations are no less important or impressive than Max Mathew’s ‘Daisy Daisy – Bicycle Built for Two’ (sang by Hal years later).” First of all, thanks for bringing up the much maligned Hal: some day we’ll get his side of the story (there’s a PhD topic for someone). I was being hyperbolic when I said that this lacked historical interest, the tempering case being our present discussion. I wouldn’t necessarily put Mathew’s ditty with Whitney’s work, and certainly neither with Tenney’s work. Mathews knew that what he and the other engineers were doing at Bell Labs was not awfully sophisticated (I think Pierce might have entertained higher ambitions but was too busy being one of the most formidable technologists of the second half of the century) and that’s why they brought in actual composers, first the largely absentee David Lewin and then the in-residence James Tenney.

A. Michael Noll’s visual art and animation is even a clearer example. His work would be akin to the level of Mathews, but he reworked the abstract ditties of modern art. “Computer Composition with Lines” from 1964 is a simple copy of Mondrian. He was an excellent engineer with not a great aesthetic sense rationalized to make art by pushing digital computers to allude to the apparent attributes of abstraction. We can’t begin to compare the substance of the art from which Noll’s work derived or sought legitimacy, or the contemporaneous work, without being ridiculous, but he was obviously not working anywhere within the vicinity of such comparisons. At best, he was doing very important work developing new tools.

Engineers like Mathews, Pierce and Noll were involved primarily in making demonstrations to exercise what digital synthesis might be able to do. Tenney

and after him Jean-Claude Risset were driven by other aspirations, and in collaboration with the engineers ended up pushing the technical capabilities further. I haven't looked into the tenure of Whitney at IBM, but I imagine the same could be said of that instance too.

The problem, of course, comes from the possible confusion generated "music's deeper historical relationship to digital computing" with that other argument for intrinsic properties found among the discourses of art music as the highest expression of Western civilization. Luckily, the subsequent development of digital technology from synthesis to recording, simulation and networking has eroded such historical claims and indeed set up a number of machine-critiques about the delimiting qualities of such discourses on artistic possibility and cultural practice.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: Networks and Sound Part II

Posted: Mar 13, 2005 1:54 AM

I have a sneaking suspicion that Lina's resolve for "hitting the nail on the head" paired with my historical conjectures are dampening the culture of exchange on this panel. What else could explain the relative silence? You can't blame Club Med because they have to be wireless just to follow the daiquiris around. Perhaps instead of investigating the assumed relationship of networks and sound, we should assume that they exist and are doing quite well and get more specific about what they are in fact doing, shining examples and odd behaviors, and what they could be doing?

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 13, 2005 2:18 AM

Doug,

I've enjoyed reading your historical responses. And, yes, all is well!

Question to all: are you a part of any file-sharing networks / servers for sound art / experimental music?

Lina Dzuverovic

Subject: Re: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 13, 2005 9:09 PM

hi Kenny, good to have you back! I'm not part of any file sharing networks, because (dare i say this) i actually spend very little time online, so I'm rubbish at participating in any online things at all. How about you - any servers, networks

you can want to tell us about? I would actually love to hear about this. Anyone else?

ps. Doug- i take your point about Tenney -in your last post. Being a big fan of people like the Whitney Bros etc - i felt it was my 'duty' to give them the mention they deserve when the conversation headed in that direction.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 14, 2005 4:51 PM

Ken:

Because I'm the director of an academic program, many of the files I share are called memos. I'm online quite a bit answering dozens of emails a day, using my library proxy to drag misshapen nets through journals, corresponding with people I write about, pestering professors around the world with obscure questions, and participating in the Tate Online d_culture panel.

I rarely swap music/sound files since the listening I do is usually tied to my research or writing commissions. I will more often simply purchase obscure materials from online auctions, Verge, Forced Exposure, or directly from individuals. For the people I'm writing about, I would rather pay them money or return the favor somehow, than pull down their work for free. My interests are broad and always developing and although over the years I've amassed a formidable amount of text, media and documents they are not as concentrated in specific areas and they would be for a collector, an archivist or a fan.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 14, 2005 5:08 PM

I've been a file-sharing fan since the Napster days when I plugged in the keywords "Xenakis" or "La Monte Young" and thousands of returns came back. I quickly began gorging and never turned back.

These days, while I still troll peer-to-peer networks, I've dedicated myself to a private server for experimental music. It's not a huge group of people, but they're very intense, often uploading a dozen or more discs. The group's members come from all over the world and are generally the types you'd expect to be reading The Wire closely. As such, the server's directory structures reflect that magazine's interests:

Electronic and Samples

- Beat Remnants

- Contemporary Electronics
- Cut and Paste

Improv and Jazz

- Contemporary Improv
- Free Jazz and Fire Music
- Non-Idiomatic Improv

The Avant Garde

- Early Electronic and Concrete
- Electroacoustic
- Foundsounds and Field Recordings
- Minimalism "System Sounds"
- Novelty Acts
- Orchestral Avant Garde
- Outsiders, Deviants and Artists
- Radio Art
- Sound Poetry

The Rockist Agenda

- Ambient, Minimal and Drone
- Contemporary Improv Cut-Up
- Experimental Art Noise
- Japan - Noise, Free and Psych
- New Zealand
- Progressive and Euro Art Rock
- United Daires and Friends

Unconventional Ethnic

- Aborigine Music
- Chinese Traditional
- Indian
- Japanese Gagaku
- Japanese Nh
- Others
- Sublime Frequencies
- Tibetan - Buddhist History

Each category is packed with hundreds and hundreds of files, holding much more than any record store I've ever been in.

Often I pluck items uploaded to this server and re-post them on UbuWeb for the general public. The recent spate of Fluxfilms of UbuWeb were grabbed off of this server and made available to all. The server and its community have become a massively important part of my life; it feeds my radio show; and

constantly supplies new content to UbuWeb. Needless to say, its name and location cannot be revealed.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 15, 2005 12:30 AM

Ken:

In terms of the politics of exchange and production, I can see how your personal position producing UbuWeb and a radio program in a major metropolitan area might assist the folks whose work you admire, but I imagine there are plenty of people you're swapping files with that are not in a position to assist. You might call them consumers, except for the fact that there's no money being exchanged. If this is a barter system, what is being exchanged?

Are the musicians and artists benefiting from the system in some way? Should we send them clothes, medical supplies or symbolic capital, or would they prefer money? Should they benefit from the good fortune of their creative productions?

Academics like myself write for free most of the time because we have a mechanism called merit and promotion, if not tenure, to translate these writings into a livelihood. Most academics I know "live off the smell of an oily rag" (as the Aussies say) for a long time until they land in a decent place, if at all. Some privileged folks walk through the ivy at the front door, but most enter through the wringer in the back laundry.

Do artists and musicians have a similar mechanism, even if just a promise, in file-sharing? Does one exist or could one be designed?

Should artists and musicians expect a livelihood? I know that issue arises already in the class system of aspiring artists and musicians in NYC where most wait on tables while the rich kids work hard on their shows.

The "dematerialization" practiced by a number of conceptualists was possible because they didn't have to work or sell things for a living and could postpone cashing in until their transgressions delivered them into an adequate level fame.

Is there a way to steer file-sharing into a way of supporting artists and musicians so we won't have to get all our Bohemian goods from Biff and Betty?

I know that people like to trumpet the putative democracy of Jacques Attali's epoch of composition, but what happens to those trumpets amid the acoustics

of his bank office with all that marble? Should people be able to make or contribute to a livelihood or should it be relegated to leisure time activity until musical predictions of Attali's utopia are realized in the political economy? Are entrails and tea-leaves a new historical form of musical notation?

As for the Unconventional Ethnic category, see Steve Feld's article: "Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," in the Yearbook for Traditional Music, 1996, Volume 28, pages 1-35.

It seems crucial that system creators need to design, if they have not done so already, ways to support suppliers to the system. Is there an equitable way to do this without becoming Starbucks? If not, then the infantilism of consumerism, the kid in the candy shop, will eat its offspring.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Re: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 15, 2005 5:27 AM

I'm with you all the way here, Doug, except that I don't get the feeling that, sadly, most sound works of this nature ever make much money. Seems to me, from the many folks I've worked with on UbuWeb, etc., that for them, it's about getting the work out and heard rather than try to wring a paycheck out of it. In this case, file-sharing and free distribution systems like UbuWeb for innovative sound works are a blessing.

We're back to Bruce Nauman here where his sound works command thousands of dollars and others working exclusively in audio are happy to just have it heard. (A similar analogy can be made to Jenny Holzer's work, which must be the most valuable language on the planet. Makes the poets fume...)

John Oswald

Subject: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 15, 2005 4:18 PM

I stopped buying records in a concerted fashion back in the early '70's. Then i discovered some people and some institutions who had large collections of the unusual audio artifacts i was interested in. Given that i had finite listening time, i tended to prefer to listen to little bits of a lot of things, rather than extended periods of any one thing. I remember one particular university library that allowed bin browsing. I would carry stacks up-to-my-chin of records to a little listening kiosk and proceed to needle-drop my way through them. I usually brought or smuggled in a recording device and dubbed short samples of things i found interesting.

I don't ever remember purchasing compact discs in any concerted fashion, unless it was for a specific project (i.e., 'i need a couple of dozen versions of

Strauss' Zarathustra'), but somehow i've ended up with hundreds or more likely thousands of CD's, most of which i have listened to at least once, but haven't ever organized them in a way which would make them easily accessible. I find now that i'll sometimes download something i know i've got a hard copy of somewhere, because finding it on the net is sometimes more time efficient. I continued the habit of dubbing little bits of things when i was gathering the resources for the aforementioned Plexure ('92), which has electroquoted samples from at least a thousand pop songs from the '80's. The interesting difference was i was now cloning, rather than copying: i was making digital transfers of exact duplicates of the sound information on the CDs, which was often an exact duplicate of the master tape from which the CDs were made. I was a relative latecomer to Napster, but discovered the browsing facilities were only slightly less wonderful than back in the library days. One interesting aspect of finding soundfiles on Napster was that during this period my CD purchases increased by an order of magnitude. I'd find a bit of something in generally crappy sound on Napster that would lead to wanting more or better of that thing. I couldn't figure out, based on my personal habits, why the Recording Industry destroyed Napster.

These days if i want a pristine audio copy of something i'll first of all try to order a hard copy (usually CD) online. If i'm just curious to hear what something sounds like i'll try listening to the 30 second low-bandwidth snips that are often part of audio online sales or check some web radio indexes. If that doesn't do it for me, i pay, depending on where i go, 25¢ or a buck (which, with inflation, is about what it would cost to listen to a song on a juke box these days i'd guess) for a mid-fi mP3 track. If i can't find something for sale (for instance the biggest online supplier doesn't sell individual tracks that are longer than 10 minutes) i go p2p looking for it.

I'm entirely selfish in the latter environment because i don't upload. In my vocabulary uploading is synonymous with publication, and publication, for me, has always involved trying to take some sort of unique editorial stance, and i've been working on some things along these lines for the net, which i haven't made available yet.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Re: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 15, 2005 4:49 PM

Ken:

First of all, in my comments I was more interested in the other server you mentioned, not UbuWeb. Not knowing much about it, the main issue seems to break down to a matter of scale. On a smaller scale, it might emulate the type of swapping among friends that all media have experienced. On a gradient toward larger scale, it will have more financial impact. The important part is that a larger scale operation has the potential to have a beneficial financial

impact as well as a deleterious one. A beneficial impact might not always be in terms of dollars, but it should be clear how they might be beneficial.

It's true that many of the sound and music works of the type we're talking about don't make much money, and perhaps it was unwise for me to repeatedly say livelihood. However, I could recognize among the categories in your server list ones in which individuals (artists, writers, composers, performers, etc.) rely on their works to make a living, even if not in Nauman/Holzer-esque style, and in which many small labels live and die in the tides of cash flow.

Also, often a small amount of money at the right time can make a very big difference, especially when it can contribute to getting the next work done or, in the case of the "Unconventional Ethnic" category, eating or acting against environmental destruction or Chinese oppression.

Finally, I think there are many possible economic realities between the poles of the Naumans and Holzers of the world and those who are happy just to have their work heard. And there are plenty of micro-economies at the poles (Nauman, for instance, wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth), so it's not a matter of individuals, but of the operation of systems. It would be preferable for networking systems to benefit communities of independent practitioners through systems of support.

Kenneth Goldsmith

Subject: Re: File Sharing

Posted: Mar 18, 2005 4:47 PM

On UbuWeb, we mostly post stuff without permission. If we had to get permission, there would be no UbuWeb. Occasionally, someone gets pissed when they find their stuff there and demand that it be taken down, which we do promptly. But every other time, we find that people are thrilled to find their work on our site, in a context that they feel is compatible for their work. We also find that having audio works in a "nude" state or degraded state (MP3) leads people to want to have the "clothed" release, complete with great sound and liner notes, not to mention the need to possess the artifact itself; so often, by giving work away on UbuWeb, it leads to sales for the artists featured. For example, I recently got a note from Paul Dutton. 5 years ago, I asked Paul if he would consider putting up his amazing CD "Mouthpieces" on Ubu. He replied that he wanted to give the disc a few years to circulate, but that at the end of 5 years, he'd be happy to contribute it to the site.

I'm a senior editor at the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Sound <<http://>>, which is sort of a sister site to UbuWeb, focusing on more conventional poetry readings. There, everything is permissioned before being hosted. The artist donates the work (we don't buy anything, we just accept donated works) and, in

turn, it becomes a part of the UPenn library, complete with a card catalogue number, etc. Founded by the poet Charles Bernstein, it's a very clever way of having Penn "acquire" avant sound works that they never would have touched with a ten-foot pole before.

UbuWeb, while independent, is given technical support by universities. They provide us with unlimited server space and bandwidth, making it possible to host what we want without limit -- a very, very rare situation. Hence, at the moment, UbuWeb hosts nearly a terabyte in media files. We hope to double that amount over the next year.

John Oswald

Subject: selling & sharing

Posted: Mar 21, 2005 12:06 PM

Audio artifacts, unlike visual art things (paintings for instance), are mass-produced, & have been since just after the earliest days of recording; when, for technical reasons, cylinders were limited editions (performers would do multiple takes for multiple masters which would wear out quickly in making copies). An interesting result of this mass production is a general standardized pricing for recordings, independent of their production costs or perceived value by society. So while painters will scale the price of their works based on the size of the painting (more canvas costs more, and usually takes more effort to cover with paint), and the market will pay a thousand times, or even a million times more for something by one painter than for another's work, a Michael Jackson CD which cost millions of dollars to produce, tens of millions of dollars to promote and video-ize, and is manufactured in millions, will cost about the same to purchase as any one of a dozen of this year's Eugene Chadbourne releases, which may have been recorded in one take on a dicta-phone in Eugene's bathroom, and come packaged in a recycled cookie bag: both have the same retail price tag. The financial advantage of Michael over Eugene comes from sales of large quantities of the Jacko things. But no one, including his 'employer', Sony Music, pays more than a few bucks for a Jacko CD. The millions of dollars Sony (formerly CBS) have given Michael were in the form of advances loaned in anticipation of future sales; and now that Michael hasn't sold as many of those discs as anticipated, it turns out that Eugene (who is his own record company) is probably richer, albeit not conspicuously so, than Michael.

I use Jacko as an example, because back in the '80's i created a photo-collage portrait of him as a naked white woman as the cover art for a CD i distributed. Around the same time Jeff Koons was selling ceramic portraits of Michael as a prissy white guy and his chimpanzee in the art world for, i would guess, over a hundred thousand dollars a pop. I was jealous of Koons' prosperity, because i thought that my portrait was an aesthetically superior representation. But there was no exclusive and therefore particularly valuable version of my image of

Jacko (except perhaps the original paper paste-up which i probably won't be able to sell until Sony Music goes out of business) which was intended to be infinitely reproduceable and available. Someone, on the other hand, buying one of the Koon things for a lot of money was also buying into an agreement of limited production exclusivity. Even though Koons could have manufactured lots of these things, and then perhaps a few of of them for substantially more than production costs, in an unlimited edition, there are relatively so few people interested in his stuff compared to the pop music world, that banking on the richness and proprietary exclusiveness of art collectors seemed like a better way to make money.

An historical footnote of a crossover example of the fine-art-limited-edition world meeting the pop music world was The Beatles white album with cover art by Richard Hamilton, which was initially pressed and printed in a limited, numbered edition of (as i recollect, approximately) one million.

I've been confronted with the distinctions of these two systems over the past year or so, because for the first time some of the pictures i'm making are being sold through the commercial art system. I initially tried selling my 'flatware' (as dealers call the relatively easy to sell pictures on walls) on my own in numbered unlimited editions for about double the production cost, but as was the case with the Burrows tapes back in the '70's, no one was buying.

Now they are selling for a lot more money in arbitrarily-determined limited editions (there is a practical limit to the number of prints that can be made because i'm supervising the manufacture of, and inspecting each one (which, come to think of it, was also the situation with each and every \$8. Mystery Tape copy (that process is described in another posting, above)) plus signing each one; but the absolute practical quantity of an edition could be much higher than the the one we've chosen.

The edition thing gets a little more bizarre with the chronophotic works i've been making, which are stored on DVD or in high-resolution versions on hard drives. A DVD currently takes me a few minutes to manufacture and costs less than a dollar in materials, but depending on the edition-size limitation, i can and have sold these DVDs for \$5,000 each, and the hard-drive-stored works, which are in multiple segments, go for \$10,000 per screen.

Or, on the other hand, you can purchase, in an unlimited edition, a copy of my DVD, The Arc of Apparitions from the publisher OHM/Avatar, for about the same price as any mass-produced CD (about \$20.).

When one venerable art museum decided to exhibit AoA, they insisted on having contracts signed that established the insurable value of the art, cost of returning the art after the exhibition, etc. There was quite a bit of paperwork to go through, even though i kept insisting that the value of the the piece was \$20,. and if something went wrong with the copy they were using, they could always just grab another copy from their own gift shop.

This selling of the art itself, in its ultimate pristine form is quite contrary to what is commonly available in these art gallery gift shops. The AoA DVD is the prime manifestation of this piece, and the copy in the shop is an exact clone of the original; whereas the postcard or poster of the Mona Lisa being offered for sale in that shop is a less less-exclusive, i.e., less-unique, facsimile of something closer to the artist's intention.

The AoA DVD is also an example of why something exists in the form it does, which thereby fits into a certain market. A lot of movies, like audio tracks, seem to be reasonably apprehendable and satisfying in their downloadable form. AoA was designed and programmed as a set of related tracks which link invisibly in a random access process which is programmed right into the DVD's playback instructions. The DVD is endless and, although not infinitely variable, it rarely repeats in the same way. A download of the segments of this DVD will not do this, which is an important aspect of the character of this work. Theoretically, this insures that the work has some value, however small and temporary, as an object, independent of the 'information wants to be free' tendencies of digital distribution.

I so far have been managing to almost break even with this system of object making without hardly anything in the way of public institutional funding (art grants, etc.).

Otherwise i feel that part of my day-to-day survival, as a full-time artist, rests on this making of things that a lot of people seem to appreciate, and consequently a few of these people have the peripheral goodwill to endeavour to pay me to keep busy (this Tate Online discussion being an example). It's like the livelihood of pop music stars indigenous to countries which have virtually no market in licensed recordings – all recordings sold are black market copies : the artist doesn't make any money at all from recordings, but they are universally known through these recordings, and survive through live performances, gifts, and goodwill.

I hope.

Douglas Kahn

Subject: Bid a fair fondue

Posted: Mar 22, 2005 2:28 AM

On the 23rd this chariot turns back into a pumpkin, so it's time to say thanks and goodbye.

Starting early tomorrow morning I will be engaged in an economy and culture of exchange the old-fashioned way, from city to city transported on networks of airplanes, from the Sacramento airport to the University of Iowa, where I'll participate in a conference called Collage as Cultural Practice, and then on to Amsterdam for another conference called Sonic Interventions at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. All this sound and exchange is in the air right now so flying seems to be the best way to get close to the action.

The disembodied action on this online panel has been great. I've met John before so there is an active memory puppet to go with the words. With Kenneth, all the nude media talk goes well with his bum in the photo with Vicki Bennett from People Like Us. I saw People perform in Newcastle, Australia in September 2001, and we had Vicki for a talk here at University of California at Davis a couple years later but it's still difficult to interpolate his bum from hers to animate a proper puppet. UbuWeb has a huge presence with contents cloaked in such sumptuous layers that looking for nude would be like peeling labels from a Klein bottle, but e-meeting the person pulling the strings on the web has been a pleasure.

Anyway, I've found the whole panel very appealing and would like to thank Lina and Kelli for moderating and organizing it.

In the future, if not before.

Lina Dzuverovic

Re: Bid a fair fondue

Posted: Mar 23, 2005 3:38 PM

Just before the chariot turns into a pumpkin, I wanted to thank you all for taking part. I hope you have enjoyed the ride as much as I have. I thought we landed a great combination here: with Doug's brilliantly illustrated and detailed historical accounts, John's highly personal experiences of navigating the strange terrain of art and music production across a variety of contexts (so well illustrated in his last post), and Kenny the 'net guy's' take on offline vs. online sound consumption, we couldn't have done better.

The fact that we set off to wander across what was deliberately a rather vague and open-ended area led us in many directions and resulted in us covering ground that we perhaps never anticipated we would. Looking back over the posts, there are topics we touched upon that I can see myself returning to many times and that I think are worth exploring further and deeper, at some other time and place. There are specific threads that could spark off several panel discussions or essays all by themselves. Whatever Kelli and I might have meant by 'cultures of exchange' and 'politics of sound' at the beginning of the forum has proven to be much more complex than we expected when we set out. Starting off with discussions about The Tate and its 'new' interest in the arts of sound spiraled off into wider thinking about arts institutions' engagement with sonic culture and with collaborative (or participatory) practice. The topic of economies of production, commissioning, and collecting as well as distribution mechanisms and exhibition platforms came in at that point and thank you John for expanding on this with such clarity in your last post. As far as the relationship between networks and sound goes, which Doug had some

fascinating thoughts on, I look forward on chewing on this one for a while longer (in my phd). Kenny's term 'nude media' will, no doubt, stick beyond the forum as it describes so well the climate of exchange that has been central to our discussions. All in all I feel wonderfully privileged to have had the opportunity to throw these questions at you all and grateful for a fascinating discussion.

Once again - thanks everyone and many thanks to Kelli for initiating this, for posting all the useful resources, and for keeping an eye on the technical aspects of this outrageously long page. I know I'll be missing the ritual of checking the forum for updates first thing every morning as I sit in front of the computer with a cup of coffee.

So long, and hope to chat to y'all in real space over a drink sometime soon.
Lina

John Oswald

Re: Re: Bid a fair fondue

Posted: Mar 23, 2005 8:34 PM

cheers

Kenneth Goldsmith

Re: Re: Re: Bid a fair fondue

Posted: Mar 24, 2005 8:42 PM

Thanks everybody for this great discussion! As a parting note, I'd like to let you know that we just opened a section of historic artist's films on UbuWeb. The first batch includes films by Kenneth Anger, Luis Buñuel, John Cage, Guy Debord, Marcel Duchamp, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Robert Morris & Stan VanDerBeek, Isidore Isou, Man Ray, Robert Rauschenberg, Hans Richter, Harry Smith, Jack Smith and a set of 37 short Fluxus films. It's bound to keep growing so please stop by:

<http://www.ubu.com/film/index.html>

Ciao!

Kenneth

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