

A Sprawling Mess: The Poetics of *Musica Residua*

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Introduction

This essay explores the poetics of a contemporary music practice that takes postmodernism's articulation of modernity's aesthetic failure as its expressive prerogative. The works that I consider here are written by Canadian and American composers whose conceptual attitude is indebted largely to the American and British experimental tradition. Similar in character and spirit to the early works of composers like Cornelius Cardew and Christopher Hobbs, the tedium and senselessness that characterises these contemporary works derive from the eccentric intuitions of its composers who stand neither within nor entirely outside the purview of the 'art' music discipline or its institutional affiliations. As such, this practice can be understood to express the kind of tactical creativity that Michel de Certeau outlined in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Though the status of 'composers' makes these individuals so-called 'cultural producers' and puts their activity somewhat at odds with the 'unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized' practices of mass culture that de Certeau theorised, I suggest that the way in which these composers use the ideas and discursive products remaindered by Western music is the same.¹ Like the type of production that de Certeau calls 'consumption', this practice is virtually invisible and reveals itself less through *what* things are used (notation, acoustic instruments, concert ritual) and more in *how* these things are used; that is, this art music is discernible in the *way* in which the elements that comprise its expressions are employed rather than *what* these elements are. A crucial point can be drawn from this: as a circumstantial way of making do, these activities refute the postulate of absolute autonomy that underwrites the 'rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production' of contemporary composition that organises its discourse around the territory of post-serial practices.² Because the music that I am listening to is often written to be performed only once by a group of non-professionals (other composer-performers) cobbled together for the circumstance of its performance, often in a space designated for living (apartment lofts) as opposed to performing, these practices cannot secure a strategy of their own by which to develop and manage 'relations with an exterior distinct from [them]'.³ Thus, the poetics of this way of making music is a study of tactical mobility, of making do with and accepting 'the chance offerings of the moment', offerings that include the chance of risk and failure.⁴ Unlike the work of 'complexitists' such as Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Brian Ferneyhough and Frank Cox, whose

prefigured forms of risk are less unconscious *jouissance* than elemental fatalism, what I call *musica residua* has no propriety rights or insight into failure apart from the contingencies that are co-implicated in the ad hoc nature of its expression. It is the hazard of working tactically, of composing 'out of turn' by sensing opportune moments – what the Sophists called *kairos* – that determines the 'tinker-like' character of this music.

It is the expressive mobility and guileful activity of *musica residua* that I attempt to register in this writing. Because, as de Certeau notes, the tactical action 'must play on and with a terrain imposed on it',⁵ my writing, in its seemingly desultory appearance, aims to exploit the ways of moving through the terrain of hypertext so as to not to merely explain but to enact the poetic 'homologies between practical ruses and rhetorical movements'.⁶ The first part of this work addresses the nature of the experimental situation in which these mostly non-professionals and DIY composers work. Insofar as this music finds its opportunities 'on the wing', its concerns and effects are continually being refigured so that its relationship with the terms of Beauty, failure and sense (The Beloved) is essentially indeterminate. The second part, echoing the sentiment of the first, deals with the impossibility of Beauty and its supplement of Charm as a project unto itself. This section is composed in a form that simulates Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and proceeds by way of nested (psuedo)scholia so as to continually displace and ramify the sense of each proposition. The third part of the work is an examination of experiment's etymological cousin 'experience'. I filter the experimental attitude that 'art is experience' through Jean-Luc Nancy's phenomenology of listening in order to update this maxim in terms of 'making sense' and how making sense is the experience of *musica residua*'s experiment. I end the work with a brief epistle, re-casting the idea of sense as a metaphysical surface in terms that show this experimental poetic to be aligned more with the lyrical rather than the mimetic tradition of expression. 2

The audio examples strewn throughout this work play a peculiar role in that they are never the direct object of analysis. Instead, they are implicated (*pliqué*) in the text through a series of reflexive amplifications that Deleuze calls a fold – 'an internalization of the outside'.⁷ The audio, though it is never cited directly, insists in the essay in a way that expresses a relationship to text that is not one of object to sign but of interior to exterior. Thus my use of music does not illustrate so much as ex-em-*pli*-fy the text through a strange movement that, in a way, turns the essay inside-out while at the same time folding its poetics into musical expressions. 3

(The online version of this paper contains hyperlinks to music examples and to other websites which are not included in the printed version. The locations of these links are marked here by **bold text**.)

Spacing and Echoes

These words are parts of the event that your reading/listening is spacing out. They express a non-appearing 'apparition' in the constellation of their elements that I will call 'sense'.⁸ But this sense should not be confused with meaning, for meaning comes afterwards. After you have forgotten this experience and gone on to forget others, like the taste of *madeleine* it will return to you as 'meaning', its surfaces reflecting and weaving the sense of the text into a proposition. But it is never a meaning you will anticipate, for sense is at heart nothing but a 'pure variation' (Deleuze), an irreducible strangeness (Nancy), or as I prefer, a cipher. As such, what follows is a 'pad', a cryptogrammatic echo-chamber that keeps its resonances always in play and out of joint. To come to the point, there can be no 'point'. There is no external law or well-ordered type that orders the following text. There is only an internal resounding or immanent 'folding of ideas and things within one another',⁹ which makes the point of this work an aleatory point: 'a paradoxical element, intervening as nonsense...and operating as a quasi-cause assuring the full autonomy of effect'.¹⁰

I. On Beauty, the Beloved and the Failure of Contemporary Experimental Music...

Experimental music is hopeless. The experimental has nothing to do with 'being music', it's just a coincidence, or rather, a way of making sense of the fact that 'it happens': 'the pure process that never ceases to reach fulfillment as it proceeds'.¹¹

Think about how the experiment succeeds, how it fails to become anything other than just 'what becomes of it'. This obtains because what I'm talking about is not a thing but a process. For example, a work that asks a performer to **'un-play' the written melody [hyperlink]** can only make sense as an expression of the surface that bisects the performer and the text (score), the instrument and the performer, the tradition and the instrument, and this live performance from the recorded performance. What is expressed as 'music' are the grooves and contours of an **enigmatic admixture [hyperlink]**. Insofar as this experiment 'actively creates the terrain it maps',¹² what becomes 'Music' is an event whose time is never 'now' but is only 'having been' or 'due to be' musicked.

So, the experimental situation never becomes what is given, or rather, it can only succeed by becoming what is not given. As expression, music never resembles its conditions. In other words, the experimental expression *must* fail to be the sense of music; the experiment must forget its conditions and become what it is not – namely, the Idea of 'Music'.

However, this failure is not regrettable; in fact, it's a boon. It relieves the experiment of a Beauty that must coincide with its terms, terms freighted with a discursive waste that from the first obscures the conditions by

which what happens in 'this' music might be interesting. Of course one can seek Beauty in these experimental events, or at least a memory of Beauty. Clearly, there is a tendency towards something that recalls Beauty; however, every image of Beauty 'must take away from the reality of the world' and hover closer to the by-product that culture remainderers as 'nature'.¹³ Kant says that the Beautiful emerges as a judgment grounded upon the pleasurable agreement between the Imagination's faculty of intuition and the Understanding's faculty of concepts. By this measure, we cannot rightly call the experiment Beautiful, for as a process that maps its territory as it proceeds, its intuition and concept can never meet. (Try if you'd like. Try to find the 'form' that agrees with the 'Idea' of a process *in medias res*.)

Works such as **this [hyperlink]**, works that simply make an event out of a series of salvaged effects, fail 'to perform a particular function within a given purposive context'.¹⁴ As such, what we are talking about is an event that is 'always almost' just what it can never be – non/sense. 9

Up close this music is harmless. Listen to the **peregrinating line(s) [hyperlink]**. They are unstrung and chasing their own tail, seeking at once the sense of what was their past and what will be their future. I suppose there is little choice in this, for the figures are continually insinuating associations from which they immediately diverge. Like Beauty, the melodies carry the burden of history, but as with any melody you care to remember, the 'was' that a melody freights is just a residue that opens the 'is' to a 'will', as a looking glass opens a body to its own alterity. We call the 'was' a tradition, and tradition describes how we listen to the present from the perspective of the past. The 'will' is what tradition hears in advance – a 'will be was'. But what 'is' divides the 'was' from the 'will' in a moment of non/sense; that is, a moment where the 'was' and 'will' palpate each other, a moment where 'was' and 'will' find their sense (*sens*) in what each becomes. We can therefore say that melody arises in the meeting of beginnings and endings that extend forever in both ways at once. It is from this moment of non/sense that melody strays as the **lyrical detritus [hyperlink]** of a temporal histrionics. 10

Say it another way: The work we are hearing divides a past from a future as the address divides a poet from his 'Beloved'. Properly speaking, the Beloved belongs to the lyric poem. Though I speak of a Beloved it does not make of this music a poetry. But consider this: A lyric poem imagines at once both a speaker and a world addressed. But more simply, the world and the Beloved coincide in an ontological modulation that affects the being of the speaker. The Beloved, as Allen Grossman notes in his book *The Sighted Singer* (1992) is what 'modulates the relationship of the poem's subject and object, and the distance it creates is filled with ontological questions'.¹⁵ Poetry's question, its theory – it's 'theatre' – is ontology. Poetry interrogates being. In that music is also a denizen of imagination, it too fantasises an ontological relationship of sorts, but it differs from poetry in that its object of address, its 'Beloved', does not modulate the relationship of subject to object but instead modulates a 11

'was' from an 'is'. Music hallucinates a **structure of attention [hyperlink]** in that its Beloved, in a manner of speaking, is a non/sense that inheres 'in effect'. Music's question, its theory, its theatre, is change. In a sense, music's Beloved is the propriety of the address itself, a propriety the melody addresses in the advent of its being-listened-to. As such, the experiment of this work makes its point by addressing the non/sense of melody as its Beloved.

It is in the preoccupation with non/sense that the experimental Beloved emerges. **Keep in mind [hyperlink]** that the experiment of this music *makes non/sense* and so never has the property, the 'propriety', of Beauty. Beauty belongs to the history of art and the interests of a leisure that can afford its own disinterest. Insofar as preoccupations can be taken to delineate a 'Musical' event, and to the extent that these tinkering of difference remain indifferent to the hail of that which they remainder, we have only deeds that drift and rummage among the Ideas we already have about music. But how does that matter for a **precession of failings [hyperlink]**? Perhaps because Beauty founders on its own terms ('balance', for example, has no sense apart from 'disparity') it requires a third name to keep it straight: 'sense'. What stands in for Beauty in this case (even though it is hopeless) is *the sense of non/sense*. 12

The Beloved which this work addresses, what transforms our hearing into a listening, is an object that is the non/sense of Beauty. We can say that the failure of the experiment is installed at the very core of whatever expression we give to the 'was-will'. Hailing a Beloved whose desire is non/sense produces only an 'aggregate of noncausal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resumptive and resonances, a system of signs [...] and not at all a necessitating causality'.¹⁶ The re-ply (*re-ply*) that comes from the non/sense of the address of the experiment is the re-plication of a fundamental hollowing out of time. Because we are discussing the question of music and not poetry, we are interrogating the Beloved of becoming. As becoming, the Beloved is not so much silent as out of range, out-of-joint. The Beloved of non/sense is infinitely truant and so demands a limitless patience to express its endless desire. 13

The becoming that hollows out what is possible in this musical experiment, so that a Beauty might-yet-come-late to the Beloved, characterises a withdrawal that reveals the world's re-ply (*re-ply*) as the ex-position of being singular plural – that is to say, becoming brings in to play the 'touch of meaning [...] the plurality of the "each time" repeating the strangeness of these touches to the other'.¹⁷ Like night, whose striking opacity makes sound remarkably concrete, the withdrawal of the Beloved, although not itself sensible, is the condition that makes one sensitive to the absence of the Beloved, to the sense of non/sense. 14

Why does this music seem so sad? [hyperlink]

Because its melancholy proceeds from the fundamental task of showing 15

itself to be bereft of Beauty, of signifying the eternal departure of the Beloved whose withdrawal is the only thing that it can say.

How then does one listen to a music whose entire Idea is already a future past?

What is there to listen to but a 'continuous line of variation'? As a conceptual hinge we might think that the Beautiful of the past manoeuvres this work out of its purview of failure. But like the relationship of a lie to truth, this just keeps its 'other' in sight, endowing the experiment with a privative kind of beauty. If the Beautiful is at all relevant to this music it is with the singular purpose to avoid being it. And in order to succeed at this, 'failure' must become its sobriquet. 16

II. The Charm of Failure

Canto I

1.0 Try to understand that I am not saying this work is Beautiful, rather, I am suggesting that it hails a hopeless beauty. 'The Beautiful', which is not what I am saying, is only an address that the work finds drifting in its delirium. 17

1.1 On addressing Beauty: The address itself is almost nothing, mostly nothing in fact and more than anything else, gives way to change. Indeed, this capacity to become something other is dependent upon its giving way, for the 'charm', the persistence of an aural presentiment, is precisely the alibi of change. 18

1.1.1 It might go without saying that Beauty changes with time, its meaning being a measure of what the sign can determinately **not** signify. If we take Adorno's sadness (the anti-form of history), then Beauty is always already just another figure of what is already known. It's only upside down. 19

1.2 'Lingering' might be a better term to describe how the *residua* of culture endure and perform an expressive excavation of time. 20

1.2.1 Rather than harmonise the detritus of history, *residua* prefer to distribute it, to put it in counterpoint and lose it in a sense that goes in all directions, that wanders ambivalently, expressing a loss that is lost, a lostness that finds itself fully present to its ability 'of being in uncertainty and mystery'.¹⁸ 21

Getting lost in a manner that makes non/sense.

1.2.2 It could be said that there is no working over history here. The remaindered effects of the Ideas of Music that we call 'anacrusis', 'tension', 'resolution', etcetera – those congeries of a vintage past – exhibit expressive forms like the curiosities that they have become. In 22

fact, all it takes to satisfy the modular Idea of Music that has developed over the years is to shuffle the crumbs. But when crumbs become *residua* they do not pretend to establish a sphere of sense; instead, they reply (*re-pli*) to culture as its contagious dross whose virulent form of replication spreads an infinitely thin surface of difference over each singular-plural that is remaindered.

1.3 We often describe ourselves as floating among the flotsam of life. Everything you might have hold of then—in art, in thought—is the jetsam of time. **23**

1.3.1 If this is our contemporary predicament, then we are all of us lost in an affective Sargasso. In the wreckage of 'Art', while hope floats, Beauty drifts. **24**

Canto II

2.0 A 'hinge' is what works to freight the significance of remainders. A hinge then does not require an ontological ground but needs only an Idea of its transcendence to shuttle meaning between the strangeness of being singular plural. **25**

2.0.1 The French musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch calls this hinge in music 'Charm'. **26**

2.0.2 'Charm', he writes, 'has both something nostalgic and precarious about it, some unknowable something having to do with insufficiency and incompleteness which heightens itself through the effect of time.'¹⁹ **27**

2.0.3 So music that has lost its Beauty is in someway Charming. **28**

2.0.3.1 The time that this music takes (but in a way gives back) is a kind o 'enchanted temporality', a fugitive time that inscribes the theme of nostalgia on the simulation of progress. **29**

2.1 Using Beauty, let's think about the Beloved as a functionary in a way that history does not. I could speak in formal terms about this or that, but 'that' would exclude the more interesting thisness of failure's function in the pleasure of experiencing no where here now. **30**

2.1.1 As I said above, if an experimental music starts from the event of its failure to address a Beloved, then the drift of its own delirium becomes the surrogate Charm that is everywhere no where. **31**

2.2 The 'no where' of this music – the Beloved who is forever out of reach – in principle, frees one to endure its persistent absence in much the same way that the world's half, hidden behind your frontal gaze, has a strange presence that braces the world about you. **32**

2.2.1 In this sense, the Beloved is like a conscience. **33**

2.3 The Beloved that is lost in this music opens itself to having nothing to say. And by this I mean that it is a-rhetorical, which, curiously, in making itself be nothing – a cipher even – multiplies its valence such that you can say as much as you want about it but you can never say it all. 34

2.3.1 A cipher is non/sense. A cipher is a mere nothing that makes a difference. The experiment that we will come to call 'Music' is itself a cipher, what we might call a 'dumb expression'. 35

2.3.2 In speaking non/sense this music agitates other discourses and affections that in effect makes them speak its parodic name. But, in a way, all music uses the signifying practices of other domains to establish its own sense (*sens*). This music, however, simply recognises no other domain. 36

Canto III

3.0 The Beloved 'no where' is always the object. Thus failure is always its aim. 37

3.1 But don't take this failure as regrettable. There should be no greater success than for the music to fail the terms of being Beautiful. When failure is immanent to Beauty it (re)adjusts our attention to a 'Music' that never was. 38

3.1.1 'Never was' is of course another name for ideology, a name for the 'sense' that underwrites its own expression. 39

3.1.2 All the arts, to a degree, entail a creative re-imagining of their terms. In a way, the arts are radically anachronistic, yet at the same time they are a-chronistic, for their sense is always either too late or too soon. 40

3.2 Again Jankélévitch: 'Caught in the poetic momentum that will have been set in motion, the subordinate re-creator, fertilized, becoming a poet in turn, will someday reproduce – who knows? – the initial act, the original poetic condition where works of art improvise themselves into existence.'²⁰ 41

3.2.1 Failure, then, is a hesitation of experience, a divergent matter whose expression splits the world in two: the factual and counterfactual. 42

3.3 Failure thereby reticulates the advent of experience itself. 43

Canto IV

4.0 Failure places its address beyond hope, for hope admits a deferral that implicates a Beloved that it know it cannot have. 44

4.0.1 Instead, failure speaks to the nonsense immanent to the sense that 45

cannot be said by its expression. As Deleuze notes: 'I never state the sense of what I am saying. But I can always take the sense of what I say as the object of another proposition whose sense, in turn, I cannot state.'²¹

4.0.1.1 Thus, 'non/sense' refuses the hope, the contingency of sense, yet at the same time is its unspeakable condition. 46

4.1 Failure does not consummate meaning, yet it rides the crest of implication. 47

4.1.1 As bearer of implication, failure does not withhold possibilities; however, its possibilities are of the kind that admit their very possible impossibility. As such, failure can be understood positively as the radical affirmation of the possible. 48

4.1.2 To the extent that an embrace of failure opens 'possibilities for future action' to their potential undoing, experience becomes enriched with the sense of its own contingency. That is, experience 'interpreted as with meanings' whose 'tendencies are sensed as brought to fruition',²² is recognised in the light of failure that it might possibly have been experienced "otherwise." 49

4.1.3 In other words, failure expresses the insistence of the counterfactual, which in music, is a charm wrought by its labile nature. 50

4.2 The charm of failure, if by that is meant an alternative to the insufficiency that haunts the realisation of every Idea, lies in its affirmation that what 'this' means also (always) may (possibly) have meant 'that'. 51

III. Sense, Surfaces and Ciphers: How Art is Not What it Means

Art as experience [hyperlink]

Ben Johnston once wrote: 'A crucial shift has occurred in many avant-garde works: they are no longer about experience, whether concrete or abstract: they are experience.'²³ This statement, originally penned in 1971 for *The Composer*, was Johnston's response to a sensibility developing in art since the end of World War II that challenged the traditional status of art as a means to make statements on what he characterises as the "'profounder" values of life'.²⁴ Whereas the traditional and popular conception of art was to symbolically express life's ineffable or 'emotional' sense, the vanguard practices that Johnston had in mind in his essay sought neither to negate the capacity of art to refer to the sense of another experience, nor to deconstruct the notion of art, but instead aimed to express its own occasion as a sense in itself: Thus art shifted its mode of expression from representing experience (i.e., Ravel's 'sunrise' in *Daphne and Chloe*) to embodying experience. The intermedial avant- 52

garde practices, exemplified by composers like Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik and La Monte Young, effectively breached the disciplinary boundaries that 'sustained, named, framed and contained' the medium-specific purview of traditional art, and proposed itself, its praxis, as an opened ended expression, an unlimited proposition to see, hear and feel the world as it might be otherwise than it has already become.²⁵

Jean-Luc Nancy, nearly forty years later in his meditation on listening, describes in terms of sonorous phenomena, Johnston's sensible sense as an opening, or an 'arrival', a sense coming to presence rather than it 'being already there' as it 'appears' in visual experience.²⁶ Nancy takes the act of listening as the exemplary state in which we attend to experience before it is coded and its **lines of relay [hyperlink]** ossified. In listening, he argues, we do not perceive the significance of this so much as we find ourselves present 'to something other than sense in its signifying sense'.²⁷ Listening is a way to attune our experience not to meaning but to the sense of sense, the condition of sense. Johnston's commentary pertains to all the arts for the fact that, to him, creative expression was not constrained to a single disciplinary medium. Extrapolating upon this once vanguard interest to articulate several different media, a common sensibility today, Nancy identifies a certain 'spacing out' (distension) that is for him the very condition of sense. He writes: "The perceived *possibility of sense* (or, if you like, the transcendental condition of significance...) is overlaid with the resonant possibility of sound."²⁸ 'Resonance' is thus key to the condition of sense.

For Nancy, sense, and by extension the sense of experience itself, is made possible by an echoic play of difference; sense begins in a 'vibrant spacing out' or 'rebound that is coextensive with the whole folding/unfolding (*pli/dépli*) of presence and of the present that makes or opens the perceptible as such.'²⁹ He calls the spacing out of sense 'resonance' so as to characterise the reflective and dynamic distribution of surfaces that a play of difference constitutes. The 'singular complex of returns' that describes the resonance of **a sonorously articulated event [hyperlink]** exemplifies the sense of sense that resounds between all types of differences.³⁰ It is as a resonant 'complex of returns' that the sense of sense is expressed as an active spacing out and which founds 'the very conditions, not the limitations, of experience in general'.³¹ Thus the condition of sense arises within and as the resonance (resounding) of a differential complex, be it a complex of 'cultures [...] the arts [...] the senses' as well as 'the mutual intricacy of these differences [differences of differences]'.³²

What determines an art as experience and not as mere representation of experience entails as its 'truth', as its desire, an opening or spacing of difference. Art that distributes itself across media in order to make itself an experience rather than an aesthetic object cannot easily be classified as art because its priorities are less about nailing down and symbolising (signifying) the 'profounder values of life' than in creating an array of **extra-ordinary attunements [hyperlink]** (*Stimmung*) or a network of

returns whose sense (resonance) is an on-going promise that is always yet-to-come. In short, art as experience marks a desire not to mean anything but to compose the resonant conditions for sense to arrive. Thus the 'state of the art' does not 'make sense', but is the expression of sense. Only the 'event of the art' or the art of the event makes sense by creating singularities that compose and constellate an 'irreducible strangeness' which cannot be but 'each time its "own" clearing, its "own" imminence, the imminence of a "propriety", or propriety itself as imminence.'³³

The erasure of traditional boundaries in the art of the event is therefore less a critique or deconstruction of forms and more the effect of '*a coming and a passing, an extending and a penetrating*' that describes the sense of an experimental distribution of singularities.³⁴ "The spreading out of [art's] resonance, its expansion, and its reverberation' is what we listen to (*entendre*) as its singularities open out, within, upon and across different media, different speeds and different times.³⁵ The 'post-medium' art that Johnston observed in 1971 is a practice that does not take its existence to refer to another experience. An art of the event is an experience that itself enacts the 'vibrant spacing out' of sense so that, in a paradoxical way, it can become about how 'the difference in sense (in the "perceived" sense [*sensé*] of the word) *is its condition, that is, its condition of resonance*.'³⁶

This notion of resonance has a considerable conceptual valence for thinking about not only avant-garde or experimental art but art in general. First, resonance is a contagious condition in that its returns traverse various media, times and places to compose a radically intertextual and inter-modal event. Resonance describes the way in which 'presence is never a simple being-there or how things stand, but is at once an advance, penetration, insistence, obsession, or possession',³⁷ it is an event of crossing that expresses the 'metonymic contiguity' of things.³⁸ Experience, whose 'major characteristic is not to form merely the results of an abstract decomposition of the concrete phenomenon, but just as much to play some [elements] against others in this phenomenon',³⁹ shows art to be **more or less [hyperlink]** 'experimental' not by virtue of its formal ingenuity but to the degree that it articulates more or less obscure differences. For example, Arte Povera's exhibition of rubbish articulates art's principle of verisimilitude with the mundane's aesthetic by-products. Secondly, resonance, as Nancy continually reminds us, is not 'absent from other perceptible systems', but 'comprises them all (a colour or texture also resounds)'.⁴⁰ Resonance describes the dynamic mood (*Stimmung*) of a differential complex and so aligns thought with the notion of sonority, or what we can call experiential 'sonance'. The character of an event is, properly speaking, 'nothing but its reverberations'.⁴¹ Because the sense of an event is the 'sonority' of a situation, in and as the inter-modal reverberations sonance allows us to extend, in a metonymic manner, the concept of 'timbre' to the general experience of the sense of sense: 'sonorous matter is precisely what [...] spreads out in itself and resounds in (or from) its own spacing.'⁴² Thus

the sonance, or timbre, of an event – an evolving difference between senses – becomes 'the first consistency of sonorous sense as such'.⁴³ Therefore, in the sonority of an event, which needn't be characterised by its sound *per se*, we immediately come 'onto the metaphor[s] of other perceptible registers' so that we can reasonably speak of the 'colour of sound (*Klangfarbe*), the 'density of touch' or even 'the taste of speed'.

A world of sonorous sense thus never 'appears' but 'arrives' as an ongoing clamour between the senses. It 'comes to' in the resounding that opens within and among seeing, hearing, tasting, etcetera, each as they inflect the sense of the other. But a world of sense is also hollowed out or scatted by connections that articulate and make resound a heterogeneity of materials; the hair of a bow, taught metal strings, wooden bridge, a hollow chamber, practised gestures, a fleshy touch, little black dots and, of course, the ear (yours or mine), form a relay that promises the sense of 'Music'. Art as experience is never simply a mere sensation (though for some that's all it affords), but something that in-folds imagined and affective relations. The sense of art subsists virtually among, along and between every object, Idea, feeling and effect. The sense of sense echoes even among Ideas (i.e., philosophy, science, art) – Deleuze's infamous 'quasi-causality'. A song, an opera, a car chase, a road trip [...] a mood, a thought, a belief [...] a birth and death [...] a life. None is necessary but each is an event whose expressions – becomings – are infinite. Each has its own sonance, its own signature of sense, its peculiar way of taking effect. 58

As experience, art does not know effects, it distributes them. Art, when it no longer purports to mean anything or to be about experience, when it becomes a way into experience or an uncertain ingress into a situation, does not hear but listens to sense. In listening, art – all art – becomes an experimental practice as it strives to sense 'what is not yet framed in a system of signifying references'.⁴⁴ Effects, more than 'significance', become the provenance of a practice or set of practices whose desires remain indeterminate of a medium (even the medium of thought). A practice of effects seeks only to affirm its **indeterminate desires [hyperlink]**, not in judgment of what they might be or mean according to 'this' or 'that' sense, but by what they might become or express, what they can do to make effects and to make sense. 59

Refrain...

The works that surround and pass through this essay are each events. But, even more than that, they are ciphers. I call them ciphers because, as you might gather from the above, I'm not convinced that meaning matters to (experimental) art. Certainly, art is 'about' meaning, but only in the sense that art is on 'all sides' of meaning. It's not that I think art has no truck with meaning, but rather, meaning is more accurately what art's form and appearance remainder. What matters to art, because it's always making a difference, is sense: Art is a matter of sense, which is to say that art makes sense, makes difference. Put simply, art's work, its project 60

is to differentiate, and a cipher is precisely a mere nothing that makes a difference – in spatial terms, we can call a cipher a surface.

Surface, then, is the essence of art. Art does nothing but invent surfaces. 61
But you have to understand that a surface is not really itself a 'thing' but what lies between things, what connects and divides not only things but also Ideas to things, and Ideas to Ideas. Surface sense is therefore a metaphysical dimension that communicates, or rather, resonates different differences.

An analogy: The sea and the sky sit side by side. Though neither falls 62
into One they nevertheless are affected by and affecting each other. The surface that keeps their difference in touch 'makes waves' that belong to neither the sky nor the sea, but is an expression of their mutual composition, an effect of their dynamic mixture. Expression lies, then, on the surface of things, not as meaning but as sense. What we mean by 'sky' or 'sea' is thus a way of expressing, of making effective, a particular side of this surface. The sense of 'sky' in a way belongs equally to the 'sea', for to express one or the other is not to negate one side of the binary (*à la* dialectics), but to dwell more or less within each other's field, productively contaminating and modulating the limits of their reciprocal impingements. What lies between the sea and sky, and what allows either to be considered at all or to mean anything, is sense. A cipher/surface (like the '/' does not itself mean anything but mediates between one order and another to effect a transformation/transcription that can be read and subject to interpretation. Art as cipher therefore does mean anything in particular but generates surfaces, directions and drifts (*sens*) that 'sensitise' **the babble of things** [\[hyperlink\]](#).

Veils...lives...

1. To become any 'thing' is to affect a world. That is, both a thing and a 63
world refer to a 'doing' – a thing to what it does, a world to what is done in its name. Worlds are affected (influenced, brought forth, disposed); they are impingements and pretensions that belong to 'Anyone'. To make a theatre for myself is to affect what is not for me, but for Anyone. In a sense, to affect my own world is to infect Anyone's world with my being-t/here. As such, my being-in-the-world cannot not affect the situation in which I find myself. And so the world becomes my own as the effect of my affect.

2. But I often find my self in the leftover habits of culture's history, and the 64
ways I end up interpreting my self is as an echo of the social world I was thrust into. But I am never entirely convinced by these ways, for every articulation of my 'I' with the 'They' veils the singular affect of my being-t/here. Thus, in committing myself to these inherited roles, 'I' may just as well not have been t/here: 'I' may have been elsewhere, now/here, or otherwise: 'I' may be 'Anyone'. But here I am. My situation, neither fated nor random, is an expression that I invent to capture a glimpse of myself, as an apparition, as the effect of being affected.

3. But I am not without my own influences. A Being without affects could not be t/here: no One would be t/here. In a sense to become who I am I need to infect a situation with affects whose effects can then express an affected self. Concerning my existence and yours, I am a virus and **you are [19]** too: There is no self apart from a fundamental (de)coupling. My being-t/here is adumbrated by a viral-becoming, a being-t/here that expresses a power to appropriate, even if that appropriation figures as a negation. Being is parasitic, it is communicable, it is a contagion that vaccinates us from nothingness. 65

4. I say that being appropriates, but really I mean 'we' affect. I mean 'we' because appropriation is a matter of making sense, and only 'we' makes sense when 'we' appropriate. Apart from the appropriating sense of 'we' there is non-sense. But non-sense nevertheless continues to affect, only it doesn't matter. Affects only matter to a 'we' who are existentially asymmetrical. Death is balanced. Life is crooked. To gain a footing on this slope 'we' circulate our affects. 'We' pollute each other with a desire for a world that would have us. We affect one another to make sense of our being-t/here. In one and the same moment I affect you and you affect me. You find your 'self' in the effect of being affected; I find my 'self' in the effect of your being affected. And you pass this along... 66

Notes

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xvii.

² *Ibid.* 31.

³ *Ibid.* xix.

⁴ *Ibid.* 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* 39.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 98.

⁸ Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, tr. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 82.

⁹ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense : A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 16.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 95.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 371.

¹² Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation, Renewing Philosophy* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, tr. Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(E) Foreign Agents Series (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 118.

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- ¹⁴ Winfried Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense: Kant and Bluebeard* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 5.
- ¹⁵ Allen R. Grossman and Mark Halliday, *The Sighted Singer : Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 226.
- ¹⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 70.
- ¹⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, tr. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 6.
- ¹⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005).
- ¹⁹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, tr. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press 2003), 96.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.* 119.
- ²¹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 28.
- ²² John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 374.
- ²³ Ben Johnston, *"Maximum Clarity" And Other Writings on Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 135-36.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Geraldine Finn, 'To Speculate - on Music - and/as the Sound of Différance', *Tijdschrift Voor Muziektheorie*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2002): 190.
- ²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, tr. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.* 32.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.* 30, my emphasis.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.* 16.
- ³¹ *Ibid.* 11.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 7.
- ³⁴ Nancy, *Listening*, 13.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.* 11.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.* 15.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* 42.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.* 15.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 76.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* 77 n.7.
- ⁴² *Ibid.* 40.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 36.

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