

The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Think We Want

Andrew Kötting

Imagine a vinyl record playing throughout

FRONT LINE - VIRGIN COMPILATION

Apparently Kötting hopes to dig into himself like an archaeologist in a hopeless attempt to explain the sounds that abound therein.

P's Every documentary film, even the least self-referential, demonstrates in every frame that an artist's chief material is himself.

It is an excavation of oneself.

It is an ego trip.

DUB REGGAE - I ROY - U ROY - AUGUSTUS PABLO - DR ALIMANTADO PRINCE FAR I and ADRIAN SHERWOOD

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MEREDITH MONK – MORTON FELDMAN and LAURIE ANDERSON's *OH SUPERMAN*

Music for me was always about atmosphere.

Something that might surround you

Enter into you and invariably eat at you

It was about the not-knowing, the non-existent, the non-narrative.

It wasn't about clever structure – middle eights – harmonies and guitar breaks.

It was about being spooky and exotic.

Confused and erotic.

Dreamy and quixotic.

John Cage gave a lecture once at the Seattle Arts Society, in which he suggested that the noun '*music*' should be replaced by a more meaningful term: **The organisation of sound.**

But that was then.

This is now.

It's always difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen.

Memory is the past rewritten in the direction of feeling and anything processed by memory *is* fiction.

Therefore our memories **are** fictions.

Memory loves to go hunting – especially in the dark.

And the dark is VERY atmospheric.

The dark is last week or a few months back – the further back you go the hazier it gets.

Or does it?

I'm interested in the generic edge – the thin membrane between what might be called fiction and non-fiction.

The foggy no-man's land between what *is* and what *isn't*.

I draw from the real in order to make an 'unreal' or 'ethereal'.

And the work involves the organisation of both sound and image.

And the soundscapes that I create attempt to dig into the clouds of consciousness.

When I first started filming other people MY head would be full of questions;

What does it mean to set another person in front of the camera?

Am I not trying to extract something from their soul?

When am I exploiting?

When am I exploring?

When am I adoring?

Or is it all just one and the same?

Perhaps that is the truth of all human relationships?

So I'd fabricate my own responses.

Let non-sequiturs be the order of the day I thought.

Let the tangential take hold:

Close your eyes, prick up your ears, and from the softest sound to the wildest noise, from the simplest tone to the highest harmony, from the most violent, passionate scream to the gentlest words of sweet reason, it is invariably Nature that speaks to us.

She reveals her *being*, her *power*, her *life*, and her relatedness - so that maybe even a blind person, to whom the infinitely visible world is denied, can grasp the endless vitality in what can be heard.

No monotheistic belief systems explaining divine interventions or man myths – just pure unadulterated Nature.

It's as loud as it gets – it's as loud as it needs to be...

Nature is both Landscape and Cityscape.

I'd like you to watch a film I made way back before I had the learning

HOI POLLOI

It's both document and documentary.

Both Fact and Fiction.

A portrait of a life led in the French Pyrenees in the late 80's.

A portrait of a disabled daughter.

My daughter.

Eden.

She was born with a rare neurological dis-order, Joubert Syndrome.

She was missing a bit of her brain.

The vermis.

An important part of the cerebellum.

And it was this loss that provoked in me a sense of loss.

An imminent loss:

The voice of authority with its clinical prognosis - Gleaned from Senate House Library, University College London, whilst I was a student at The Slade – still rings in the ears:

'Life-expectancy is not good and few if any sufferers live into adulthood'.....

The words had an impact on me

I was overcome by an urgency.

I began to document her life.

Our life together.

But never the morbidity - I wanted it to be a celebration – a celebration of lives lived within a Landscape – our Pyrenean Landscape

A Nature fantasy – make believe and fact.

And the **hoi-polloi** of the title represents the voices inside Eden's head

The voices inside my head.

The voices outside in the forest – resplendent in their phantomic animistic presence.

I made them up or cobbled them together.

Cabin doors to manual.

HOI POLLOI - <https://vimeo.com/55218526>

Eden as both cipher and Sybil – a flesh radio that we tune into ...

With the look-back from today the film seems strangely cathartic yet deeply darker than I had imagined – perhaps a subliminal Freudian understanding in my desire at such a young age to be rid of the responsibility that was Eden.

And yet ironically - she has grown into my liberator - inspirator and facilitator but more on that later.

The poet **Gerard Manley-Hopkins** used the terms **inscape** and **instress**.

These were words, which always had a hold on me; they beguiled me and confused me.

Did he mean that *mindscape* that we carry around with us from day to day and moment to moment, that safe haven behind your eyes that is looking out at the world - your inspace - the place that works as an antidote to the great-out-of-doors?

Did he mean Herzog's *ecstatic truth-space*, Beckett's *cerebral hinterland*, Tarkovsky's *zone*, Sinclair's *thinkspace* or John Clare's *headtalk*?

Perhaps by *inscape* he meant the unified whole of the things that give consciousness its uniqueness and that makes each thing different from all other things.

Perhaps by *instress* he meant either the force-of-being which holds that inscape together or the unfathomable-thing from that inscape which sticks to the minds of others.

Did he mean glue?

Whatever Manley Hopkins meant, for me *inscape* is the metaphysical manifest.

The interior *noisescape*, the inside sent out or the outside brought in.

I believe in the arts as a type of knowledge.

I believe in science AS a quest for knowledge.

I believe in religion as superstition and myth or at best a Friday night Morris Dancing Session.

Some truths we NEED

Some *truths* are myths.

The Pre-bronze-ageist **Aristotle** mooted that music was character forming and that it should be introduced into the education of the young.

Now there was a proper thinker.

When one listens to music our souls undergo a change he said - a transformation - it arouses moral qualities - but he also went on to say that it must be the 'right sort of music'.

The wrong sort of music - particularly that of the flute might prove too exciting or too tempting for both children and slaves - which was just too 'vulgarizing'.

Plato of course thought that The Arts just made people worse - unlike Reason and Science.

The Arts he suggested were way off the mark when it came to the TRUTH.

At best they were only a form of sport or mucking about.

And besides the fact that they encouraged the passions flew in the face of the principles of the SOUL.

And

When arranging human SOULS into nine grades - **Plato** put philosophers at the top - tyrants at the bottom and artists at number six - just above artisans and farmers. He does however make an exception for musicians (provided that the music they make is virtuous and not intended for children and slaves) in which case they come in at number five.

I'm forever looking backwards

Gathering up fragments and re-using them

Re-assessing them

The memories

The difficulties

The probabilities and the possibilities

They balm me and soothe me and hurt me

I enjoy the pain of the revisit

I receive the memory as punctum.

Palpable and potent.

The past is the one thing we are.

Sound is ubiquitous, immersive and unstoppable.

The agency through which music is absorbed and spoken language is understood.

Sound works quietly with the other senses in an attempt to scan the environment - to

define orientation within a place and to register the feeling that we might describe as *atmosphere*.

All Sound is music.

OR IS IT?

Some quotes:

Goethe - *Blowing is not playing music – you have to make use of your fingers*

Beethoven - *I am inclined to think that a hunt for folk songs is better than a hunt for heroes who are so highly extolled*

Anonymous - *It is easier to understand a nation by listening to its music than by learning its language*

Anne Carson – *Every sound we make is a bit of autobiography*

David Toop - *Visual work has boundaries; a position that is fixed, if only from moment to moment; a capacity to express specific ideas. Sound, on the other hand, may come and go; be perceived at all points in a space, even behind the listener's head or out of sight; be resistant to verbal interpretation, or attachment to any kind of meaning other than the way it alters an environment.*

Andrew Kötting - *Your eyes have eye lids but your ears don't*

Sound can be fun.

I'd like you to watch **Jaunt**.

A television commission and a running time set-in-stone.

But a commission nevertheless, in which I was left alone - to document trips up and down the River Thames – from Southend-on-Sea to The Houses of Parliament.

Eversuchalongtimeago.

JAUNT - <https://vimeo.com/55220005>

There are waypoints, markers, buoys and signifiers in all the work I make.

They come about through something I've seen or heard or smelt or remembered.

Something I might even have tasted.

However it is the sound that informs the picture.

The memory the significance.

The companionship of shooting - the tradition – the process.

Meanwhile

Collaboration undermines the authority of control.

And I'm glad of it.

It let's you Letgo

It helps to dilute the ego.

Thus I'm ever hopeful that something else 'might' happen.

BUT in the edit suite or on the paper that I write this, begins the real work.

The job of **reverse engineering**.

Coaxing out of the various parts - a structure and possibly *meaning*.

The latter invariably something that I might not even 'recognise' until months or years later.

If at all.

Paradoxically it is the subjective space

The personal space

The autobiographical space

The MySpace

That helps me to understand The BIGGER PICTURE

So today - I'm corralling ideas from the page and out into the auditorium in pretty much the same way that I collage sound and image into the film work.

Confabulation and improvisation is often my compass

As well as:

Randomness

Openness to accident

Assemblage

Anthropological autobiography

Appropriation

Collage

Discontinuous

Emotional urgency

Impetuousness

Non-linear

Plasticity of form

Risk

Criticism

Self-criticism

Serendipity

Self-reflexivity

Stupidity

Self-ethnography

Spontaneity

Self-evident

The blurring

(Sometimes to the point of wanton invisibility)

Happenstance

The psyche and its geography....

Psychogeography

Psychogeography as an approach to geography that emphasises playfulness and drift.

Psychogeography as jaunt.

Psychogeography as the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the environment, consciously or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

Psychogeography as box of tricks or a bucket of eels. Playful and inventive with its' exploration of the landscape.

Psychogeography as anything that takes us away from our pre-determined trajectories and jolts us into a new awareness of the world.

Let the **not-knowing** OR the **trying-to** be my motor.

Let absurdity of ill-fitting configuration be my titillator.

Let the taking from the 'real' and collaging into a coherent but fluid disorder be my meter.

Let serendipity be my map.

Italy - Sicily - France and Spain

All round the coast of Britain with Gladys and Eden

And back again.

GALLIVANT - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gilKsrTIRal>

To **gallivant**, is, according to a dictionary definition 'to wander about, seeking pleasure or diversion; to gad about with members of the opposite sex'

Perhaps we were mapping the atmospheric pressures that the process of travelling together produces.

Perhaps some satisfaction was gleaned through the process of making public the intimacies of autobiography and serendipity.

The letting-in of others.

A film that one critic demanded 'should have been drowned at birth like the runt of a litter...'

Perfect for the poster.

Atmosphere as the layer of hot air that surrounds the work

And **Collage** as pieces of 'other' things.

Collage as a demonstration of the many becoming the one, with the *one* never fully understanding what became of the many that informed it in the first place.

Collage as fragmented materials, often mis-aligned and even out of context.

Collage as an accentuated act of editing, picking through options and presenting a new configuration, albeit one that is never smooth and complete within the 'traditional' sense.

Collage as **key** to the post-modern predicament.

Collage as a contender to the present-day non-binary norm!

Perhaps another purpose of my work is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.

Which is why collaborating with **Eden** has brought us both into our own.

She reminds me all the time that Art exists in order that we might recover the sensation of life.

It exists in order that we might *feel* things.

It helps make the sound better heard and also helps make the pictures better seen.

Maybe all art aspires towards the condition of music?

Who you talk with alters the mind, the soul, the opinion.

Who you walk with alters the view, the vista, the vision.

None of us are **autodidacts**.

None of us learn alone.

We live in a manufactured and artificial state in which we yearn for the real, or at least a semblance of the real.

I want to pose something non-fictional against all the fabrication.

I want to indulge autobiographical frissons.

Those framed or filmed or captured moments.

And in their seeming rawness I want them to possess at least the possibility of breaking through the clutter.

What a beautiful picture.

The mimetic function in art hasn't so much declined as mutated.

The tools of metaphor have expanded and as the culture becomes more saturated by different media, artists can use larger and larger chunks of culture to communicate.

All of culture thus becomes fair game for appropriation.

But perhaps a lot of this is just repetition?

I love repetition.

Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but it does change something in the mind, which contemplates it.

The looping of rhythm

The rhythms of looping:

Philip Glass - Steve Reich and Michael Nyman

Gavin Bryars - John Tavener and La Monte Young

Terry Riley - Arvo Part and Kim Jong-Un

Just as letters in a language are metaphors for specific sounds, and words are metaphors for specific ideas, shards from all cultures now form a kind of language that we will never know how to speak.

It doesn't need to be spelt out.

It's quicker and easier to go to the existing material – film footage, vinyl records, radio recordings, old cassettes, newspapers

It's the artist's job to breathe new life into the selected material.

To generate new footage - to fill in the gaps

This is what we do.

This is what I do.

And like Eden in **Hoi Polloi** - I've become a *flesh radio*

There is nothing new in what I do.

Re-configurations through new re-gurgitations

ORIGINAL is nothing but a collection of previous cultural moments.

God is Dead.

No Supermans – No Übermensches

Not even Geniuses.

But Brian Eno suggests there might well be **Sceniuses**

David Bowie was a Scenius

Eno moots that **Scenius** is the intelligence of a fluxus or group of people.

He wants us to forget the idea of 'genius and think about the whole ecology of ideas that give rise to good new thoughts and good new work.

Individuals rising like a phoenix from the ash trays.

They suck in heavy from the dandruff of the shoulders of bygone GIANTS:

Leonardo

Giotto

Picasso

Caravaggio

Risotto

Oxo

Botticelli

Lorenzo de Medici

Leon Battista Alberti

Lamborghini

Maserati

Bucati

Linguini

Spaghetti

And with cognition comes THEORY OF MIND – the ability to think oneself into another's position – to empathise, sympathise or even despise.

To worry the work into existence.

The theory of mind.

And **Women** have more THEORY OF MIND than men - which is why men have always been so frightened and threatened by them - which is why they were burnt at the stake, dunked in rivers or nowadays just stoned.

Out of sight out of mind.

To think with any seriousness is to doubt.
Thought is indistinguishable from doubt.
To be alive is to be uncertain.
The essayist should be at war with herself.
The essayist should argue with the reader.
The essayist should enact doubt as a genre.
The keynote speaker should be a non-believer.

When we are not sure we are truly alive.

Apparently the world holds two classes of men - intelligent men without religion, and religious men without intelligence.

Eden reminds me every day of her inability – her inadequacy – her dependency – from dressing her - to toileting her – to trying to understand her.

We work together – dig into life together and now for an excerpt from something we made together:

THIS ILLUMINATED WORLD IS FULL OF STUPID MEN - <https://vimeo.com/90691946>

The final 'product' should always and necessarily remain unfinished or open-ended, no full stops, no new paragraphs only commas and semi-colons ...

In a world full of noise silence is like saffron

SO

I'm going to leave you with a consideration followed by an important list.

Postmodernism, the (my) school of 'thought' that proclaimed 'There are no truths, only interpretations' has largely played itself out into absurdity, but it has left behind a generation of academics in the humanities disabled by their distrust of the very idea of truth and their disrespect for evidence, settling for 'conversations' or 'dialogues' in which nobody is wrong and nothing can be confirmed, only asserted with whatever style you can muster

Professor Daniel Dennett

And the list:

NOISE – A HUMAN HISTORY by Professor David Hendy – with chapter headings such as: **echoes in the dark – the singing wilderness – the ritual soundscape and the roaring crowd**

Spoken word as atmosphere by Robert Ashley

Anna Homler (better known as BREADWOMAN)

Tim Hecker

Christain Marclay

Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y by Johan Grimonprez

David Toop's Ocean of Sound and his SONIC BOOM exhibition at the Hayward Gallery

Melvyn Bragg's Routes of English

Jem Finer's LONGPLAYER

Anything by **Iain Sinclair**

Pierre Bastien

Chris Watson

Anselm Kiefer

Joan of Arc

Joseph Beuys

Egyptian mummies

Shrunken heads

Stelarc

Jack-in-the Green

Samuel Beckett

Mummers plays

Emile Cioran

Theatre de Complicité

Margaret Atwood

John Clare

Kathy Acker

Morton Feldman

Meredith Monk

Andy Stott

And **Alison Streeter – The Queen of the channel** – 34 hours 40 minutes – 1990 swimming from England to France – France to England and then England back to France again

And of course **William the Conqueror**

ALSO as a footnote:

DEEPITY – a term somewhat redefined by Professor Daniel Dennett but originally coined by Miriam Weizenbaum.

Dennett uses “**deepity**” as a definition of a statement that at first seems profound, but is actually trivial on one level and meaningless on another.

Generally, a **deepity** has two (or more) meanings: one that is true but trivial, and another that sounds profound and would be important if true, but is actually false or meaningless.

Examples MIGHT BE

Que sera sera!

Beauty is only skin deep!

The power of intention can transform your life!

Or

THE UNWANTED SOUND OF EVERYTHING WE THINK WE WANT

*The talk culminated in a collaborative performance with Claudia Barton and inspired by Kötting’s most recent work about **Edith Swan Neck**:*

NB: Thereafter **EDITH digital pinhole timeline** runs and Claudia Barton and myself perform – A CUP – THE ARROW AND THE SONG – GONE WITH THE WIND IS MY LOVE – THE RIVER IS FLOWING – spreading the sounds throughout the auditorium as best we can....





Production photographs from *EDITH WALKS* (2016). © Andrew Kötting