

## *The Art That is Made Out of Time*

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This chapter examines how rhythm, temporality, sound and noise, work through a range of artistic practices: through **literature**, **painting**, **film** and **music**. Artists, it will be argued, have always employed a distinct array of media to create what might be referred to as ‘sound art’, when that term is expanded to include all work that is prefaced on the idea of a temporal flow and set against the figure of noise. To underpin this idea, different theories relating to the materiality of sound will be considered to show how they affect the ways in which ‘sound art’ as a term can be understood. Moving through two key interventions in this regard - from Christoph Cox (2011) and the response to his position given by Luc Dobereiner (2014) – two competing versions of materiality are explored. The aim is to initiate a dialogue between these positions and the related notions of movement and representation, or more precisely non-representation, as a means of engaging with a range of contemporary aesthetic concerns that have embraced and utilised temporality and sound as key features.

As a means of demonstrating how sound art can operate beyond the strictly sonic register, the chapter will include a summary and discussion relating to works in the recent Granular exhibition (<http://www.greenwichunigalleries.co.uk/granular-the-material-properties-of-noise/>). This will show how many of the concepts and arguments introduced during what follows can become manifest in a range of mediated forms that emerge ‘out of the spirit of music’ (Nietzsche), or more precisely perhaps, out of the energy of noise.

Christoph Cox sets out a cogent argument for a reinvigorated approach to sound art in his

article *Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism* (2011). In the article, he argues that sound art emerged as a confluence of interests between a number of both visual and sound artists trying to address spatio-temporal concerns through experimental practice. The sonic elements of this practice have though, in relation to their visual counterparts, he says, remained largely under theorised if not ignored altogether. To counter this and to build a new approach to art in general, Cox attempts to develop a material framework for the understanding of sound as a component of all art, in a way that eschews notions of representation and signification. He begins with a critique of postmodern thought in relation to the linguistic turn and its rejection of essentialism in favour of the text, and in doing so he enacts a renewed call to materialism. For Cox, the rejection of essentialism, though correct in his opinion, comes at a cost. It instates and supports specific dualisms that he wants to challenge - not least that between culture and nature, itself a subdivision of the real/virtual where the real physical world has two aspects, the natural and the rational (human).

He seeks to directly challenge the idea that: “Contemporary cultural theory thus manifests a problematic Kantian epistemology and ontology, a dualistic program that divides the world into two domains, a phenomenal domain of symbolic discourse that marks the limits of the knowable, and a noumenal domain of nature and materiality that excludes knowledge and intelligible discourse.” (2010: 147)

In carrying out this critique he also challenges the claims of Kim-Cohen (2009) that to adopt a materialist stance in practice constitutes a return to essentialism. For Kim-Cohen any form of analysis that seeks to escape from the fluidity of cultural discourse and the privileged ability of humans to execute it, constitutes a return to the dark ages in so far as hitherto

inanimate ‘unthinking’ objects are afforded a degree of agency. For him sound must reside in the realm of rational human activity. Whilst Cox understands that sound has to date resisted analysis in terms of representation and signification, he is reluctant to try and make it fit with established paradigms that demarcate between subject and object, meaning and affect, the cultural and the natural. His aim, and it is one which is shared here, is to collapse such dualisms; not in the dialectical manner of Hegel, wherein idealism always triumphs as a thesis that stands ready once more to be negated, but through a reading of Nietzsche and Deleuze, for whom materialism is instantiated not as a duality but as a singularity where subject and object emerge from the same material source. According to such readings, sound, sound art, and music should not be thought of as abstract just because they are not conducive to formal representation. For too long Cox argues, sound has been misunderstood in this respect.

“Music is thus conceived to be either sub-representational, a primitive eruption of desire and emotion (hence its suppression by moral conservatives from Plato to the Taliban), or super-representational, pure mathematics. Thus, Descartes (1961[1618]) could write of music that ‘its aim is to please and to arouse various emotions in us’ (p. 11) while Leibniz (1989[1714]) could claim that the beauty of music ‘consists only in the harmonies of numbers and in a calculation that we are not aware of, but which the soul nevertheless carries out’ (p. 212).” (2010: 149)

Instead, music and sound should be regarded as material and immanent. To establish this position Cox outlines the respective ideas of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as a way of underpinning his own monism. Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche distinguished music from other forms of art, but did so importantly in quite different ways. Schopenhauer regarded

music as having unique characteristics that echoed the mysterious virtual world he called the will, but his inherent Kantianism meant that he continued to demarcate this ultimately inaccessible metaphysical realm from that of the natural, physical world, the world of appearance and representation, that was mediated through reason and the intellect. For Nietzsche, though, both the Dionysian, as the untamed realm of the virtual will, where sound and music reside, and the Apollonian, as the formal realm of visual representation, were immanent to nature as well as to each other. Neither is an absolute or essential state. For him nature was a creative force, an artist in its own right, and where a human artist was present, it was a presence that was subordinate to the power of nature – as itself an expression *of* natural forces, either positive or negative. He described this situation in terms of ‘artistic energies’ which could emerge without the necessary mediation of the human being *as* artist. The key thing for Nietzsche was that the relationship between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, music and the visual and textual arts, was not one of opposition but one of spiritual modulation - the former always animating the latter through a dynamic process of self-organisation. “The priority of sound and music in Nietzsche’s philosophy, then, is not an aesthetic choice but an ontological commitment: the commitment to the primacy of becoming, time, and change. (2010: 157)

So, just as all possibilities emerge from the virtuality of the will, so all art emerges from sound and music. It is necessary then, according to such a formulation that the temporal characteristics of sound and music be applied to all art - as ‘the art that is made out of time’, where representation and signification are subordinate to temporal relativity, and traditional subject/object dualisms are collapsed. Some forms of artistic expression, as will be discussed shortly, emphatically recognise and embraces this. Where this is the case however, it need not serve by necessity to undermine representation altogether, as Cox tends to suggest, but to

stress the extent to which it forms through the patterning of non-representational energy as Nietzsche described. But if the spirit of music exists within all other forms of art, beyond representation and signification, then as Cox says, at certain moments music itself has been beset with its own forms of signification in terms of its representation through notation. The drive to bring sound and music into the signifiatory realm, where the eye is privileged over the ear, was part of a wider set of circumstances that served to instantiate political and economic paradigms (Attali: 1977) that were founded upon ocularcentric media practices and related technologies, as has been well documented by Marshall McLuhan (1988) and more recently by Friedrich Kittler (1999) and Wolfgang Ernst (2016). Yet it would also be through technology that sound would come to be liberated.

The invention of the phonograph specifically was cited by Friedrich Kittler as a means of capturing the temporal nature of sound in such a way as to render the static signification of formal notation, a relic of the visual age. “Audio recording registers the messy, asignifying noise of the world that, for Kittler, in a heterodox, materialist rendering of Lacan, corresponds to ‘the real’ - the perceptible plenitude of matter that obstinately resists the symbolic and imaginary orders. The real’ Kittler concludes has the status of phonography’ (p. 16).” (2010: 154). This ‘sonic real’ resists the tendency of representational media to compress information and instead unleashes “what Kittler (1999[1986]) calls ‘the waste or residue that neither the mirror of the imaginary nor the grid of the symbolic can catch: the physiological accidents and stochastic order of bodies.’ (p. 16).” (2010: 155). Or what I would term noise.

Despite these technological and philosophical moves, formal music for Cox, as a category distinct from the properly material practice of sound art *as* the real, continues to be incumbered by representation in the form of the score as visual signifier. In arguing this he

undermines the act of composition and with it the significance of the artist within the realm of sound art, as well as the status of music more generally. For some he goes too far in this regard.

Much of Cox's argument is challenged by Luc Dobereiner, who in his *How to Think Sound in Itself? Towards a Materialist Dialectic of Sound* (2014), repositions the composer and the use of notation within a dialectical reading of materialism rather than a monistic one. The form of materialist dialectics of sound that he proposes, "is one which gives primacy to compositional practice as a discursive-material process, i.e. as a form of thought as practice that continuously redraws the cut between sound and its description." (2014: 3)

Hence musical composition, as a struggle between sound and its description, manifests the material rather than being an abstraction. This idea is distinct from Cox's position where music "...is still too much tied to the idea of notation, which is based on arresting the fluidity of sound and elevating the representational concept over its actualization." (2014: 2)

By removing the signifying act of composition and replacing it with an anonymous form of sound art that no longer requires human agency, Cox attempts to liberate and substantiate the real and the material by collapsing the subject/object dualisms. Dobereiner however, reads it in a different way. For him the materialism of Cox (and by association the Deleuzian model on which much of his argument is based) is guilty of what he calls 'reenchantment'. Nature, he concludes is granted the status of spiritual divinity in a manner that in turn serves to completely undermine the materialist intentions of the argument. For Dobereiner, it is the continual interaction, and the impossibility of resolution, between the composer and the sound material, that gives music and sound art, or music as sound art, its expressive energy

and its material presence. Drawing on the ideas of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan, to support his claims, he describes a gap between the real and the symbolic, the insurmountable tension between which, is what constitutes materiality as a negative rather than a positive force. He says: “Every language or symbolic order contains gaps, exceptions, and impossibilities, for there is no total set of all signifiers, no complete symbolic order. Every attempt at a total symbolization remains incomplete. There is always a remainder, a residue, which reveals the inconsistency of the symbolic.” (2014: 4)

To further state the importance and inconsistency of this gap he draws on the ideas of Karen Barad and particularly her notion of the cut, as a separation between the observer and the observed. His use of Karen Barad to support the role of the composer in the constitution of sound as real, however, does not necessarily tally with his use of Žižek’s brand of dialectics. Žižek proposes a structural void, a gap that cannot be closed, and as such implies a kind of silence. It is a silence that is challenged by Cox’s Deleuzian notion of a dense plenum where there can be no void, and where the cut (as described by Barad) is the result of a form of friction as noise. It is through noise then, as it emerges as sound and music, and not silence, that the waste and the residue, that Dobereiner himself refers to, are generated. Rather than gaps that cannot be breached, Barad’s notion of the cut can be understood as the material formation of patterns amongst other patterns that intersect in a dynamic fashion where observer and observed, are generated from quanta that are relative to each other and to the circumstances of their formation, a formation that divides, and combines infinitely and at relative speeds to produce both consistent objects and inconsistent events. So rather than marking the divide between parallax dimensions, as is the case with Žižek, the cut is dynamic and unpredictable, but always possible and positive. It is not a convenient cut in two, but a process of multiple cutting and healing.

At its most basic level then, the argument seems to revolve around the role of the artist, and Dobereiner's attempt to protect the status of the composer against Cox's perceived attack. I would argue however that this is not actually what Cox is trying to do. He simply reconstitutes the ideal thinking subject within an immanent context that cannot be separated from material reality. To do so undermines static representational aesthetic practices and the political frameworks that they support. For Dobereiner, on the other hand, symbolic notation becomes a significant aspect *of* the real, rather than a simple representation. As such he delivers a rearticulation, via Žižek, of Hegelian logic and its attendant confirmation of the power of the intellect or the genius of the artist and with that comes all of the problems associated with dominant ideologies and canonical practices in the arts. Whilst it does offer a way of including music and artists within sound art I am not convinced by the need to re-enact dialectics to do so.

This temptation to persist with dualisms and with dialectics can and should be resisted. Support for such a strategy can be underpinned by referencing another set of ideas, from what at first may seem like an unlikely source. If our attention is turned away momentarily from the domain of continental philosophy, and towards a more analytical position, then further weight can be given to the argument being put forward here. The analytical Philosopher Wilfrid Sellars describes the coming together of the manifest and the scientific image (as representation and will). He says:

“The same considerations which led philosophers to deny the reality of perceptible things led them to a dualistic theory of man. For if the human body is a system of particles, the body cannot be the subject of thinking and feeling, unless thinking and feeling are capable of



interpretation as complex interactions of physical particles; unless, that is to say, the manifest framework of man as one being, a person capable of doing radically different kinds of things can be replaced without loss of descriptive and explanatory power by a postulational image in which he is a complex of physical particles, and all his activities a matter of the particles changing in state and relationship.” (Sellars, 2007: 397)

This is remarkably similar to the argument that Nietzsche developed in relation to the spiritual modulation between nature and culture. State of mind then becomes a state of matter, where the presence of an observing subject as material object can have a discernible impact on the laws of nature, as described by Barad (2007). Hence subject and object come into complex alignment and resonate as temporal events which means that, as Brian Kane points out drawing on the work of Jean Luc Nancy, meaning and sound, or sound and its signification become closely entwined rather than separated, as Dobereiner claims. Kane suggests:

“Meaning and sound share the ‘form, structure, or movement’ of resonance. In the perpetual movement of this meaning, Nancy avoids the adequation and static presentation that characterize signification, for there is no closure in the economy of resonance and renvoi. If the phenomenological subject got what it deserved - a static sonorous object - then *mutatis mutandis*, the same follows for the resonant subject. Nancy conceives the subject, not as a proper self (an I), but as a form, structure, and movement of an infinite referral (renvoi), since it refers to something (itself) that is nothing outside of the referral.” (2012: 445)

There is then, according to this position, no need to separate the symbolic and the real. The lack of closure ‘in the economy of resonance and renvoi’ prescribes a subject immersed in a chaotic universe, emerging and unfolding, harmonic and dissonant, and always relative to the

conditions of their existence. And importantly it means that the significance of composition, that Cox puts into doubt, can be accommodated through the figure of resonance, and as will be explained shortly, through noise, itself a series of infinite referrals where the subjective composer and listener are themselves patterned as relative noise-events formed from vibrating energy. In relation to this Nancy himself says:

“The subject of the listening or the subject who is listening (but also the one who is ‘subject to listening’ in the sense that one can be ‘subject to’ unease, an ailment, or a crisis) is not a phenomenological subject. This means that he is not a philosophical subject, and, finally, he is perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment - by which a voice is modulated in which the singular of a cry, a call, or a song vibrates by retreating from it (a ‘voice’: we have to understand what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of instrument, even from the wind in the branches: the rustling toward which we strain to lend an ear.)” (2007: 21-22)

Such resonating interactions constitute ‘the art that is made out of time’, and it is an art that comes in many forms. As a creative becoming and a (multi)-temporal process it is perfectly captured by Jaques Ranciere when he writes:

“Now this multi-temporality also means a permeability of the boundaries of art. Being a matter of art turns out to be a kind of metamorphic status. The works of the past may fall asleep and cease to be artworks, they may be awakened and take on a new life in various ways. They make thereby for a continuum of metamorphic forms.” (2010:133)

This temporal dimension, and ever changing status means ‘art’ is always contingent. It effectively possesses a fourth dimension, and though a continuum in terms of potentially changing states, it is not linear or predictable. Rather, it adopts relative spatial proximity with a panoply of other objects and states, including the ‘artist’ to form new artistic combinations and possibilities.

Ranciere uses this temporal unfolding to make the argument that claims relating to the ‘end of art’ can be overturned. In doing so he draws on the Balzac novel *La Peau de chagrin*. In the novel, Balzac’s hero Raphael enters a large curiosity shop where all manner of statues and paintings are situated next to old-fashioned furniture, gadgets and long-forgotten household goods. “There, Balzac writes, ‘this ocean of furnishings, inventions, works of art and relics made for him an endless poem’. The paraphernalia of the shop is also a medley of objects and ages, of artworks and accessories. Each of these objects is like a fossil, wearing on its body the history of an era or a civilization.” (2010:133)

It is these constantly shifting combinations, relations and potentialities that account for what art and poetry are for Ranciere. Referring again to Balzac, we are told: “...that the great poet of the new age is not a poet as we understand the term: it is not Byron but Cuvier, the naturalist who could reconstitute forests out of petrified traces and races of giants out of scattered bones.” (2010: 133). It is the person who is able to understand and work with time, now constituted as a medium, that generates creative output (art), and in a contemporary digital world that is in many ways a global manifestation of Balzac’s curiosity shop, there is much that we can learn from this. Dynamic combinations operate as natural orchestrations that emerge as endless becomings to constitute art in all its forms where the artist can be

human, nature, or machine, or multiple combinations thereof. The temporal nature of such becomings means that sound, and music, as Nietzsche believed, infect all other artforms with their spirit, or to use a better term, and one that avoids the accusation of enchantment, their energy.

The ‘permeability’ and temporal dimensionality that Ranciere describes can be evidenced in a range of creative practices, as will be discussed in due course. It is present in **literature**, **painting**, **film**, and in **music**, and it was foregrounded specifically in a recent exhibition and conference *Granular: The Material Properties of Noise* (2018), where a number of artists and academics were challenged to address the related notions of noise and granularity. What emerged was a series of works that might be described as having been ‘made out of time’. In the programme notes the curator of the show David Waterworth writes:

“It is through his observations of matter in motion that Lucretius seeks to prove the atomic composition of the universe; the constant process of change being taken as proof against a supranatural hand in the direction of destiny and evidence that we live in a universe that makes and remakes itself. Form emerges, then, from a momentary aggregate of the fragmentary, a collision of time and materiality.” (2018)

The exhibition featured work by the following artists who each, in their own way, addressed the materiality, permeability and temporality that Ranciere described:

Russell Duke examined the relative temporalities of analogue and digital realms through video image combined with a granular synthesis of noise to explore the temporality of objects as an unreliable and noisy clock gets handed down two generations only eventually to be

replaced by its digital descendent. The relative speeds of the clocks themselves and the time they measure, combine, like the objects described in Balzac's curiosity shop, to generate an accompanying soundtrack.

Jim Hobbs took still (silent) life, referencing Robert Mapplethorpe, and through his use of the optical soundtrack, reintroduced movement and noise, in a way that enacted a temporal disjunction between stillness and movement that required the audience to conceive of them simultaneously. This stillness seemed always to be a hesitation as the image flickered and the flowers in situ began to decay.

David Ryan returned to Lucretius and to Antonio Negri to develop a complex interaction of instrumental sound and voice, where subject and object fused and where even when signification was present in the form of the spoken word, it was separated to such a degree as to create a discontinuous granularity where meaning became transitory.

Rob Smith presented a set of fluid images that somehow paused. Using an underwater pin hole camera that let both light and water move through the device, he created images that although static permanent and discontinuous seemed to invoke a sense of movement and continuity as the work strained at the confines of the borders that contained it.

### **Literature and sound art**

In a manner that echoes the respective singularity and duality of Cox and Dobereiner, Ursula LeGuin, in her novel *The Dispossessed*, tackles the dialectical divide between incommensurable modes of thought, between Capitalism and Anarcho-Syndicalism,

and between temporal notions of sequence and simultaneity. The novel is presented in an alternating fashion between the two distinct locations of Annarres and Urras, between which oppositional forces are divided to enforce the ideological dualism. The central character Shevek, a theoretical physicist, attempts to breach the divide, both the spatial (between worlds) and the temporal. His solution though is not a dialectical resolution, but an acknowledgement of incommensurability as the simultaneous existence of different states that interact to create noise that is best approached through ‘the art that is made out of time’ (Ursula Le Guin, 1974: 131). The answer to his questions emerge out of his engagement with music as he seeks to solve the problem of instantaneous communication - the *ansible*.

As he proceeds he seeks to reconcile the seemingly distinct notions of sequence and simultaneity, where, like the Apollonian and the Dionysian, the former is energised by and born out of the latter.

A similar literary call to simultaneity comes again from Balzac, specifically in his *Gillette, The Unknown Masterpiece*, where the simultaneous presence of silence and noise, and of dereliction and growth, embrace temporality as a kind of glitched rhythm where time and timing constantly move in and out of sync. In her *Reading with Michel Serres: An Encounter with Time*, Maria L Assad, draws our attention to this engagement with sound, and more specifically with noise, as she sets out a description from Balzac where, as Michel Serres has pointed out, he offers us a double aspect of noise: noise as quarrel and noise as silence and blankness. This “...underscores the all and nothing, the undifferentiated and illogical ‘middle of possibles that Serres attempts to understand pre-phenomenologically. They are not

contradictory states but two expressions by which we may understand the multiple all and nothing, not all or nothing.” (1999: 38)

This ‘undifferentiated middle of possibles’ corresponds to the virtual, and as such is counterposed to Dobereiner’s (via Žižek) void. It describes a noisy and granulated material plenum that sustains all possibility. And as noise and sound it sustains the art that is made out of time in all its forms.

### **Painting and sound art**

Both Kandinsky and Paul Klee used music as a guide to, and an inspiration for, their artistic practice. The two artists worked closely together to utilize a formal theory of sound that could be adapted and applied to colour and form. Drawing on Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system, Kandinsky in particular, tried to elevate painting to a new level, propelled by dialectical contradictions. For him painting enacted a “thunderous collision of differing worlds; a clash whose outcome is the creation of a new world which we call a work of art. Technically, each piece comes to being just like the earth was made - from catastrophes which can produce, out of the cacophony of instruments, a symphony, which is called the music of the spheres.” (Duchting 2012: 20). For Kandinsky, the resolution was the static and newly ordered dimensions of the artwork.

But this resolution does not fit well with art when it is understood as a practice that is never resolved. In sound art dialectical contradictions, such that there are any, don’t always get resolved, as Dobereiner has previously pointed out. Instead they endure as temporal fissures,

part of a noisy environment where rhythm, movement and vibration form multiple patterns or symphonies without conventional recourse to cause and effect or temporal linearity.

This situation was recognised by Paul Klee who Unlike Kandinsky set out to develop a systematic pattern of organisation for the visual arts similar to that which he believed to have been present during music's golden period. Music for Klee had reached the highest limits of artistic expression with the work of Mozart, as a form of art that could fuse the earthly and the celestial. More contemporary music of the nineteenth century, he thought, had become too theoretical and too intellectual to serve as a viable model or source of inspiration. He sought such inspiration from the temporal phenomenon of rhythm and specifically noted the rhythmic ability of the polyphonic fugue to affect our experience of time. The fugue Klee noted, used a number of basic rules, a clear structure with variations on a theme, to fuse the temporal flow – to make simultaneous distinct temporal sequences (as Shevek had also attempted to do). Klee experimented with visual patterns along similar lines in order to inform his painting. He aspired to control his colour palette in much the same way as the baroque musician did the piano keyboard. To achieve this aim he developed a technique based on mathematical ratios of black and white to inform his watercolours of 1908-10 with each shade being attributed a tonal value, and spent many of his subsequent years trying to apply these values to colour.

Kandinsky's reliance on dialectics, and Klee's dismissal of modern experimental intellectual music however, ultimately meant that both in their own ways preserved the distinction between representation and the will, between the spiritual non-representational emotional purity of music in contradistinction to more specifically cerebral and intellectual activities. And so, a range of dualisms endure.



## Film and sound art

Such enduring dualisms are also evident in film practice. Ingmar Bergman has said:

“When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect, we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly on our feelings. Music works in the same fashion; I would say that there is no art form that has so much in common with film as music. Both affect our emotions directly, not via the intellect. And film is mainly rhythm; it is inhalation and exhalation in continuous sequence. Ever since childhood, music has been my great source of recreation and stimulation, and I often experience a film or play musically. (1960: 17).

This implies an unfolding and unstable visceral affect that is distinct from the critical distance of the intellect that resolves to extricate itself from noise, sound and music, paradoxically for the medium of film, through the privileging of the visual. Bergman’s approach maintains and supports a mind/body dualism, and in the case of film, elevates the visual to the status of the sonic. For him there is a quality in music, as there is in film, that inclines it towards emotion and intuition. So, film, as Michel Chion has also noted (*Film: A Sound Art*, 2009), becomes a ‘sound art’ and the distinction is not located between the sonic and the optic, but between emotion and intellect, as modes of being? As such sound art is understood as a superior kind of expression that evades the intellect and can emerge in forms other than sound itself.

But this presents us with a problem: what is intellect, and how does it relate to emotions?

And further, what happens if we collapse into noise all such distinctions? What happens if we

understand ‘inhalation and exhalation in continuous sequence’ as repetition that enacts both the intellect *and* emotion simultaneously? Whilst echoing Nietzsche’s Dionysian/Appollonian distinction, Bergman ultimately maintains the distinction between two separate realms as Schopenhauer had done, and claims in the name of art, the fleeting ability to access the will, noting that Bergman himself uses the term in a different sense.

The claim here is that rather than ‘putting aside intellect’, film, and all other forms of creative expression, when they operate as Bergman says, as a rhythm, actually bring the intellect to life rather than operating in parallel to it. It is not that film simply has something in common with music, but that it emerges into being as a sonic event.

### **Music and sound art**

If music infects other artforms with its energy, is it an artform in its own right? As has been discussed, Christoph Cox and Luc Dobereiner have taken up very different positions on this question. The position taken here is that in all its different forms, music as the ‘art that is made out of time’, can very much be a sound art, when the artist/composer is situated as a temporal event relative to the material conditions of sound as Nancy described in the earlier quote.

Even where it is afforded a degree of permanence through formal notation and an array of recording techniques, music is always dynamic and relative to the circumstances of its production, reproduction and reception. Like the objects in the curiosity shop, any stillness is only ever a pause, and it is always primed and ready to move in new and unexpected directions. As an example, we might take the song Tom’s Diner, a particular granular

formation that repeats and is reconstituted over time like the objects Ranciere refers to. The song was written in by Suzanne Vega in 1982.

“Tom’s Diner is over 30 years old, but it’s built out of parts that are timeless. There are the lyrics, which read like the sort of observational, creative nonfiction you see threaded through your Twitter timeline every day. (A man walks into a diner for coffee and gets caught up in watching the people around him. He reads a newspaper and gets lost in a thicket of fond memory before leaving to catch a train.) There’s the song’s close-miked, a cappella intimacy, with Suzanne Vega’s warm voice ripping at the edges like she’s singing right into the lid of a MacBook. There’s the melody, tossed wordless into the song’s outro like an afterthought and denied a resolution - a melody that’s since sliced its way through three decades of music, always stepping out of the diner with a cloudy head.”

<https://www.theverge.com/2015/10/18/9014373/toms-diner-history-suzanne-vega-timeline>

This slicing through the decades is significant. The song recurs at regular intervals tapping out a rhythm to the accompanying technological shifts that occur during the time period in question. In 1990 the producers DNA sampled the song added a machine beat, and it went on to be sampled many more times by artists such as 2Pac, Timbaland and more recently Georgio Moroder. In between, and more significantly perhaps, it became a testing ground for the music compression algorithm. The song was the first to be compressed into an mp3 format, and later the waste generated by that process was reanimated and recuperated as an art work in its own right by Ryan Maguire.

<http://ryanmaguiremusic.com/theghostinthemp3.html>).

As a simultaneous enactment of presence and absence as noise, in the way that Michel Serres has described it, the work evokes both the original track whilst simultaneously foregrounding that which had been deemed surplus to requirement. This reanimation of compressed waste, or of discarded material, brings to the fore once more the notion of a noisy and dense material plenum as distinct from any kind of silent void where compressed representational forms are separated from the object of their intention.

This dense plenum can be understood as a one substance cosmology that describes a world of bits, or grains, that form, deform, reform, as the material manifestation of both static objects and fluid events. It is a dynamic world where everything moves and where stillness is only ever hesitation. It is a world of repetition best understood as granular and noisy and expressed through the 'art that is made out of time' in all its forms. As such it draws back to the debate between Cox and Dobereiner. If Dobereiner is arguing for the preservation of the human agent as the privileged site of being, then Cox urges a posthuman reading based on anonymous interaction. The related notions of granularity and noise however, provide a way of surmounting this divide in so far as they accommodate both order and chaos at the same time, a situation where patterns, even when they appear regular and static, are always unique, complex, potentially unstable and dynamic. By positioning granular noise and its reproducibility at the centre of any understanding of sound art in this way, the art, the artist, and the multiple forms of signification, can all be understood as emerging out of incessant repetition and recycling in infinite combinations.

Art, in all its modes, works through noise as a material and temporal event. Such events emerge from interaction, from both resonant and dissonant frictions, *as* noise, and not as a dialectical feature of a silent void that can't be breached. If Cox is over zealous in his

dismissal of notation and composition, and in his rejection of music in favour of sound art, then Dobereiner is equally over zealous in his claims relating to reenchantment. In his attempt, justified I think, to reinstate composition as a creative practice and with it the status of music as art, he needlessly reinstates dialectics and negativity as a discontinuous manoeuvre. Instead I propose the simultaneity of the continuous unfolding sound event, and the static signifiatory mode of representation as hesitation, that combine at relative speeds to constitute noise as a singularity. It is out of this noise that ‘the art that is made out of time’ emerges.

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