

For Want of (not) Measuring



**"Sea, forest, rumour,  
noise, society, life,  
works and days, all  
common multiples; we  
can hardly say they are  
objects, yet require a  
new way of thinking.  
I'm trying to think the  
multiple as such, to let  
it waft along without  
arresting it through  
unity, to let it go as  
it is, at its own pace."**

(Michel Serres, *Genesis: 6*)

*For Want of (not) Measuring:* title, proposition, statement, installation, induces an algorithmic back and forth, a confusion, a choreography of positive and negative points, a geometry of listening, an alternating current of energy that interrogates stasis and certitude.

The work inhabits a scale of extremes, challenging the received wisdom of universal patterned states and the negative notion of the lack – humans withdrawn from being and destined only to possess what they measure – that positions us on a standardised grid of expectation. In its place a new mode of experience based on the interconnection of events that both attract and repel, forming an ever-evolving ecosystem – a sonic economy where order and chaos are modal and uncertain, never either/or.

We move through Smooth and Striated space, and these modes resonate and cohere following a trajectory from F.H Bradley through William James and Alfred North Whitehead where both absolute and relative qualities are evident as a kind of wave particle duality, continuous and discrete, immeasurable, and measured without contradiction. This modal interaction between simultaneous states of order and chaos, as compressed and uncompressed realities and perception of realities that are themselves interrelated, is a recurring feature. The smooth and the striated spaces are present as either nomadic or sedentary, dynamic, and free to roam along the atonal diagonal, or static and fixed according to point-based coordinates. Yet the two spaces are never contradictory. They exist in relation to each other in a more complex way than can be accounted for by simple opposition. The two spaces – measured and not measured – exist only in mixture. They do not communicate with each other on equal terms. It is not a straightforward process of communication with pre-agreed protocols. Organising or mapping noise and chaos as the smooth on a grid using the grammar of striation is not an option.

The murderous proclivity of the sign resides but does not reign here. That which is terminated by the measure and rearticulated according to a set of geometrical points, symbols, and signifiers as abrupt intervention, is also always part of a more complex mellifluous system. It is

therefore necessary to rethink the nature and the extent of harmony and dissonance in relation to the different kinds of geometry, or indeed the difference between a geometric and dynamic understanding of the universe and of spacetime. What is experienced here is essentially alive and harmonious. In relation to physics and metaphysics, we experience things that change and things that stay the same, points and measurement, a dynamic sense of place, division into specific fixed units with borders and thresholds, alongside amorphous topological regions. These differences are accommodated and modulated sonically to produce new arrangements and effects. The sound both conforms to geometry and behaves in a way that cannot be contained and easily bounded.

If the noise and the sound, are more appropriate modes of engagement with the non-relational absolute in terms of revealing the process of causal efficacy (as the self is abandoned to the forces of nature without formal measure), then the visual dominates in the mode of presentational immediacy (where forms and their measured qualities arise from differentiation and relative distinction). In combination as modes of experiencing they begin to account for a universe in which percipients are distinct and active, but also exist as nodes within what might be



described as a super-relational ground or grid. There is no simple choice to be made here between the audible and the visual. Rather, aspects of each inform, as modes of experiencing, different but always related convolutions.

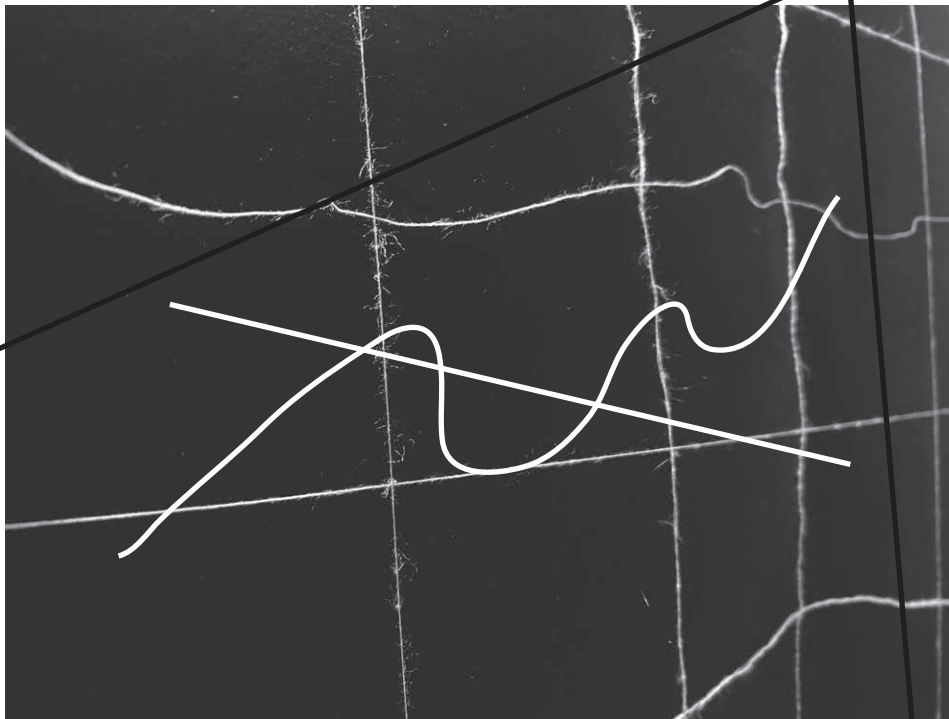
This fusion of modal experience might better be understood then as a non-geometry, an unfiltered process, as perception in the mode of causal efficacy that only subsequently resolves towards geometry in the mode of presentational immediacy and onwards through its progression toward the symbolic, where mathematics, art and culture entwine (as they do in music). If so, we enter a Whiteheadian universe of point-free geometry. Dealing predominantly with regions rather than points, it concerns itself with what is known as mereology (the relation between parts and the whole), and later expands its scope to a form of mereotopology (the invariant relationship between parts within a whole whose shape and size can change continually). These parts, wholes, units, multiples, locations are all factors that are relative to one another within dynamic systems that include social, political, economic, technical, and aesthetic formations.

This is a complex matter: multiples and singular units, multiplicity as a singular and singularity as multiplicity. Monism as a singular set of relations or a more totalizing assertion that the universe is truly a singular entity within which discrete entities are either mere appearances or facets of a greater whole, understood in part through a mode of metaphysics that is ultimately unable to reflect on itself.

Describing the multiple Michel Serres writes: "I have no idea, or am only dimly aware, where its individual sites may be, I've no notion of its points, very little idea of its bearings. I have only the feeblest conception of its internal interactions, the lengthiness and entanglement of its connections and relations, only the vaguest idea of its environment. It invades the space or it fades out, takes a place, either gives it up or creates it, by its essentially unpredictable movement." (Genesis 5) It is for want of (not) measuring.

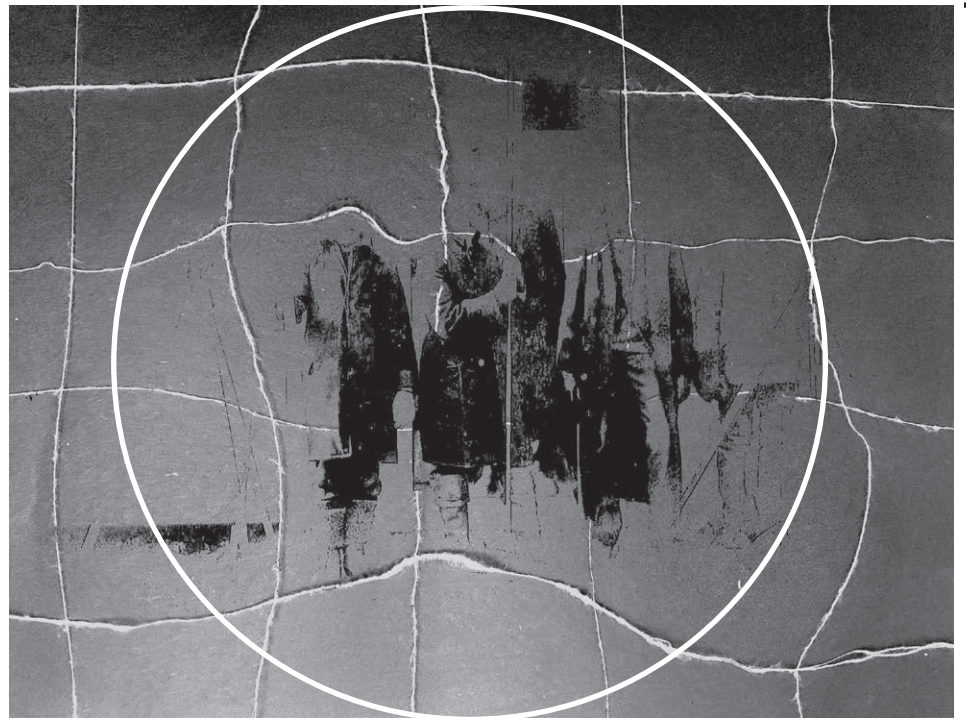
Emergent and dynamic processes, the connection within and between things, their capture, measurement as representations, either fixed or in motion in spatiotemporal terms is what is at stake here. Monism, dualism, pluralism, all seek to establish the ground or grounds upon which reality subsists. Whether it is a real that exists ultimately as a singular absolute as Bradley asserted, or as space inhabited by a plurality of ultimately withdrawn and unknowable objects (relational at one level but entirely independent at another), as the speculative realists propose, is never and probably can never, be resolved. What can be resolved however, is the necessity to bring to the fore some of the characteristics of sonority that compel us to reposition ourselves in a universe of vectors where movement and transitoriness prevail, and where even fixed points in space and 'permanent' structures are subject to the relative vagaries of time. The visual itself, as well as serving to make certain other things invisible, is always prone to an inner vibration, rendered for the most part inaudible but never fully petrified.

The cultural dominance of the visual (as a mode of ordering and measuring) always involves a kind of silencing as part of what Jaques Ranciere has called 'the distribution of the sensible'. When something comes into view something else fades out – seeing is selective, both physiologically and sensorially. Noise, sound and (sometimes) music on the



other hand can serve as reminders of the fact that elements not in plain sight are still present, acting (potentially) as an irritant, a gnawing, throbbing, pulsating presence that does not necessarily seek to undermine the visual (and its ordering) but if understood properly, infects it with its temporal energy, prompting us to look away, look further and deeper, using eyes like ears, alert and inquisitive. Thinking about sound, thinking through sound, and sounding thought, invokes all the senses: merging, clashing, silencing, ordering, losing the self in a cacophony of Dionysian abandon and emerging into a mode of Apollonian clarity where separation prevails.

In *For Want of (not) Measuring* spatiotemporal relativity and the interplay of permanence and transitoriness, provoke a response to ocularcentrism and a recognition of the significance of sound, or more specifically noise (as a



means of engaging with the fleeting and only relatively stable). The work brings forth technical and aesthetic dimensions where in the final assessment, one is compelled to engage with it through a sonic economy of the senses.

<sup>1</sup>. Deleuze & Guattari

<sup>2</sup>. See *Geometrical constructivism and modal relationalism: Further aspects of the dynamical/geometrical debate*. James Read (2020)

<sup>3</sup>. See *Mathematical Features of Whitehead's Point-free Geometry* From the book *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought*, Giangiacomo Gerla and Annamaria Miranda

<sup>4</sup>. But how are we supposed to measure how wise or prudent we are in choosing the instruments of measurement and interpreting the findings? Modern literature is full of references to the dehumanizing side of measurement, as exemplified by the character Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens's "Hard Times," a dry rational character who is "ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to," yet loses track of his own life.

<sup>5</sup>. F. Nietzsche *The Birth of Tragedy*

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