Performing the Politics of Sound

The Ritual
Sound art performance

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Description of the work
The work is part of the author’s research on the transformation of energies into the performative space and attempts to unlock the notion of effort in sound art in relation to the impact that the human body may cause to the environment around the performance space. Moreover, it addresses the question about the relation of sound to the social space where the human being is the central agent.

The Ritual is taking place inside a club. The Dj and the crowd are wrapped in the beat and everyone acts intuitively until the physical actions of the performer in front of the DJ interrupt everything. The rest of the Ritual continues on a small platform where the performer amplifies different sounds from inside of his body with the help of special contact microphones and sensors. The gestural action of the body borrows movements used in rituals from different religions around the world. The performance is an attempt to create an Auditory Mirror Image of the social norm by focusing on the representation of violence through the ritualistic and sacrificial act.

Auditory Mirror Image
Sound signification and sacrifice

The club as the performance space regulates the symbolic commodification of sound in modern society which also creates and organises political order in music. By reproducing ritualistic gestural signifiers the performer crosses the border of the symbolic and reaches a semiotic space where the human body articulates forces of ruptures.
For Jacques Attali\(^1\) music has always signified, even prior to the cultural/economic codification which eventuates with music's entry into the market economy and subsequent commodification which destroys its ritualistic use value, abstracting it into exchange value. Before exchange, in ancient societies, music operates according to a code that Attali calls sacrificial. Music, given meaning by the codes of the sacred, forms, domesticates and ritualizes noise. Music is not innocent but, through ritual, structures power relations, enforcing and legitimizing the dominant code. The work under discussion here reverses Lacan’s theory *Mirror Stage* which says that we resolve ourselves as an I and function as a subject in response to a reflected image of ourselves. Claude Bailble argues that the sounds occurring through the body to body contact of the fetus and mother (heartbeat, breathing, voice etc) establish the subject's consciousness of its other. The child learns to be in response to sonorous rather than visual cues. The *Ritual* engages Baible’s argument and transforms interactively the visual ritualistic gesture into a sonorous meaningful code. Thus, the visual kinetic symbolisms recreate an *auditory mirror image* of the political order of music inside the clubbing culture.

**Conclusions**

The *sonic body* in contemporary sound art and performance gives ear to the significance of sound in modern society and the cultural and historical contexts in which it resonates most strongly. The immaterial-material nature of sound becomes the substance that is meant as objectivity and tri-dimensionality, of the presence and the vision, of the hearing. The sonic event is a phenomenon of contact and displays, through an array of autonomic responses, a whole spectrum of affective powers. Sound has a seductive power to caress the skin, to immerse, to soothe, beckon, and heal, to modulate brain waves and massage the release of certain hormones within the human body. At the same time discussion of the physiological affects of sonic weaponry has usually centered on intensity (acoustic power), the ultrasonic or the infrasonic. Need we be reminded that noise, like anything else that touches you, can be a source of both pleasure and pain and that beyond a certain limit, it becomes an immaterial sonic artistic tool. A powerful tool that goes beyond basic human instincts. Spinoza’s term *appetite* refers to the body’s behaviour as future facing and always in conjunction with the body’s relation to a shifting ecology, its open-ended relationality. A body’s effort/tendency to persist in its power to affect

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and be affected, its potential. Whereas instinct usually denotes a closed, preprogrammed system with no room for change. For Brian Massumi (Onopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception), the sonic activation of the affective sensorium produces a basic autonomic response. The immediacy of visceral perception is so radical that it can said without exaggeration to precede the exteroceptive sense perception. It anticipates the translation of the sight or sound or touch perception into something recognisably associated with an identifiable object. In terms of performance, this example of visceral perception initiated by the sonic vibrations, marks the beginning of the body’s pre-acceleration. In the sense identified by William James in his Psychology of Fear, autonomically the body makes the decision to act, with the emotion and conscious decision to act being merely a retrospective description of the feeling of the body’s decision. That is a major, and yet undiscovered, challenge and a threshold shift in the objectivity of sound in performing arts. Finally, it becomes apparent that sound can be used as a “generative distribution of sensations that identify, channel, and amplify performance power. Sonic power has been understood in relation to concepts such as silence and noise, with both offering, in different and sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary ways, vehicles for thinking the aesthetic, cultural, or micropolitical potential of the audiosocial.”

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