

Three Songs

Finding resonance in the language of other disciplines, the title of this paper is *Three Songs*.
Three Songs: a poem, a diagram and a case study in exuberance.

...

Looking at the change of things, I am interested in the ways things resist translation; in interlocution and in the processes of abstraction and crossing into language, how the world insinuates itself as a kind of notation of subjective modalities. For this paper, I have adopted a Sebaldian weave, using reference material and my own leanings to research and write a space of connection and coincidence that somehow elucidates my understanding of making.¹ It is a critical, reflective and reconstructive approach that proposes a non-hierarchical, contingent structure. I include images in the body of the text and make extensive use of discursive footnotes.²

Three Songs traces an investigation that could have steered itself differently. Listening is not considered solely as medium, but as a structural metaphor for a process of investigation in which individual subjectivity is acknowledged within a self-reflective working process and considered in relation to an ethics of being that is always an active entanglement with time.

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'Three Songs' is the title of a book of poems by Edith Sitwell, published in 1932.³ Sitwell was a British poet and critic who collaborated with composers and performers to 'set' her work to music. In *Façade*, an experimental theatrical production made in 1922, Sitwell performed concealed from the audience behind a painted curtain and recited words through a hole in the mouth of a painted face. She performed with the aid of a large papier maché megaphone called a sengerphone, which 'allowed poetry to be recited impersonally with great clarity and resonance.'⁴

In Sitwell's performance of *Façade*, the body is implied, the voice acousmatic. 'Codes of expression are detached from one another.'⁵ This term, unearthed by Pierre Schaeffer in the 1950's describes the voice whose source, an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, cannot be seen.⁶



Edith Sitwell with Neil Porter at the New Chenil Galleries, Pacific and Atlantic Photos Ltd, April, 1926.
Skipwith, Joanna & Bent, Katie, (eds.), *The Sitwells*, National Portrait Gallery, London, 1995, p.77.

¹ I make process-related work, moving from one project to another with a great deal of uncertainty. This movement allows for reflection on agency. My work is carried by an interest in 'slow ontology' (Bachelard, 1994), in subjectivity as multiplicity and the complex relation between diagram and experience.

² 'Reading is a waste of time when the reader likes to pause before the images.' Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, 1994, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

³ Sitwell, Edith, *Three Songs: Poems by Edith Sitwell*, London, Oxford University Press, 1932.

⁴ Skipwith, Joanna & Bent, Katie, (eds.), *The Sitwells*, National Portrait Gallery, London, 1995, p. 5) (Exhibitor catalogue, National Portrait Gallery, London, Oct. 14, 1994-Jan. 22, 1995.)

I came across Sitwell in the library catalogue while researching the categories of 'sound art' and 'music'; keywords chosen in an effort to extract a topic from my practice, somewhere in the play between strategy and intuition. 'Sound art' has a long lineage that can be traced back to the Futurist manifesto⁴ and through to subsequent movements and genres, such as Fluxus, Conceptual art and performance art, and contemporary artist's use of new technologies.

⁵ Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), London: Fontana Press, 1977. p70.

⁶ Chion, Michel, *The Voice in Cinema*, Claudia Gorbman, (ed. & trans.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, note 5, p.19.

The French word *acousmate* designates invisible sounds. Apollinaire wrote a poem in 1913 entitled 'acousmate' about a voice that resonates in the air. In 1957, Diderot and d'Alembert cite the Acousmatics as Pythagoras' uninitiated disciples who followed his teachings listening from behind a curtain for five years, at the end of which they could look at him and be fully initiated.

Writing on the voice in cinema, Michel Chion describes the 'complete acousmètre' or 'not-yet-seen voice' as a kind of epiphany; a 'talking and acting shadow'. Comparing the properties and limits of aural and visual perception, Chion describes the voice as a kind of 'visualized listening'; resonant and unclear. While we can hear all around us, 'the source of the voice can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior.'⁷

Speaking about the voice means speaking about the mutual entangled relationships in the 'very precise space of the encounter between a language and a voice'. 'The 'grain' is in the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.'⁸ 'With the voice the problem appears to be how to establish a distance... to draw the dividing line between the interior and the external world, where does the voice come from? Where do we hear it? How do we tell the external voice from the voice in the head?'⁹

There is no meta-position. 'However far its source, sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself.'¹⁰ Listening refocuses questions around subjectivity and objectivity, materiality and time. Tracing the history of an object, or encounter, 'this lack of form creates a perplexing relationship between properties of states; inside and outside, material and immaterial, the way thoughts become sound through speech and external sounds become sensory impressions that only become thoughts as they pass through the ears and outer membrane into awareness.'¹¹

Virginia Woolf, writing on the problem of a vanished auditory past; "Instead of remembering there a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen in to the past. I shall turn up August 1890. I feel that strong emotion must leave it trace..."¹²



Susan Philipsz, *Wild is the Wind*, Malmo Konsthall, San Sebastian, Sweden, 2002

Contemporary Scottish artist Susan Philipsz uses melodies as sculptural fragments to transform public places and galleries into temporary sites for intimate listening. Philipsz re-sings catalogues of popular music including traditional ballads, folk classics, and ambient music and presents her layered song via radio as part of the architecture of a space. Personal stories and memories weave into new refrains and suggest the possibility of a shared past. Hearing allows us access to the world that surrounds us and flows through us in all its uncertainty.

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Lost, not yet lost.

Ears enclosed by headphones, the body relinquishes the feedback function of its own sound.¹³

If the wanting to know where we are, to locate, is a problem of vantage, what does it mean to be somewhere? Helen Cixous describes drawing and writing as expeditions, wanderings, 'adventures, which depart to seek in the dark, which do not find, do not find, and as a result of not finding and not understanding, (draw) help the secret beneath their steps to shoot forth.'¹⁴ In this language-crossed world of mutual relations, there may be no possibility of getting lost.

I am interested in the middle as an extensive and productive non-hierarchical vantage and stage. A kind of pre-poetics in the space between forms and of intervals between instants, and in the coincidence of my usual narrative with a new situation. That space-time when the musicians lose track and pause; or when we hear the accent and timbre of a voice over its message, and slip between, into the simultaneous space of you and me.

Lyn Hejinian writes of a pre-poetics running through the formulation of a poetics that involves confusion, ambivalence and doubt. 'Pathways of thinking create patterns of coherence. It is at points of linkage – in contexts of

⁷ Chion, Michel, *Film, A Sound Art*, Gorbman, Claudia, (trans.), Columbia University Press, New York, 2009.

⁸ Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp.181-182.

⁹ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, p.80.

¹⁰ Voegelin, Salomé, *Listening to Noise and Silence, Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, New York & London, 2010, p.xii.

¹¹ Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance; The Mediumship of the Listener*, Continuum, New York, 2010, p.36.

¹² Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance; The Mediumship of the Listener*, Continuum, New York, 2010, p.34.

¹³ Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance; The Mediumship of the Listener*, Continuum, New York, 2010, p.44.

¹⁴ Cixous, Helene, 'Without no End no State of Drawingness no, rather: The Executioner's Taking Off', MacGillivray, Catherine .A.F., trans., *New Literary History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Culture and Everyday Life, Winter, 1993.

encounter that one discovers the reality of being in time, taking one's chance, becoming another, all with the implicit understanding that this is happening.' ¹⁵ How to create a space for investigation, re-telling and contemplation - for the interruption of habitual attitudes; questioning of assumptions; and social constitution of self?

...

In the faded forest there is a birdcall
Which is meaningless in this faded forest
The roundness of the birdcall rests
In the interim of its making
Like a wide sky on the faded forest
Pliantly, everything makes room in the cry
The whole land seems to lie and rest within
The great winds seem to nestle up inside
And the moment, which wants to go on
Has, pale and silent, as if it knew things
For which anyone has to die
Risen out of it. ¹⁶

This poem was written in German by Rainer Maria Rilke in around 1903. What interests and moves me is the materiality of the sound, its shape; the sky like a bowl resting on the earth's shoulders, the volume of the echo and silence at the fading of the call, the cry and how it is somehow outside of language, yet heard and understood. Sharing time and space with the call, I find resonance and disruption; communion and solitude; the phenomenological doubt of the listener about the heard and myself hearing it; the risk of being-no-thing, and the emptiness of awareness itself.

Phenomenologist-poet-theorist, Jean Luc Nancy writes that 'sound has no hidden face'; that 'to be listening is to be at the same time inside and outside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other.'¹⁷ He writes of a kind of pure presence or immersion in which 'meaning and sound share the space of a referral, in which at the same time they refer to each other, and that, in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a self, a subject.'¹⁸

For Nancy, listening is an act that brings us closer to what we are not. A shifting register, 'a self is made of a relationship to self, or of a presence to self, which is nothing other than the mutual referral'.¹⁹ The paradigm of listening allows Nancy to construct a looping space of subjectivity in which it is possible to be both outside, observing and also working within. It is a space that operates outside of the traditional realms of epistemology and empiricism. Here sound is a catalyst for the formation of mutual relationships, and knowledge equals possibility.

What is it that sound can do that the visual can't?

Rather than enable a detached viewing position, listening proposes a methodology intrinsically linked to its subject. It 'connects the experience of sound with possible worlds not linked to the logic and rational of a visual reality.'²⁰ Listening is a basic relational experience. Sound allows a notion of time as variable and continuous.

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For Heidegger, the voice is an intimate beyond, a pure call, mute, and aponic. It is alterity, calling us out of the closure of self-reflective monologue. A 'call before language' and to which language responds as an echo, 'the voice is an opening towards Being, and Being is nothing but the opening 'manifested' by the voice.'²¹

How are we to listen to such a voice? To sounds that are not sounds?

If 'the voice is an opening towards meaning', it is also 'what does not contribute to making sense – the material element recalcitrant to meaning.'²² It is this recalcitrant materiality and ambiguous legibility that interests me. 'Mmmmmmm resounds previous to the voice, inside the throat... just a column of air pushed from the chest in a sonorous cavity, the cave of the mouth that does not speak. Not murmuring, the condition of all words and all ... I hum and growl, song, *joissance*, and *souffrance*... the substantial union of body and soul, body and ammmmmmm.'²³ Touch and sound lie together; sound describing space and articulating time.

¹⁵ Hejinian, Lyn, *The Language of Enquiry: a Structure of Creativity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2000.

¹⁶ Rilke, Rainer Maria, "Apprehension", in Edward Snow, (trans.), *The Book of Images: Revised Bilingual Edition*, North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1991, revised edition 1994, p.73

¹⁷ Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, Charlotte Mandell, (trans.), Fordham University Press, New York, 2007, pp.13-14.

¹⁸ Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, Charlotte Mandell, (trans.), Fordham University Press, New York, 2007, p.9.

¹⁹ Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, Charlotte Mandell, (trans.), Fordham University Press, New York, 2007, p.9.

²⁰ Voegelin, Salomé, *Listening to Noise and Silence, Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, New York & London, 2010, p.xiii.

²¹ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, pp.95-96.

²² Mladen Dolar, writing on the Lacanian voice in *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, pp.14-15.

²³ Jean Luc Nancy, "Interlude, Mute Music", in *Listening*, Charlotte Mandell, (trans.), Fordham University Press, New York, 2007, pp.23-25.

What of the non-voice and language as the whoop and whoosh of breath, variously sewn together with a range of pitch and rhythm to which we assign meaning. What if the voices we hear are those of spirits, ancestors, world? In Ancient Greece oracular listening was a form of divination using the sound of sneezing, bird song, the murmuring of oak trees in the wind, the cracking of laurel wood in the fire, singing in the ear.²⁴

'Singing in the saying', 'songing' and 'eariness', are confabulations made of the momentum and rhythm of particular sounds. As one sound encounters another, meaning lapses and loops momentarily to somewhere outside of a shared and coherent language system. This incoherent voice is contingent, contaminated and particular; resonant with a kind of emergent nonsense that carries with it another sense. Rhythm and repetition, meanings made and meanings found; this kind of transmission of information and feeling is often indirect, unintended and understood as a turning or suture.

The sound itself. Not the source. What of the voices we hear inside our heads, self and world, simultaneous and threaded?

Ways of gaining and transmitting knowledge are often hidden to us. Confronting shades and increments of existence, there are parts of the 'self' that are 'other'; influences that remain hidden or not heard. We are the residues of knowledge, the noise, that do not reconcile with the verifiable. Michel Serres writes that 'noise is a joker necessary to the system. It can take on any value and is unpredictable so that the system is never stable. It is non-knowledge. Systems work because they do not work.'²⁵ Bruno Latour, looking at how ontologies are articulated in events or practices, says that transcription is the translation of meaning and being from one mode of existence to another and in this 'transcription dance' one thing can never be fully translated into another place or time. There is always, in this in-between of formatting and unformatted things, loss, outfall, plasma, noise.²⁶



Angela Detanico and Rafael Lain, *Two Voices*, 2012, reading/performance, [still from video performance documentation] <https://vimeo.com/52608911>

Angela Detanico and Rafael Lain perform *Two Voices*. Two people speaking at the same time, they each pause to stop and select another book, open a page seemingly at random and recommence reading, often in a different language. Sun and moon, in orbit, in conversation, tracked and tracking, yet speaking across a vast darkness. Sound like reflected lunar light reaches us across a vast distance, immediately, simultaneously here and there, he and she. Through this confusion of registers, the meaning-producing voice is over produced and layered until mostly incomprehensible except as accent and pause, lilt and emphasis, sing-song, cadence, and chance intersections, listening empty headed recitation.

Here the voice, linked to the book as vocal substance written, exteriorises itself, rather than what it carries.

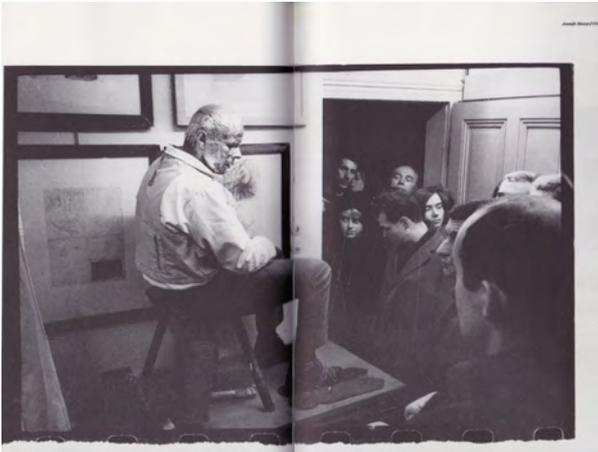
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What of the 'hearing space of the image', there somewhere before the eye can see...the imageless place of eclipse? What of silence? How to picture (or listen to) the shape of a thought, thinking, and how one thought leans into another and generates certain kinds of other thoughts?

²⁴ Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance; The Mediumship of the Listener*, Continuum, New York, 2010, p.52.

²⁵ Serres, Michel, *The Parasite*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982, p.66.

²⁶ Latour, Bruno, Harman, Graham & Erdélyi, *The Prince and the Wolf, Latour and Harman at the LSE*, Zero Books, John Hunt, United Kingdom, 2011.



Joseph Beuys, 'Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare', 1965, performance/action documentation, silver gelatin photograph by Ute Klophaus, printed in 1967, reproduced in *dasSuperpaper*, March 2013.

At the opening of Beuys' first solo exhibition of drawings at the galerie Alfred Schmela in Düsseldorf. 1965, *How To Explain Pictures To A Dead Hare*, was a wordless action/performance. Beuys wandered throughout the gallery mumbling to the hare, taking its paw to gesture to his pictures on the walls. His voice was present in a kind of silent accord, a 'literal soundless acquiescence between the artist and the animal'.²⁷ The audience was left to dwell in an unfamiliar and loaded silence, perhaps eavesdropping. (Are we not always artists, eavesdropping on the world?) The idea of communing with a dead animal conveys a sense of the possibilities that arise when listening and not-speaking is placed at the conceptual center of communication.

Silence not as absence of sound but as beginning of listening as communication, provides the condition to practice a signifying language that takes account of its sonic base: embraces the body of the listener in its solitude, inviting him to listen to himself amid the soundscape that he inhabits.²⁸ Like shifting velocities by remaining still, Beuys' silence introduced a temporality that exceeded and intensified the formal bounds of presence.

Klophaus' photographs of Beuys' performative actions are simultaneously direct and oblique records. Something about the quality of image highlights the graininess that is also a feature of memory and how some aspects of an event can prevail while other, even more concrete aspects, recede. The freedom of memory to roam and to return and to rearrange. Residues. And what is lost in the telling, and re-telling.

'The Presentation Sisters were not what I was expecting. I had neither met them nor been inside the convent building before I committed myself to the film. I was working blind.'²⁹



Tacita Dean, *Presentation Sisters* [still], 2005, 16mm colour anamorphic, optical sound, 60 minutes, edition of 4, http://www.frithstreetgallery.com/works/view/presentation_sisters

'Working blind' tells something about the curatorial strategy and constellation-like structure of the way Tacita Dean works. Using film, drawing, photography, sound, other people, other work and writing on her own work she calls 'asides', involves a process that interweaves directed research and personal narrative and coincidence. This creates a space in which to examine the conditions for, and of, each particular work. In it, the 'arbitrary', the unconnected, become a kind of trope. A space is created in which decisions are guided by chance, intuition, constellations of occurrences and the questions in the work.

For *Presentation Sisters*, Dean stayed with the five remaining women in a monastery in Cork, Ireland a while on a residency and her observational film records their continued presence. She, the vagabond interpolator, records their daily rituals, washing, preparing meals, and devotional prayer. This showing of the uneventful, the habitual, the

²⁷ Trummer, Thomas, (ed.), *Voice and Void*, Ridgefield, Connecticut, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2007, p.7.

²⁸ Voegelin, Salomé, *Listening to Noise and Silence, Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, New York & London, 2010, p.xv.

²⁹ Dean Tacita, *Selected Writings 1992-2011, Tacita Dean: Seven Books Grey*, Vol. 6, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, MUMOK, Ausstellung The Line of Fate, 2011, Vienna. Conference publication.

way things happen, the background noise, asks me questions and complicates the relationship between event and document.³⁰

Georges Perec asks how to give 'common things... a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are...', and suggests that, 'what's needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we've been pillaging from others.' The 'infra-ordinary' becomes a tool, for the questioning of 'that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us.'³¹

'Sounding out' is an expression used in Cork in Southern Ireland. The phrase gives a sense of outer movement counterbalanced by cautious ingress, which is to listen and investigate with openness, not knowing quite where the listening will take you.³² *The Presentation Sisters* is a quiet, gentle observational film, with long takes and steady slow camera. Without commentary, the film is a meditation on time; the time of watching, and the time in which things come to pass. In a baroque folding, light passing through glass, brilliant and blinding, bleeds colour along with all material substance away and returns us to world. Looking at light show us things... Listening to ourselves 'sounding out'; this is the paradox of silence listening to silence, silence realized within the interstices of fullness that is another level of silence.

...

Art as work and art as prayer. Prayer as injunction to listen.

When voice and language 'fail', something in between makes a space where no-thing is not. Like listening when we temporarily leave aside our assumptions and understandings in order to be with the other, to be in dialogue, and to make a space for it inside us where we are not.

Lipari identifies a state called 'listening being' which 'involves an encounter that disrupts our everyday understandings and habits of thought. But to encounter this alterity is not to freeze us into some kind of subject/object relation. Rather, it is to let the 'gathered' subject and object lie before us, as reference points, relative to a point of view, a position from which we take up our engagements with the world.'³³ Listening as a kind of vantage or dwelling place. 'When listening begins not from a speaking, but from the emptiness of awareness itself,'³⁴ 'listening being makes possible the impossibilities of freedom.'³⁵

This reminds me of Agnes Martin's writings and the Buddhist idea of *upekka*; 'thinking-not-thinking'. In mindfulness meditation, being with things as they are is a kind of becoming listening without the interference of judgement, that resists our desire for the familiar and opens towards the nowhere of here and now. New regimes of attention are initiated. Noticing change, a whole new catalogue of things and events become apparent.³⁶

....

How to hold things, like metaphysics?

– or a case study in exuberance³⁷ (and non-binary thinking)

Hllma af Klint painted 'secret' pictures, guided by a spiritual dimension. She determined her work was not to be seen until twenty years after her death. 'Discovered' by the art world in 1986, (part of the exhibition 'The Spiritual in Art' at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) her work is the currently focus of a major exhibition at the Moderna

³⁰ Immanuel Kant, on transcendental or negative idealism, wrote that 'things in themselves' stripped of any input from our subjective constitution, are entirely unknowable since we cannot get outside the subjective conditions of the possibility of our experience. Transcendental realism objects of experience and hence of knowledge, simply are things in themselves, their nature and existence independent of our sensibility. Allison, H.E., *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, Yale University Press, London, 1983.

³¹ 'How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are... What's needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we've been pillaging from others. Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic... What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Why? Where? When? Why?'

Perec, Georges, 'L'Infra-Ordinaire / The Infra-Ordinary', 1974. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, John Sturrock, (ed, trans.), London: Penguin, 1997. Extract first published 1937.

³² Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance; The Mediumship of the Listener*, Continuum, New York, 2010, p.63.

³³ Lipari, Lisbeth, 'Listening, Thinking, Being', *Communication Theory*, August, 2010, Vol. 20 Issue 3, p.350.

³⁴ Lipari, Lisbeth, 'Listening, Thinking, Being', *Communication Theory*, August, 2010, Vol. 20 Issue 3, p.360.

³⁵ Lipari, Lisbeth, 'Listening, Thinking, Being', *Communication Theory*, August, 2010, Vol. 20 Issue 3, p.350.

³⁶ Agnes Martin, writing in 1973, 'I have sometimes put myself ahead of my work in my mind and / have suffered the consequence. / I thought me, me: and I suffered... / I will go onto inspiration and you will see what is / possible. / Inspiration is there all the time / for everyone whose mind is not clouded over with thoughts / whether they realize it or not... / It's a peaceful thing... / It is an untroubled mind.

Martin, Agnes and Wilson, Ann, "The Untroubled Mind", *Flash Art* 41, June 1973, pp.6-8, reprinted in *Agnes Martin*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, 1973, pp. 17-24.

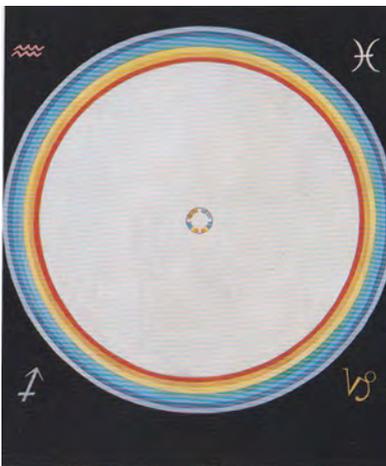
³⁷ A case study is creative non-fiction, a third party form of address. Exuberance is an angle of energy, a strong conviction like inspiration. It is not aggressive and does not serve to prop up notions of 'self'. Rather it exists because the work is there to be done. Out of a sense of groundlessness, even non-existence, exuberance brings fearlessness and outrageousness.

Museet, in her native Stockholm.³⁸ Hailed as a 'Pioneer of Abstraction', Hilma has become historic, significant and revelatory.



Photo-portrait, Hilma af Klimpt, http://img.anpdm.com/Moderna_museet/ny_prm_hilma.jpg

She belonged to the theosophical, and later to the anthroposophical society at a time when spiritualism, telepathy and theosophy, alongside science, were popular ways of seeking to understand the forces beyond the visible. A voice-thruster or ventriloquist, and a 'visionary artist', Hilma was also a recorder, intercessor, and interlocutor. Dismembering the attribution of agency, her work points to the mediumship of the listener.



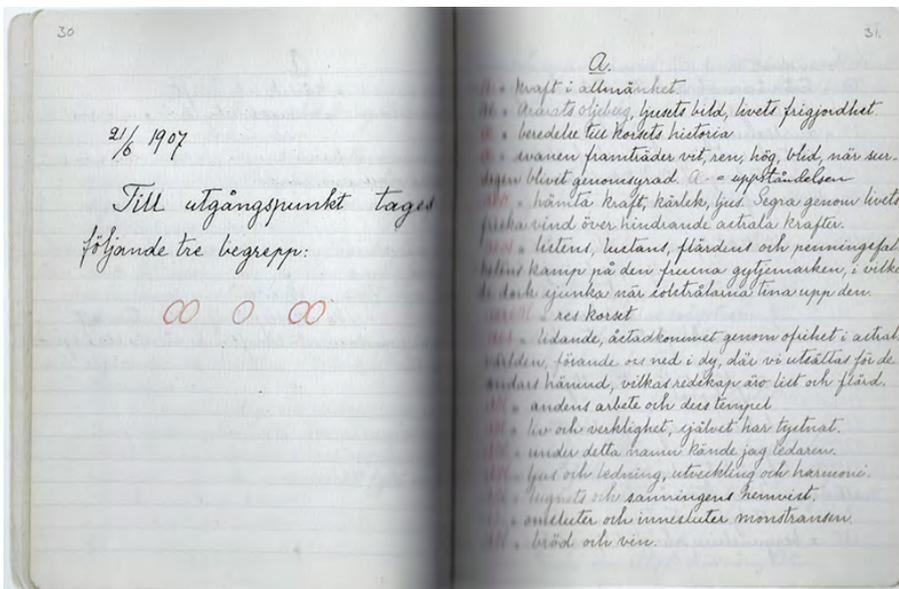
Hilma af Klint, *Group 9, Series UW, Dove, No.38, Cosmic Picture, Spring, 1915.*

During her two main 'occult' periods (1907-8 and 1912-15) Hilma painted over one thousand esoteric works comprising large oils on canvas paintings and later, smaller watercolours on paper. All were painted without any reworking.³⁹ "The pictures were painted through me directly, without preparatory sketches, and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict, and yet I worked fast and unhesitatingly, without altering one brush stroke."⁴⁰ Hilma constructed an abstract pictorial language and methodology. Her works diagram matter, planes and cycles. In many there are also illegible 'mystical vowels'. These suggest particularly resonant enunciated and imagined sounds that 'tune' or change vibrations in the body and affect consciousness. The body passes through sound, and sound also passes through the body.

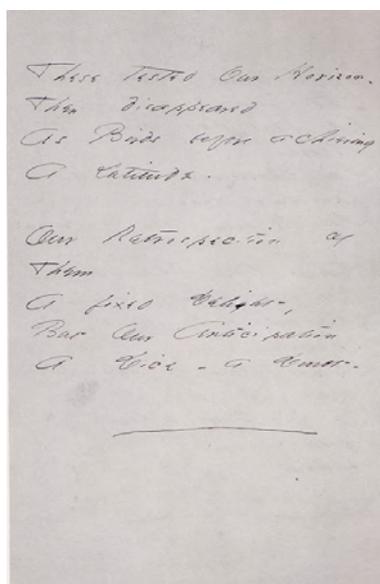
³⁸ Fant, Ake, (ed.) *Secret Pictures by Hilma Klint*, exhibition catalogue, Nordic Arts Centre, Helsinki, 1998-1999, Valokuvat photographs. Work from collection of Stiftelsen Hilma af Klint's Verk, Stockholm.

³⁹ Fant, Ake, (ed.) *Secret Pictures by Hilma Klint*, exhibition catalogue, Nordic Arts Centre, Helsinki, 1998-1999, Valokuvat photographs. Work from collection of Stiftelsen Hilma af Klint's Verk, Stockholm.

⁴⁰ Hilma af Klimpt in Fant, Ake, (ed.) *Secret Pictures by Hilma Klint*, exhibition catalogue, Nordic Arts Centre, Helsinki, 1998-1999, Valokuvat photographs. Work from collection of Stiftelsen Hilma af Klint's Verk, Stockholm.



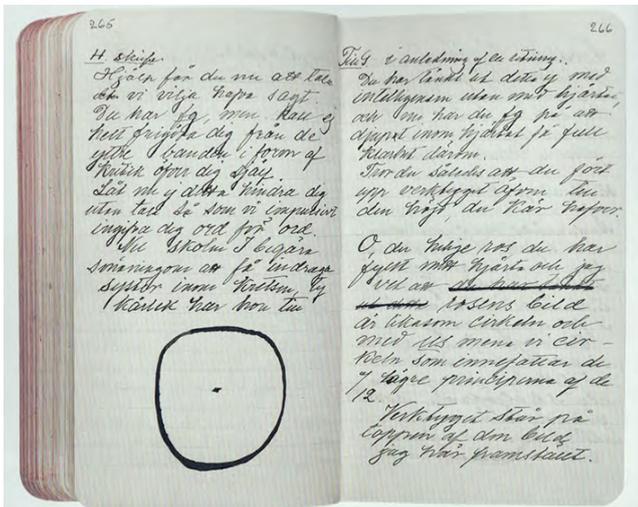
Hilma af Klimpt, *From Notes on Letters and Words pertaining to Works, June 21, 1907*, in Müller-Westermann & Widoff, Jo, (eds.), *Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Stockholm, 2013.



Emily Dickinson, *Retrospection*, 1862. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12242/12242-h/12242-h.htm>

As with Emily Dickinson's occasional use of capitalization and unusual punctuation, there is a system of notation or sounding that remains obscure. Located at the site of this illegibility are multiple entry points, and diverse narratives.⁴¹ Dickinson, like Hilma, lived in a self imposed seclusion or estrangement from the worldliness of the world perhaps to make a space for listening, wherein which poems could enter and visionary voices speak.

⁴¹ Dickinson wrote on loose sheets of paper sewn together into fascicles late in her life at a time when most of her writing was completed. Relationships remain unfixed. Questions arise about translation, and how to represent her written poems in print. (Horn, Roni, *Earths Grow Thick*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Ohio, 1996.)



Hilma af Klint, *From Messages through H. af. K. to Helene H. [illegible], April 7, 1912*, in Müller-Westermann & Widoff, Jo, (eds.), *Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Stockholm, 2013.

In the occult diaries (1890-1944), Hilma's handwritten notes detail the communications from the spirits along with the meanings accompanying colours and symbols. The illegibility of this artist archive questions its self-evident role as transcription. Neither instrumental explanation nor accompaniment, more a looping, self-referential commentary; the notebooks are private reminders and instructions relating to creative method written as the artist explored her process. An alphabet to be sounded.

Approaching something in translation there is room for imaginal adventure, for variation and conjecture. Rather than surround the writing in a dull silence, this inscrutability, is active, happening now.

...

...that image of Roni Horn in the studio (diagram)



Roni Horn, *Antfarm*, 1974-5/2007, oak, glass, earth, and ants, 119.4 x 177.8 x 10.2 cm. <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/RoniHorn/Images>

'Ant farm was installed and I was looking at the ant farm and that was the performance, some people stuck around and watched the ants for some time and others didn't.'⁴²

Ant Farm, identifies the act of observation as the content of the work; visitors observing the artist observing the live ants sandwiched between two sheets of framed glass. Medium, medium: oak, glass, earth, ants, artist, light, time... A silent performance, active drawing and projection space, I like to stay with this photographic document, linger a while, feel the grainy texture of the bare light, and the absorption in the looking. In the 'hearing-space' of this image of Horn's younger self, (a moment of exit from historical dust) she sits low behind a glass screen that holds a sliver of living earth and between the bare bulbs that show things. A line of poetry, a flare, a diagram; the conflation of the space of production and reception, here the diagrammatic is undermined in favour of a particular, open form of

⁴² Roni Horn in Horn, Roni, *Earths Grow Thick*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Ohio, 1996.

knowledge.

.....



Joachim Koester, *Tarantism*, 2007, [still] 16mm black & white film installation, duration: 6:31 minutes, edition of 5 with 2 artist's proofs, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/exhibitions/future-exhibitions/exhib-date/2013-03-20/exhib/joachim-koester-tarantism>

At what point does a process of translation, telling, and transformation become its own thing?



Gitte Villesen, *'I capture you. You capture me'*, 2005, collaboration with Helene Hermann, double video projection, documentation and exhibition case with research material and objects in two versions, A3 handout poster, 10 photographs, duration 2 x 18 mins., [installation view at The Venice Biennale 2005], in Kidner, Dan & Villesen, Gitte, (eds.), *Gitte Villesen, "The story is not all mine, not told by me alone", Works 1994-2009*, JRP/ Ringier, Kunstverlag, Zurich, 2010, p.123.

Gitte Villesen is an artist-collaborator. Engaging various methods of storytelling, her works 'document' from within the impossibility of isolating oneself. Various subject positions are made available and investigated in the context of participatory creative relationships. Where does one being begin and the 'other' end? The particular configuration (form, materiality, language) of each work is open, and comes into being alongside vantage.



Hannah Rickards, *Thunder*, 2005, [performance documentation], Stomness Town Hall, Orkney, 1 October, 2010. <http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/forthcoming-events/event/the-pier-arts-centre-orkney-thunder-hannah-rickards>

'Tressing codes', ⁴³ of language, gesture and sound, British artist Hannah Rickards, works with transformations

⁴³ Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), London: Fontana Press, 1977.

between categories of perception and mechanisms of representation. Centered on the framing of description, *Thunder* is a recording of an eight-second thunderclap stretched into a seven-minute passage, and transcribed into a score for a sextet by composer David Murphy. The performance by a musical ensemble years later was compressed into a recording of eight seconds duration. In the gallery the work was presented as an installation of sound and documentary text. The recording of a 'musical storm' was played (re-performed) twelve times each hour at various intervals. Rickards' work is its own kind of enriched, translated, replicated, erroneous, 'misrepresentation'. There are no beginnings - nothing is left of the 'original' sound, as her method requires the loss of the replicated sources. Some things resist translation.

...

Reconstructing the history of an object or event through language, I am always in the middle. Especially at the start.

Vagabond (Sans Toit Ni Loi) is an episodic film essay by Belgian director, Agnès Varda. Made in 1985, the film reimagines the history of an event in fragments of recollected encounters. It begins with a still image of the body of a young woman frozen to death in a ditch in the midst of a field. From this image of Mona's body Varda puts the camera on the farm labourer who found her. In voiceover, the filmmaker addresses us directly; 'No one claimed the body... She had died a natural death without leaving a trace... But people she had met recently remembered her. Those witnesses helped me tell of the last weeks of her last winter. She left her mark on them... I know little about her myself, but it seems to me that she came from the sea.'⁴⁴



Vagabond (Sans Toit Ni Loi), directed by Agnès Varda, [film still], 1985, in Smith, Alison, *French Film Directors, Agnès Varda*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, New York, 1998.

An acousmatic voice that 'wanders the surface of the screen with out entering it',⁴⁵ Varda's voice has none of the all-seeing powers of the 'voice without a place'. She declares her partial vision and knowledge have limits whose dimensions are not known. Through intersecting temporalities, Varda brings into play notions of fiction, witness, and index to investigate ways of seeing and understanding this 'other' who has chosen to exist on the margins. The camera moves ahead of and outside Mona as enters and exits long tracking shots featuring markers, signposts and discarded relics of past livelihoods. In three weeks in the landscape of Nimes, familiar beacons tell us where we are, as Mona wanders from encounter to encounter.



Vagabond (Sans Toit Ni Loi), directed by Agnès Varda, [still – Yolande recalls her first sight of Mona], 1985, in Smith, Alison, *French Film Directors, Agnès Varda*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1998.

Like Villesen, Varda reconstructs the object of her investigation as mediated and speculative. Her film investigates not Mona herself but the traces she has left in others. We become absorbed in the observational process ourselves,

⁴⁴ Varda, Agnès, *Vagabond (Sans Toit Ni Loi)*, 1985.

⁴⁵ Smith, Alison, *French Film Directors, Agnès Varda*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, New York, 1998, p.133.

constructing our own fictions of Mona and of the people she meets. Close up stills of Mona (the glances of others) become significant in the way Mona remains unreadable, escaping all attempts to construct her as 'other' or as self-image. No-one really sees her nor do we 'see' what Mona sees. All ways of seeing Mona fail to produce a reliable image. This creates a curious vantage for the observer as author. As witness we never really understand how the outside world enters Mona's head and shifts in consequence. The viewer is obliged to read the external signs and to share the witnesses' subjectivity. 'When asked to talk about her self, her life, Mona says very little, except, 'Je bouge' (I move).' This insistence on continuous movement (the choreography of modern dance and of continuous production) leads Mona to detachment and death and is played against the filmmaker/viewer/witness/author's freedom of movement, return, reinvention.

Varda's film brings with it a different kind of metaphysics; as method, travel, intensity, stumbling, translation. In it we suspend or slow ontology to look at what is happening now; at the change of things and the relation between being and perceiving. It is a space for and of variations. The world crossed with language, set in time.

'There are many ways to be continuous and discontinuous, be transported and transformed.'⁴⁶

...

Martina Copley 2013

⁴⁶ Latour, Bruno, Harman, Graham & Erdélyi, *The Prince and the Wolf, Latour and Harman at the LSE*, Zero Books, John Hunt, United Kingdom, 2011.

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