An Academic Cut-Up, in Easily Digestible Paragraph-Size Chunks; Or, The New King of Pop: Dr. Konstantin Raudive

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This essay was written for inclusion in the catalogue of the exhibition Sonic Process, *organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2002. The show is representative of a recent trend in which sound art–related exhibitions are being mounted by institutions traditionally associated with visual culture. As I mention in the following essay,* Sonic Process *and similar contemporary shows differ from earlier museum exhibitions of sound art (which tended to focus upon sound works that functioned in a sculptural manner or reflected an experimental approach to sound production related to twentieth-century avant-garde musical composition) in its embrace of popular musical forms such as DJ-based dance music. Such an embrace is possible since the critical rhetoric attached to contemporary dance music is derived from avant-garde sources. Because much of this music is composed of samples of preexisting records and other sound sources that are radically reconfigured, modernist theories of collage, fracture, and appropriational strategies can be easily applied to them. William S. Burroughs's famous "cut-up" technique of literary composition, inspired by modernist visual art practice, is the most cited precursor for this musical trend. As a humorous response to the "academization" of Burroughs's theories, I have "cut up" my own essay, though in a thoroughly polite manner so that its original sense may still be discerned. This is intended as an ironic comment on what I consider the essentially conservative nature of much of the popular music that is, wrongly I believe, linked to the radical intentions behind Burroughs's practice. The art institutions' recent embrace of such popular forms of music, which are diluted versions of more complex and radical sources, is, I believe, a tactic designed not to re-evoke historical precedents but to neuter them, to depoliticize them by presenting them as harmless fun, as popular amusements.*

My project for Sonic Process *was made in collaboration with the musician Robin Rimbaud, who performs under the name Scanner. The*

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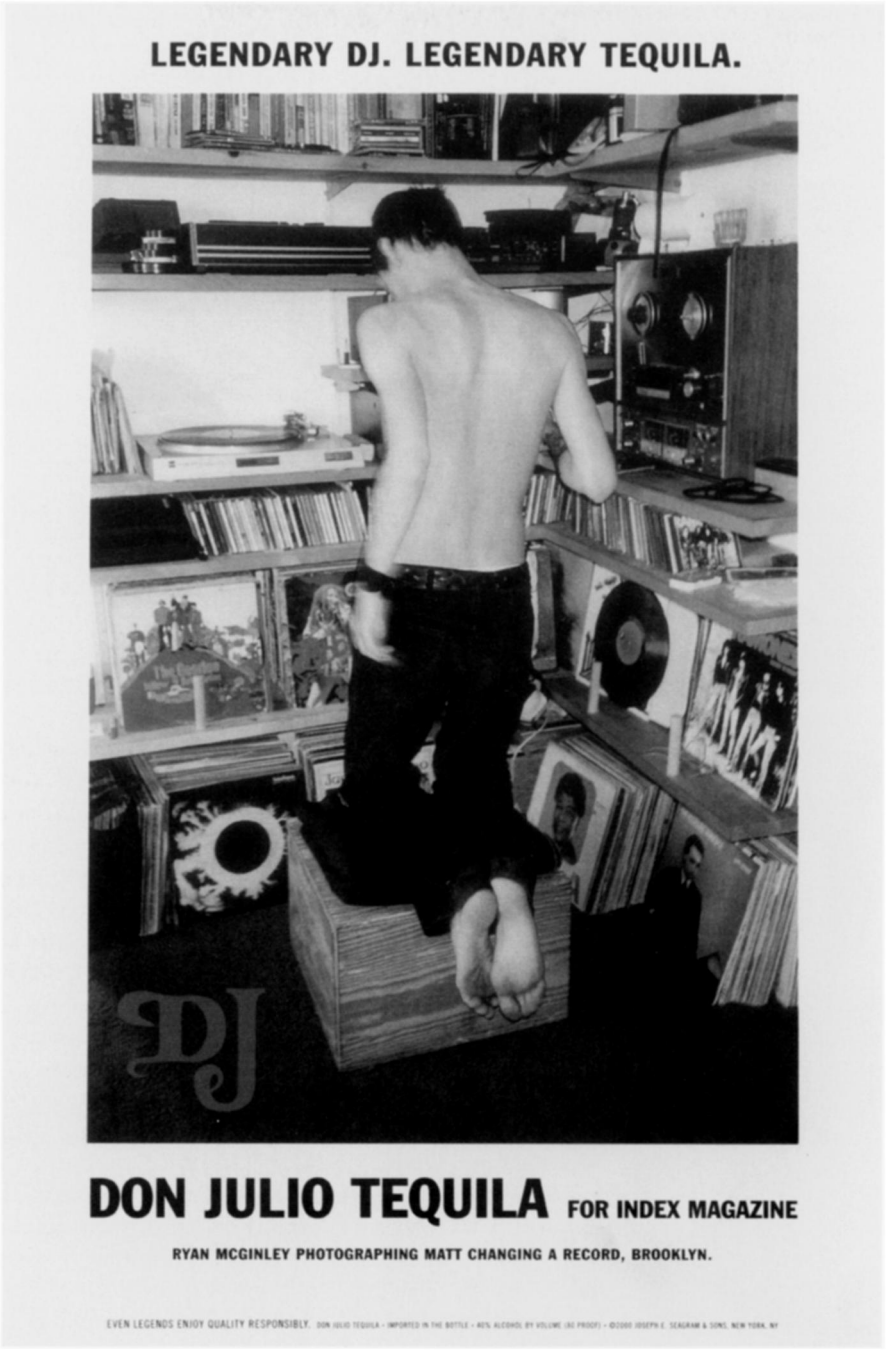
Konstantin Raudive.
From *Breakthrough*, 1971.
Photo: Bill am Sonntag.



starting point of the project was a reexamination of the Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), whereby "voices of the dead" are recorded on electronic equipment. I have been working, myself, with this technique in a musical context since the late-seventies. I postulate the importance of such extramusical sound experiments as influential precedents for the new "electronica," a premise proven by several recent CD releases of EVP-related material, including a "tribute album" featuring musicians associated with the contemporary experimental pop music scene.

—Mike Kelley, 2003

A liquor advertisement from *Index* Magazine (March 2001) uses the "radical anonymity" of the DJ as a hipster selling point. A shirtless young man, identified as "Matt" is shown with his back toward the viewer. This eroticized image is titled in seeming contradiction, given the "anonymity" of the DJ, "Legendary DJ. Legendary Tequila."

One issue that I hope to address through the use of trance channelers in live concert is the so-called schizophrenic nature of much contemporary art. Much of the rhetoric of this aesthetic is indebted to the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Instead of describing schizophrenia as pathological, Deleuze and Guattari stress the positive aspects of the condition, praising the schizophrenic's capacity to range across mental fields to transcend the bureaucratization of the mind. They dismiss the psychoanalytic desire to interpret unconscious production, which they describe as having no significance or meaning.[14] Nonmeaning, thus naturalized, becomes the basis for an abstract and anticritical aesthetic—one that, on the surface, emulates the "schizophrenic" effect of fracture. One aspect of the so-called voice phenomenon that is often commented upon is the meaningless and garbled nature of the recorded utterances. This has been explained as the result of faulty reception of spirit transmission, or—more interestingly—as representing the degraded mental state of the "spirits." The scrambled babblings on the tapes have been interpreted as the tortured voices of those in Hell, as the taunts of demons, or as the by-products of some numbing mental process that occurs after death. The "voices" could be described as schizophrenic in nature; however, relative to the voice phenomenon, this description could hardly be understood as a positive one. Writers for the supernaturalist periodical *Fate*, in response to Jürgenson's recordings, came to the conclusion that "intelligence seems to deteriorate rapidly after death."[15] And, alarmed by the disjointed nature of the voices, psychic researcher R.A. Cass warned against the possible dangers of Raudive's experiments being performed by nonprofessionals:

> If there is a spirit world full of the flotsam and jetsam of our military and mercantile civilization. If a door has been opened between this world and the next, then the masses armed with the cheap transistor sets and £5 Hong Kong tape recorders, will participate in this new Hydesville.[16]

Cass's statement is reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's rants against mass culture's frenzied infantilism, which are echoed in William S. Burroughs's satiric depiction of a pop band whose "baby talk" lyrics send their listeners into ecstatic infantile abandon.[17] In these examples, delirious response is not held up as something to emulate. An interesting parallel exists between the negative reading of the voice phenomenon as the pronouncements of base elemental beings and as the equally dangerous by-products of a (purposely) regressive aesthetic.

The imbecilic quality of the tape voices is not characteristic of the output of traditional mediumistic devices. Few examples of automatic writing, or even Ouija board pronouncements, are as garbled as the

phrases in Raudive's transcriptions. This kind of fractured language usage would be especially inappropriate if uttered by a human medium, whose portrayal of a specific persona is an important condition of their believability. In fact, mediums often tend to channel dead celebrities and famous historical figures, as if the same social hierarchies that exist in this world extend into the next. Compared to this clichéd fixation with the mass media star system, unified psychology, and history as grand narrative, the confused and ambiguous nature of Raudive's spirit voices comes off as positively contemporary—"Deleuzeian," if you will. It would be interesting to place together on stage trance channelers who have been instructed to act as conduits to such famous Parisian personalities as Serge Gainsbourg, Olivier Messiaen, Jim Morrison, and Le Petomane, with an equal number of ecstatic channelers who "speak in tongues." This contrast of unified psychological portrayal with meaningless glossolalia might be made to echo the shift in social meaning of white noise from deep meaning to surface meaning—from that which contains hidden mysteries (spirit voices), to that which is simply disposable popular product (techno music). How, or to what end, that might be accomplished I am not so sure of at the moment. But as an exercise in theatrical staging, it would be an interesting problem.

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However, I must say that part of my attraction to this material definitely had to do with the extramusical discourse that surrounded the recordings—the endless arguments as to the source of the voice effects. Whether they were explained as the voices of spirits of the dead, of demons, as projections of the unconscious, or secret CIA transmissions, the multitudinous poetry of discourse attendant to these tapes excited me. It functioned as their lyrics, and it seemed to offer promise of a music that escaped the compositional formalism of Minimalism. I was looking for a "music" that expressed more ideological concerns, such as the sound experiments done earlier in the century by the nonmusicians associated with the Futurist and Dada movements. My interests in these movements extended to the tape experiments described by William S. Burroughs in such writing as "the invisible generation."[4] Burroughs, like myself, was interested in the tape voice phenomenon and wrote an essay, "It Belongs to the Cucumbers," detailing his thoughts on the tape experiments of Raudive.[5] The transcriptions of Raudive's "voices" reminded Burroughs of schizophrenic speech or dream utterances, and he proposed that the voices might be "a backplay of recordings stored in the memory banks of the experimenters,"[6] instead of the voices of the dead. They were, perhaps, recordings of the unconscious.

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This populist attitude has radically affected the art world's traditional relationship to pop music. Museum shows of "sound art" in the past always reflected an avant-garde position; no pop music was to be found anywhere in sight.[25] Even though such an esteemed artist as Andy Warhol worked with a rock band in the sixties,[26] art institutions were unable to accept this particular aspect of his work as art. And this was at a time when there was already an immense amount of crossover between the worlds of the twentieth-century avant-garde and pop culture.[27] Even ten years later the so-called art bands (the art-school trained and media-savvy band Devo, for example), though obviously linked to the simultaneous "appropriation art" movement of the late-seventies and early-eighties, were still not accepted within the arena of art. "Appropriations" of sources as diverse as cigarette advertisements (Richard Prince) and the photographs of Walker Evans (Sherrie Levine) were acceptable to the art mainstream, while appropriations of rock band structures were not. This fact is definitely thought-provoking. Something about the social meaning of pop music made it impossible to co-opt for art-world usage at that time. (This is an interesting topic but one far too complex to address in this short essay. Suffice it to say—this is not the case now. The art world has changed. Now, pop music rules.)

I have been interested in these tape experiments since the mid-seventies, when I began to make noise music utilizing used magnetic tapes bought at secondhand shops and yard sales, as well my own recordings made in the spirit of "musique concrete." My interest in the so-called voice phenomenon was initially musical and related to similar interests in the minimalist music of composers like La Monte Young. Jürgenson's and Raudive's tapes attracted me as a form of a-compositional music. The implication was that the signal being inscribed on the tape in Raudive's experiments had nothing to do with the recording process; the voices were not audible in the room and thus must have found their way onto the tape in some manner other than through the microphone. If this is the case, "Why record at all?" is the obvious next question; why not simply amplify the natural "hiss" of blank magnetic audiotape?

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All of this is probably just a response to my general dislike of most contemporary electronic dance music—techno, for want of a better word. The primary discourses surrounding it strike me as false.[18] The so-called "radical anonymity"[19] of the music I read as indicative of a slacker ahistorical mind-set. The various musical appropriations utilized in

most techno tracks are generally unrecognizable, so their recontextualization is a moot point. Reuse is generally formal in nature, lacking the qualities of overt and purposeful misuse of quoted material found in such forms as psychedelic rock, hip-hop, and industrial music, all of which I much prefer to techno. The pseudo-Deleuzeian reading of techno as representative of a postmodern and "non-centered"[20] aesthetic, because of the music's schizophrenic multipart makeup, is denied by the presence of a constant *unifying* dance beat. Despite the utilization of the Cageian no-no, a steady beat, techno is decidedly Cageian music. It treats fracture in a *naturalistic* manner.[21] Techno mirrors the sped-up and fractured quality of contemporary electronic media and is analogous, in effect, to radio tuner dialing or television channel surfing. These could hardly be described as activities that induce delirium or cause one to question the order of experience. They are simply part of our daily media-dominated environment. Unlike the example of William S. Burroughs who, through a politically conscious remixing, makes us aware of the clichéd experiential structures through which we perceive the world, techno simply reiterates a naturalized technological environment. Techno also stinks of technological utopianism; a lot of the language attendant to it is reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's writings of the sixties.[22] This was hard enough to swallow the first time around, in the romantic haze of the hippie milieu, but insufferable now.

Already in the seventies a band like Kraftwerk had an ironic attitude about their relationship to technology, and their image as a "pop" band. This is obvious if you compare Kraftwerk's strategies to that of one of their contemporaries, the neoromantic synthesizer band Tangerine Dream, who played up the seriousness of their music and downplayed their self-image—the exact reverse of Kraftwerk's approach. It's strange to see Kraftwerk's poker-faced proclamations about their love of machines quoted now as fact[23] and their obviously cornball electronic compositions held up as contemporary masterpieces. They are, but something's been lost in the translation when the irony of Kraftwerk's relationship

Top: Mannequin stand-ins for members of the techno band Kraftwerk, late 1970s.

Bottom: Kraftwerk. *Radio-aktivität* (EMI), 1975.

to modernist technological utopianism is presented as its opposite. In the depressed seventies, when technological utopianism could hardly be conceivable given the economic downslide that left many industrial cities veritable wastelands, Kraftwerk's evocation of Modernist aesthetics could only be read as a cruel joke.

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What is so amusing, relative to this technological infatuation, is that the main signifier for techno culture, the DJ, fetishizes an outmoded technology: the vinyl record album and turntables. This is understandable in hip-hop, which grew out of a poor street aesthetic of limited resources, but not in the techie world of electronica. Limiting oneself to material found on record albums, which hardly represents the contemporary information pool and which, by and large, is corporate pap, is ridiculous in this day and age.

Do these "spirit voice" recordings somehow maintain vestiges of their previous "metaphysical" meaning, even after they have been shifted into the formalist bracket of dance music? Is there something about them that, inherently, problematizes their position as such? Robin Rimbaud has spoken to me of his interest in the battery, in how it retains a memory of past usage even after it has been discharged. He goes on to postulate that buildings and spaces maintain a similar kind of residual record of the events that have transpired there. This belief is very much in line with spiritualist ideas. The haunted house, the poltergeist phenomenon, are explained as the result of the continuing presence of traumatized spirits or stored psychic energy associated with a given place. There is a stake in the historical that I have sympathy for in these mythologies. The unexplained phenomena of the present must somehow be linked to the past. In an ahistorical period, such as the one we live in now, I find this historical concern refreshing, even though—being a materialist—I assume that there are explanations other than the presence of ghosts to account for these phenomena.

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My interest in pairing intense aural experience with critical intent has something in common with the tape recording practices of William S. Burroughs as described in "the invisible generation." He sees experience as a kind of indoctrination by a preordained editing system. He proposes the systematic recording and "playback" of daily life as a critical practice. Ambient audio recordings are made, then counteredited: chopped up, slowed down, and so on, in order to expose what he

George Landow. ***Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.*****, 1966.**

describes as the "control machine"—a prerecorded "grey veil" that separates you from true experience. These recordings could be compared to the tape collages of John Cage that are produced through random game-like strategies: the *Williams Mix* of 1952, for example. But the focus in Cage's work is on pure aural experience; his works lack the critical intention at the root of Burroughs's efforts. When Cage chops together tapes recorded at different locations, the changes in background hiss are experienced as tonal shifts—as music. These recordings cease to function as documents of specific places. The abstract qualities of his work are foregrounded because he denies any investment in his source materials. Burroughs's focus on the political ramifications of the recording and editing process is much more compelling to me. For this reason, I felt that it was important to keep a record of the places that Scanner and I recorded, as well as describe why they were chosen. The reason for choosing these locations might be as simple as that they were picked out of a supernatural guidebook of Paris.[12] But even this information would reveal a historical aesthetic predilection, would point toward a particular construction of history that ascribes importance to certain figures and events.

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This is why I believe that the recordings that Scanner and I make around Paris should, initially, be understood as operating within a pop music framework. The pop framework is the sign of quality at the moment. We present the recordings, on one hand, as documents. They depict locales in Paris that relate to histories relevant to the spiritualist tradition that the tape voice phenomenon is part of, or sites associated with the avant-garde traditions that inform the aesthetics of contemporary DJ culture. On the other hand, we present these same sound recordings as the musical background for a contemporary style of social interaction—specifically the kind of dancing associated with techno music. In this case the installation is a reflection of the many sound environments that one finds in galleries and museums at the moment, ones that attempt to move the world of rave and DJ culture into the arena of the art institution. In line with this popular orientation, Scanner and I have also updated the technology generally associated with the tape voice phenomenon. We used contemporary digital recording equipment instead of the analog machines used in Raudive's day. This is obviously problematic, given the recordings' final usage as projective soundscapes, because digital recordings have far less hiss than analog recordings do. But, it will prevent the resulting sound from being read as a nostalgic comment on twentieth-century electronic music. Maintaining a popular and con-

temporary focus is also why I want to do a concert in which the tapes are mixed live, as they would be in a dance club, with mediums presented as front figures in the manner of pop singers. However, at the same time, I am interested in clearly conveying that this change of focus from a spiritualist to a pop bracket is the content of the work. It is important that the audience understand that these ambient soundtracks are historically rooted in extramusical concerns. This is why the visual component of the installation refers back to the original recording event of taping in "mysterious" and historical places. (Of course, this aspect of the recording process could also be understood through its exploitative usage in such popular genres as Goth or industrial music. For example, the band Nine Inch Nails has recorded songs in the house where the Manson family murdered actress Sharon Tate and others.) These contradictory readings obviously promote confusion, and part of my interest in embracing that potentiality is that it points toward "schizo-culture's" embrace of meaningless effect as the sign of popular appeal. For example, our video surveillance of various Parisian sites utilizes infrared heat-sensitive technology commonly used in the recording of "paranormal" phenomena. This produces a distorted image. In the context of our installation, this distortion would more than likely be perceived as simply effect, in the same way that visual effects are used toward no illustrative or symbolic purpose in music videos. I expect that reading. At this moment no other reading could be expected.

Returning to my proposal that the electronic medium promotes its own qualities, which come to be perceived as "aesthetic" relative to the experience of playback, I find it interesting to compare the experience of listening to one of Raudive's recordings with that of the reception of certain structuralist artworks. In some experimental films from the sixties, such as George Landow's film "Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc." (1966), which has been printed so that the normally hidden edge of the film frame is revealed, the filmic experience is presented primarily as the relationship of the film-as-material to its mechanism of playback. The relationship of film to projector is what is being presented to the viewer in these films, not narrative content. I believe a similar intention is at work in Steve Reich's musical composition "Pendulum Music" (1968). This piece consists of a microphone swinging above an amplifier. As it swings over the speaker it produces a series of feedback squeals that lengthen in duration as the

swinging slows. This continues until the microphone hangs, stable, above the speaker producing a pure feedback tone. Here, the normally invisible relationship of microphone to amplifier—which are generally tools used only for the purpose of amplification—is made the content of the music, and feedback—which is usually considered unwanted distortion—is the carrier of that meaning. Since we are now in a period in which mystical interpretations of ambiguous effects is not the norm, machinic, technical concerns predominate. I believe the resurgence of interest in Raudive's tape experiments has more to do with contemporary musical tastes than in their spiritualist content. With the rise of electronica as a popular musical form, the history of electronic sound production is being scoured for source material. In this environment the tape hiss that is considered distortion in Raudive's recordings—as that which hides their true content: the voices—is now the object of primary interest. The hiss is the content, and the search for voices within it is now considered a kind of charmingly naive sublimatory excuse to revel in the pleasures of electronic sound. Because electronica is a pop music form, its focus is on effect not on theory. This is why Raudive's tapes may be resuscitated within its bracket; the serious musical concerns of twentieth-century electronic music would not tolerate the mystical pretensions of Raudive's recordings nor accept them as musical. These issues are not problematic in the world of pop music where effect is all. This cultural sea change is something that I am interested in.

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DJ art fares even worse when it is taken out of its proper milieu, the disco, and moved into the art gallery and museum. The only true politic that can be ascribed to electronic dance music is a Dionysian one: people are having fun when they dance to it, and that inspires in them some sense of "community." This effect is impossible in the gallery context. Presented there, this popular form simply becomes symbolic of populist aesthetics in general. This is what one sees in an exhibition like *Let's Entertain,*[24] which was mounted at the Walker Art Center in 2000 and traveled to the Pompidou. This show focused on artworks utilizing pop cultural motifs, but no differentiation was drawn between those works that had a critical intent and those that celebrated mass culture. The socialized surface qualities of the works was the main focus, and the underlying intent of the show seemed to be to propose that surface meaning, "phenomenological" meaning, is true meaning and that an artist's intent is besides the point. This attitude is very much in vogue at the moment, and I thoroughly disagree with it. I simply find it impossible to look at such overtly constructed images of the social through

a removed "phenomenological" gaze. What is the intention behind naturalizing the obviously constructed? I sense an unspoken politic of compliance at work here.

The acoustical properties of spaces can produce very strange effects. Vladimir Gavreau's famous "black noise" (sound capable of killing) infrasound experiments grew out of the fact that he discovered that his laboratory was vibrating in unison with a defective industrial ventilator in a building some distance from his. This was caused by extremely low frequency sound waves that literally induced pain in him.[11] It's obvious that an undetectable and mentally disturbing phenomenon such as this could be construed as paranormal. Even though I am not interested in mysticism per se, I am interested in the combination of audio effects, myth making, interpretation, and history that is a common attribute of spiritualist practice and literature. I find that the richness that results from this admixture is absent in much formal "abstract" electronic music. I am interested in examining spaces as generators of noise, with historical informational accompaniment as a kind of materialist add-on. I am interested in audio effects that are so intense that they demand to be taken in as pure sensory effect free of meaning, and then to refuse that demand by attaching sociopolitical concerns to them. I like it all the better if these concerns start to break down, fall into ambiguity and poeticization, in the presence of this noise. They are still there, in a latent form, and may bubble back into consciousness at any moment.

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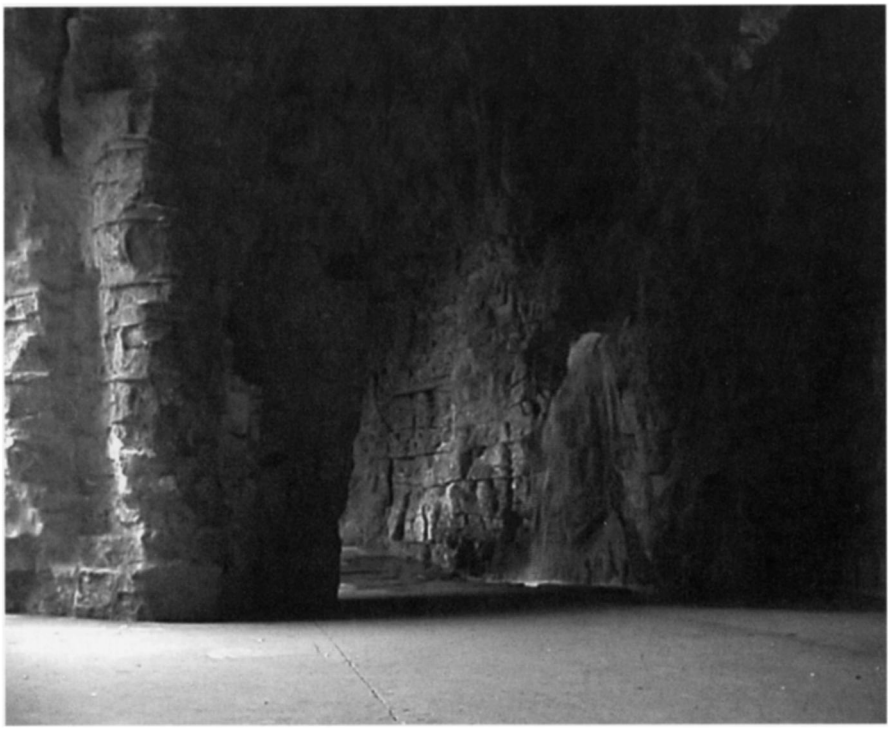
The following is a list of the places where video and sound recordings were made:

1. 7 rue du Faubourg-Montmarte. This is where the author Isidore Ducasse (1846–1870), also known as Lautréamont, died. Ducasse, poet and author of one novel, is often described as a precursor to the later Surrealist writers and is an early practitioner of appropriational writing strategies.

2. The Moulin-Rouge, where Joseph Pujol (1857–1945), also known as Le Petomane, performed in 1892. An immensely popular entertainer in his day, Pujol was able to perform musical and mimetic sound effects by farting.

3. The interior of the Grotte es cascade des Buttes-Chaumont in the Parc de Buttes-Chaumont. This constructed grotto is a famously "spooky" location in Paris.

4. 5 du boulevard Montmarte. The former shop of Jean Buguet, spirit photographer, operating in the 1870s.



Top: The house of Serge Gainsbourg (1928–1991). Photo: Mike Kelley.

Bottom: Grotte es cascade des Buttes-Chaumont, Parc de Buttes-Chaumont. Photo: Mike Kelley.

Top: The tomb of Allan Kardec (1804–1869). Photo: Mike Kelley.

Bottom: The house of Tristan Tzara (1896–1963). Photo: Mike Kelley.

5. 39 de la rue Condorcet. Former showplace of turn-of-the-century ectoplasm extruding medium Éva Carrière.

6. The apartment of Jim Morrison (1943–1971), American poet and singer. Morrison merged his interests in poetry and avant-garde stage practices in his band, the Doors.

7. The tomb of Allan Kardec (1804–1869), one of the leading exponents of spiritualism in his day.

8. The apartment of famed French singer Edith Piaf (1915–1963).

9. The home of Romanian poet Tristan Tzara (1896–1963). Tzara, one of the founders of the Dada movement, is credited with inventing the cut-up chance poem in the teens.

10. The gravesite of Charles Cros (1842–1888). Cros designed the phonograph, at least on paper, before Edison, experimented with new techniques in color photography, and tried to contact life on other planets.

11. The interior of Trinity Church, where composer Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) served as organist from 1931 until the year of his death. Messiaen is famous for his musical translations of bird song; this seems especially pertinent given that Friedrich Jürgenson first discovered the tape voice phenomenon buried in his recordings of bird song.

12. The home of famed Parisian singer Serge Gainsbourg (1928–1991).

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This projective relationship of viewer or listener to artworks (and I am primarily interested in considering Raudive's tapes as a form of aesthetic practice rather than a scientific or spiritualist one) is common today. Using the popular example of sixties "psychedelic" music, projection may be found to operate on a number of levels. In certain songs by Jimi Hendrix not only are the lyrics obscure in meaning, they are buried in the mix and accompanied by other vocalizations such as whispers or groans. Instrumentation is ambiguous as well. The guitar is distorted to such a great degree that at times it is hard to separate it from tape or electronic effects. In this case, the distortionary practices are purposeful. Hendrix's songs mix ambiguity and sensory overload to produce disorientation. The listener is invited to project his or her own subjective readings upon such a work, or to simply give up trying to ascribe meaning to it at all in favor of a more "disembodied" relationship to the music. Relative to this psychedelic effect, Dr. John C. Lilly describes the effect of LSD on the brain as the introduction of white noise, which he describes as "randomly varying energy containing no signals of itself,"[9] into the perceptual experience. He states, "The increase in white noise energy allows quick and random access to memory and lowers the threshold to unconscious memories (expansion of conscious-

ness)."[10] This overload of previously filtered-out material is often understood by the subject as emanating from outside of his or her own consciousness and is ascribed a supernatural origin—as being the voice of God or spirits, for example. Sensory deprivation has been shown to produce similar effects. The use of repetition and drones in musical forms such as minimal, trance, or ambient music often induces a "dreamy" state that invites projection.

These sites were documented on video, and ambient sound was recorded using a digital minidisc recorder. However, to push the self-reflexive machinic qualities I discussed earlier, soon after recording began the lens cap was put on the video camera, and the microphone was turned off on the audio recorder. The machines, then, in essence, recorded themselves and not the sites they were situated in. In post-production, to accentuate the white noise element that I postulate is so important to the tape voice phenomenon, the sound playback levels of the blank minidiscs were radically raised so that whatever natural hiss is present on the raw stock was accentuated. Also, in accordance with the tape voice researcher's observation that the "spirit" voices are generally faster than normal, the recordings were slowed down by 50 percent. As I said before, these altered tapes are then presented as if they are live feeds from the sites they document. This attempt at "naturalizing" the electronic effects applied to them should be easily recognizable as façade. Sound anomalies found in the discs are treated analogously to the "voices" found in Raudive-style recordings. They are sonically foregrounded through editing and looping. In this way they are made to function as "DJ mixes" and are used as a dance music soundtrack for another video documenting people dancing at a disco. This tape is also fictitiously presented as a live feed. The fact that the dancer's movements bear little relationship to the soundtrack should be enough to reveal the constructed nature of this "document."

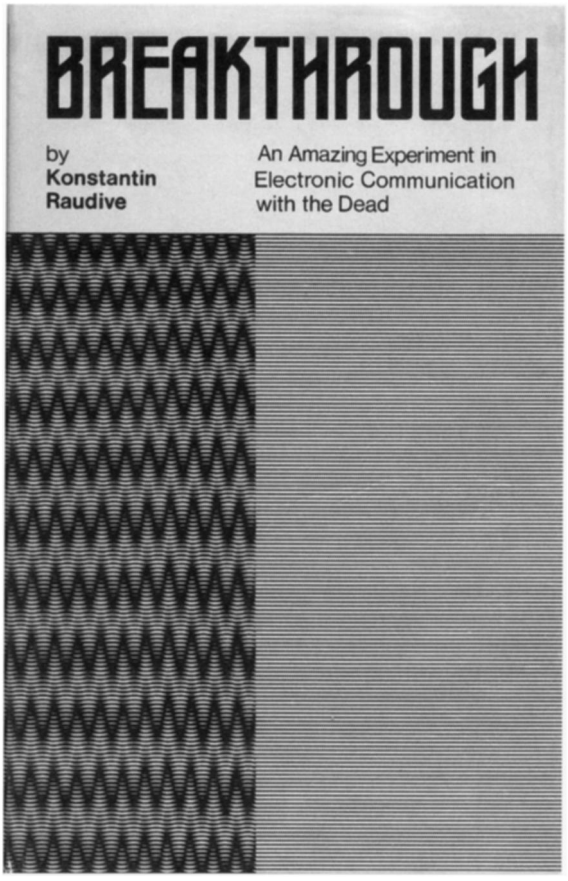
Lyall Watson, the author of *Supernature,* states that a tape recording always seems to pick up more background noise than there is in a real-life situation.[13] This is true. We are programmed in such a way as to screen out as much extraneous information as possible; otherwise we would not be able to deal with the amount of external stimuli that constantly bombards us. A tape recorder does much the same thing that putting a seashell, or a simple tube, up to our ear does—it makes us aware of the amount of white noise that continuously surrounds us. Much of the technology of spiritualism is designed to introduce this white noise, as John Lilly describes it, into our perceptual range. Many early spiritualist electronic devices took as their starting point the medium's speaking trumpet, listening tube, or cabinet. These were all simple tools meant to amplify the paranormal voices supposedly channeled through

Konstantin Raudive, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* (New York: Taplinger, 1971).

the medium. Used as enclosures for electronic amplification or recording, these objects produced an effect similar to that of the seashell—they accentuated the white noise. With this project I want to play with the historical, political, and aesthetic discussions that color the reception of this noise. In focusing upon the movement of this noise from the bracket of supernatural research into that of pop music Scanner and I, hopefully, find something interesting to say about the historical roots of, and contemporary politics of, present-day electronica.

I used tapes made in the Raudive manner in performances such as *Spirit Voices* (1978). I returned again to them later, in the nineties, for a project done for the *Do It* exhibition organized by curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist. *Do It* is a traveling exhibition in which artist's works are reconstructed in various institutions by local volunteers via an instruction manual. My project consists of instructions for the production of a Raudive-style spirit voice tape that is to be played back in a disco environment. Very few people have followed the instructions precisely, but then that's probably the point of Obrist's curatorial exercise. I now have quite a large collection of these tapes. In 1998 I did a performance at the Santa Monica Museum of Art where I mixed these tapes live, somewhat in the manner of a DJ. The present collaboration with Scanner is an outgrowth of this work.

A visit to a nineteenth-century medium was very much a theatrical experience. One would watch the medium to detect shifts in body language or voice that could be attributed to the controlling spirit. One would be on the lookout for trickery relative to the appearance of ghostly apparitions or disembodied voices. This is similar to watching a play or magic show, where truthfulness of portrayal and naturalness of stage effect are always under scrutiny. The relationship of the listener to a tape by Raudive is more akin to listening to a record album. Unlike the façade of theater, the audio recording is presumed to have some kind of one-to-one relationship to an original. This is true even in the case of recordings consisting of multichannel compilations of various tracks where the original sources are hard to decipher. The audiophile is aware that there is an immense difference between the experience of a live concert and a recording of it, and the manner in which this difference is attended to is how the quality of a recording is determined. This is very much an aesthetic interpretation. The same attention, relative to quality, is applied to the playback mechanism itself. A worn-out record needle, a punctured speaker, inflects the recording with its own stamp, and this distortion of source is considered a negative quality. In listening to a tape by Raudive, one is hyperconscious of the fact that the distortion of the recording process is the primary experience. This distortion is much louder than the "voices" buried within it. This is so



much the case that one is compelled to question whether there are voices there at all; they might only be projective audio hallucinations induced in the listener by the general uninflected nature of the white noise. The detection of voices in the tape hiss could be considered analogous to the recognition of imagery in Rorschach blots.

IIIII

This project refers overtly to the tape experiments conducted by Friedrich Jürgenson, a Swedish filmmaker and artist, and, somewhat later, by Dr. Constantin Raudive, a Latvian psychologist living in Germany.[1] These experiments grew out of the discovery, in the late-fifties, of "voices" buried in field recordings Jürgenson made of bird song. As these experiments progressed, microphone recording was given up in favor of recording from radio receivers set to nonbroadcast areas of white noise. Another researcher, Attila von Szalay, has made similar tapes with no signal entering the recorder at all. He simply held the end of a wire jacked into the recorder so that his body acted as a "microphone."[2] (Since the early-forties, von Szalay, an American, has been trying to record the mysterious voices that he hears, first on a record cutter, then on an early wire recorder.) These recordings sound, basically, like amplified white noise, and must be listened to very carefully to discover the "voices" buried within them. The voices on these tapes are said to consist of snippets of phrases, in various languages, and at different speeds. Each of the researchers concluded that the voices were those of the dead. The tape voice phenomenon came to wide public attention with the publication of Raudive's book *Breakthrough* in 1971.[3]

IIIII

The project that Robin Rimbaud (aka Scanner) and I created for the *Sonic Process* exhibition consists of a series of ambient audio and video recordings made at various sites in Paris. These recordings were presented, on video monitors, at the Centre Georges Pompidou and falsely described as live video feeds from the external locations. On a projection screen, another "live feed" from a popular disco shows people dancing to "mixes" of the ambient sounds we collected. We also intend to present

a live musical concert in which these same tapes are used. The pose of presenting the tapes as live video feeds is meant to accentuate the "reality" of the information being presented, which exists outside of the confines of the museum, and thus to insinuate that the museum setting is an improper one for the experience of our artwork.

IIIII

The experiments of Jürgenson and Raudive are part of a long spiritualist history of attempts at communication with the dead. What differentiates the likes of Jürgenson and Raudive from their nineteenth-century spiritualist predecessors is that the human "medium," the person who acts as conduit for the voice of the departed spirit, has been replaced with an electronic device. As soon as electronic communication devices were invented, the same technical principles were applied to spirit communication. Plans exist, attributed to Thomas Edison, for a "telephone" to communicate with the dead. He is known to have been working on such a device in the twenties.[7] This is only one of many examples of spiritualist electronic devices produced in the twentieth century. Obviously, one important reason for this shift to an electronic medium was the attempt to eradicate the subjective presence of the human intermediate. An unforeseen by-product of this shift to an electronic "medium" was the introduction of a new aesthetic element derived from the electronic gear itself. I would argue that this electronic spiritualist tradition is one

Friedrich Jürgenson in his home studio, 1976.

of the roots of late-Modernist electronic music. The following quotation from *From Beyond,* an H.P. Lovecraft horror story from 1920, already exhibits an appreciation for the musicality of electronic equipment, one that, by virtue of the machine's supernatural purpose, colors the sound with the mysterious aura of the exotic: *". . . below the crowning cluster of glass bulbs. The usual sputtering began, turned to a whine, and terminated in a drone so soft as to suggest a return to silence."*[8] This portrayal of the sounds emitted by a machine designed for extrasensorial contact with unknown dimensions could easily function as a description of much current ambient music.

Notes

14. The following quotation by Deleuze sounds as if it was written specifically to elucidate the aesthetics of much contemporary sampler-based music: "To desire consists of this: to make cuts, to let certain contrary flows run, to take samplings of the flows, to cut the chains that are wedded to the flows. This whole system of the unconscious or of desire which lets flow, which cuts, which lets move, this system of the unconscious, contrary to what traditional psychoanalysis believes, means nothing. There is no meaning, no interpretation to be given, no significance." "Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari Interviewed by Vittorio Marchetti," in Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy* (1972; reprint, New York: Semiotext(e), 1995), 76.

15. Clark Smith and Ann Strader, "Friedrich Jurgenson and the Voices of the Dead," in *Strange Fate,* ed. Frank Edwards (New York: Paperback Library, Inc., 1963), 11.

16. R.A. Cass, quoted in Bander, 82–83.

17. "The Buful Peoples came out with a horrible number called 'Here Me Is.' Seems the infant son of Buful Bradly would hide himself behind a sofa or under a desk and pop out saying 'Here me is' and that gave him the idea. The stage is an empty room and then the Buful Peoples start popping out in baby faces saying 'Here Me Is' and shooting the audience with projection guns. Thousands of fans went mad, put on diapers and rushed through the streets shitting and pissing themselves as they screamed out:

"'HERE ME IS' 'HERE ME IS' 'HERE ME IS.'

"The Board of Health issued a powerfully worded warning relative to 'the dangers to health mental moral and physical posed by the hideous practice of baby-talking or still worse baby-singing adults.'"

William S. Burroughs, in Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs* (1968; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 215.

4. William S. Burroughs, "the invisible generation" (1966), included as an appendix to *The Ticket That Exploded* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 205–217.

5. William S. Burroughs, "It Belongs to the Cucumbers," in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 52–59.

6. Burroughs, "It Belongs to the Cucumbers," 59.

25. For example, exhibitions such as *Sound* at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art and P.S.1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York, in 1979; and *Soundings* at the Neuberger Museum at the State University of New York at Purchase in 1981.

26. Warhol produced the first Velvet Underground album, did the cover artwork for their first two albums, and included them in his multimedia show The Exploding Plastic Inevitable.

27. See Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London: Routledge, 1987), for a history of the influence of the art school and avant-garde aesthetics on postwar pop music.

18. My two primary sources for the history and discourses surrounding "techno" are Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture,* trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1998); and Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy* (London: Routledge, 1999).

19. Reynolds, 4.

20. Poschardt, 283.

21. John Cage's naturalistic sentiments are exhibited in the following quotes: "'One must be disinterested, accept that a sound is a sound and a man is a man, give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited

claptrap.' 'The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature, in her manner of operation.'" John Cage quoted in Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1967) 119.

22. The following quote from a book chronicling the San Francisco hippie scene contains language that is remarkably contemporary: "While it is rare for a hippie to acknowledge that his way of life has any theoretical sources, at least one name, that of Marshall McLuhan, crops up frequently. It is from McLuhan that the Haight-Ashbury gets its cybernetic rhetoric, its concept of industrial pastoralism, its admiration of tribal life, its sense of human behavior as explained by game theory, its loyalty to art forms that require 'total involvement.' From McLuhan, too, the Haight-Ashbury gets its justification for the hope that, come the cybernetic revolution, all men will be artists." Leonard Wolf, ed., *Voices from the Love Generation* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), xxix.

23. Poschardt, 369.

12. In fact, most of the sites that were recorded for this project were chosen from two tourist guide books of Paris: Francois Caradec and Jean-Robert Masson, *Guide de Paris Mystérieux* (Paris: Editions Tchou, 1985); and Judi Culbertson and Tom Randall, *Permanent Parisians: An Illustrated, Biographical Guide to the Cemeteries of Paris* (London: Robson Books, 1991).

24. Karen Jacobson, ed., *Let's Entertain,* exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2000).

11. Vladimir Gavreau, "Infrasound," *Science Journal* 4, no. 1 (January 1968); reprinted in *Amok Journal: Sensurround Edition* (Los Angeles, Amok, 1995), 379–389.

9. John C. Lilly, *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer* (New York: The Julian Press, Inc., 1972), 76.

10. Lilly, 76.

13. Lyall Watson, *Supernature: A Natural History of the Supernatural* (New York: Bantam, 1974), 69.

1. For information on the history of the tape voice phenomenon see: Peter Bander, *Voices from the Tapes: Recordings from the Other World* (New York: Drake Publishers Inc., 1973); Suzy Smith, *Voices of the Dead?* (New York: Signet, 1977); and D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayliss, *Phone Calls from the Dead* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979).

2. Smith, 50.

3. Konstantin Raudive, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1971).

7. Rogo and Bayliss, 141–142.

8. H.P. Lovecraft, "From Beyond," in *The Lurking Fear and Other Stories* (1920; reprint, New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 61.