

Boring Formless Nonsense

Experimental Music and the
Aesthetics of Failure

ELDRITCH PRIEST

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

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Nonsense I

A human being unwillingly deprived of the society of his peers descends into madness as the fine structures of perceived reality, maintained and reinforced by the rhetorical bombardments of others' truths (and his own, reflected back), rapidly unwind without constant reinforcement. What I tell you three times is true. What I tell you three million times is civilization.

MARK PESCE
"THE EXECUTABLE DREAMTIME"

Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about.

HARRY FRANKFURT
ON BULLSHIT

(Voodoo

In a study on difference and power in music, John Shepherd identifies a paradox that is fundamental to human sociality and is articulated by the tension expressed "between the inalienable

potential for artifice and the inescapability of the material [world]."¹ That is, the symbolic processes allowing us to manipulate the material environment exhibit a certain independence from the material world while at the same time remaining indissolubly linked to material conditions. Shepherd makes this point, however, not to celebrate it, but to expose how the largely male project of industrial capitalism tries to disguise this tension by appropriating the power of language's symbol system to ignore "the inherent characteristics of sounds from those of the objects...on which they operate,"² a power that is only amplified with the emergence and dissemination of print technology whose system of visual signs and phonetic literacy promote an even greater separation between the sound's characteristics and meaning. This power of language to disarticulate meaning from a thing's material features is, Shepherd argues, what drives the development of a society and its civilization. However, language and the sense it makes come at the cost of sacrificing the relational and fluid presence that sound evokes and demands. The consequences of this are twofold and mutually reinforcing: First, "if the sounds of an utterance are not homologously bound or limited in their configuration by the inherent configurations of the objects to which they refer, then they can be open-endedly manipulated in relation to those objects and more easily prescribe their future manipulation in time and space."³ Second, as a culture becomes literate and takes its literary expressions, in the widest sense of the term, as its central point of definition, the "system of visual signs that are...quite arbitrary in their cross-sensory relation to the sounds they represent...can, in principle, take on a life of its own in relation to the sounds of the language it notates."⁴ Thus, the number of utterances and what can be said about something is unlimited and it is not restricted to fact or morphological correspondence. Unmoored like this, we can, in effect, bullshit all we want.

For a "something" like music, whose non-denotative aspect gives it a rich connotative potential, this virtually open-ended process of

¹ John Shepherd, "Difference and Power in Music," in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 57.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

ascription confers on its expressions a mythical status in the sense that what music "says" is unfalsifiable (imaginary). As such, insofar as the society and culture of industrial capitalism is built on the analytic tendencies of language that promote a myth of objectivization and the concomitant belief that the world is susceptible to control, music is a problematic category. As a construct of a discursive culture that categorizes musical sounds into pitch, rhythm, harmony, tempo, *etcetera*, as well as form, genre, style, classical, and popular, the sense of integration, coexistence, and fluid interaction that sound gives rise to makes music paradoxically something that "reaffirms the flux and concreteness of the social world," but also something that reifies its relational form.⁵ The idea of music therefore locates a "something" wherein opposites coincide. In a sense, the category of Music (upper case "M") is a stranger to the very culture that animates it, but a productive stranger whose paradoxical status excites the inconsistencies and contradictions that industrial capitalism's reckoning of the world produces in abundance. This trafficking in contradictions is also what makes music a myth, for like myth, which may be considered an unconscious expression of a society's internal discrepancies, the matrix of relations that is reflexively and outwardly connoted by Music holds oppositions together within the same event.

As a stranger and a myth, music functions in industrial capitalist cultures as a form of nonsense, what Susan Stewart calls a residual category, which like "Chance," "Accident," or even "*etcetera*," "gives us a place to store any mysterious gaps in our system of order."⁶ Nonsense so defined is a conceptual stopgap that accommodates what an order does not tolerate by marking its own limit. As such, nonsense is an inalienable "aid to sense making" without which "sense would not be 'measured' [but] would itself threaten infinity and regression."⁷ In the context of industrial capitalist society, Music exists as a kind of nonsense in which the inconsistencies of manipulating and defining a material reality through symbolic processes can

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 5.

⁷ Ibid.

accumulate and be provisionally managed. As nonsense, we might see Music functioning where "sound ceases to be a mediating presence,"⁸ where the suppleness of its material, which cannot help but "reaffirm the present existence of the individual, and reaffirm it with a concreteness and directness not required for reaffirmation through the sounds of language,"⁹ is expurgated from the proper map of abstractions and absences that coordinate everyday life. The sticky and messy matter of music is displaced in a way that its symptomatic appearance in the form of "emotions" or "feelings" makes it a stranger to the measure of sense with which its strangeness is conterminous.

But this does not essentialize music. Or rather, it essentializes the discursive construction of Music. But then again, what is it to say, write, or think of music, or Music, apart from its discursive constructions? Indeed, it is the basic position of post-structuralism that there is no outside, no immaculate reality apart from the discursively formulated social realities that a culture presents to itself as objective and true. Which is to say (which is already to say too much), that there is no music or language, or noise, for that matter, *as such*. Music and Language are terms of sense that express the signifying inclination immanent to those sonic practices which discourse gathers up and disseminates in its bid for knowledge. The null- or "myth-space" of the "*etcetera*," which is the same as "Blah blah blah," is the closest one can come to music or language "as such." The effort to encircle the "outside" of music with something like Cage's chance operations would appear then to be the most effective way of bringing out the "blah-blah" essence of music. However, chance does not make music any less artificial, any less constructed, it just makes chance less chancy and more planned. But all this is old hat.

What is really interesting about all of this is not *that* Music plays out the contradictions and inconsistencies of our industrial society but *how* it does this. While all Music is subject to the discursive economy that constitutes it as Music and not as Sound, Speech, or Noise, it would seem that the more self-aware practices clustering

⁸ Shepherd, "Difference and Power in Music," 50.

⁹ John Shepherd and Peter Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 164.

around its sign would make an issue of it in a way that allies it to the practice of metafiction, which, as Patricia Waugh suggests, is a way of writing that “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.”¹⁰ And indeed, the latter half of the twentieth century is dotted with musical works that embody varying degrees of self-reflexivity and formal instability that evoke comparison to the work of authors such as John Barth or Thomas Pynchon.¹¹ The third movement of Berio’s *Sinfonia* (1968–69), for instance, and Mauricio Kagel’s aptly titled *Metapiece* (1961), too, and of course Cage’s *4’33”*, are works that self-consciously draw attention to their artifice. But perhaps more exemplary of the way metafiction interrogates “a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction,”¹² is the more recent work of composer/theorist Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, who takes the lessons of post-structuralism and the dialectical contortions of Adorno’s philosophical project as an aesthetic end to be mannered by an equally, but intentionally, clumsy “complexificationizing” of the art music tradition. But the meta-musical theatre of Mahnkopf, like so many metafiction, undermines its own disturbance by maintaining a transcendental reserve; the delirium which reflexivity courts is held off by keeping the supplementary dimension of the author in play. At most what this brand of meta-music accomplishes is a hyper-awareness of its own artifice that merely sanctions the use of a beleaguered rhetoric of aesthetic negativity (which, unlike Barth, is no fun to read) that gives the impression of being enlightened and insightful. Yet, in the spirit of

¹⁰ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London; New York Methuen, 1984), 2.

¹¹ Noted, the practice of self-reflexivity appears quaint if you consider the history of European art music which is, among other things, the art of self-referentiality. (See Ruth Katz, *A Language of Its Own: Sense and Meaning in the Making of Western Art Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).) However, Waugh is writing in the early 1980s and commenting on a trend in literature that “reflects a greater awareness within contemporary culture of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday ‘reality’” (Waugh, *Metafiction*, 3). While Brahms’ *Symphony no. 2* certainly indulges a high degree of self-referential symbolism, the discourse which constitutes it as “absolute music” excuses its signs from having to address the phenomenal world and so exempts the meta-operations of the work from the complex and highly problematic issue of representation that make metafiction so disorienting.

¹² Waugh, *Metafiction*, 2.

the barren dialectic with which Mahnkopf is enthralled, this is exactly what the music stresses.

But there are other contemporary practices that take a different tack. Fully aware of the way music is discursively constituted and how the representations of its events not only have a way of becoming a part of their unfolding, of bleeding into other constructs such as gender, race, and class, there are practices that pursue a form of sovereignty which is had, paradoxically, by bullshitting. These practices flirt with Paul Mann's "stupid undergrounds" by partaking of the same asymptotic mannerisms that express the vertiginous passions of hyperreality. However, what distinguishes, for example, Irish composer Jennifer Walshe's fictive sound art collective Grúpat, or Toronto-based inter-media artist Marc Couroux's necromantic re-visioning of The Carpenters and 1970s American politics, from the modernist refrains of Mahnkopf and the suicidal impulses of the stupid underground, is their conviction to explore, if I may borrow a phrase from the crypto-metaphysician Donald Rumsfeld, "unknown unknowns." In other words, a kind of radical doubt underwrites the intentions of Walshe and Couroux in a way that decentres rather than negates the problem of reflection. The effect of doubt is not to reach a higher "truth," but to make room for a little "voodoo."

This means that Walshe and Couroux have left what Bush administration insiders have called "the reality-based community," a community defined by people who believe that solutions or results can "emerge from a judicious study of discernible reality."¹³ Walshe and Couroux no longer (if they ever did) carry out their actions with respect to an empirical aesthetics—a verifiable aesthetics whose effects are observable—but instead act at the level of potential where aesthetic effects recursively grow into new artistic realities. As the Bush people might say, when they act, they create their own reality.¹⁴ Or as Brian Massumi does say, "[T]oday's world is

¹³ These are words that *New York Times* writer Ron Suskind attributes to a senior Bush advisor. Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, 14 October 2004. <http://www.ronsuskind.com/articles/000106.html> [accessed October 2012].

¹⁴ Brian Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption," *Theory and Event* 10, no. 2 (2007): par.17, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2massumi.html.

not objective. It is potential.”¹⁵ Our world of unknown unknowns is a world that is “unexpungeable because its potentiality belongs to the objective conditions of life today.”¹⁶ As such, “truth,” or “fact,” or “beauty” even, is self-fulfilling, for in taking unknown unknowns objectively one stokes the objectively indeterminate potential of uncertainty and encourages it to take actual shape by “acting to make present a future cause that sets a self-perpetuating movement into operation.”¹⁷

And is this not voodoo? Is not acting to make present a future cause exactly what the “hougan” or “bokor”¹⁸ does when they wish luck or misfortune on someone, acting on the unprovables of a belief system to short circuit doubt and compensate “for the absence of an actual cause by producing an actual effect in its place?”¹⁹ Effects as cause, as quasi-cause. A jinx makes itself actual by correlating the ordinarily unspecified points of failure and intensities of defeat that co-exist “in a state of actual indistinction from each other”: Obscured failures “actively fused, in dynamic superposition.”²⁰ But this is not superstition. It is *hyperstition*, a fiction that makes itself real by affective insinuation, by gut reactions that contaminate the nervous system with the intensity of a nonbelief. Hyperstition is a pre-personal and unconsciously exercised conviction that cannot help but register as the reality of a situation. In fact, Marcel Mauss describes something very close to this when he qualifies the operative logic of magic as an effort to induce belief in hopes of achieving “the adherence of all men to an idea, and consequently to a state of feeling, an act of will, and at the same time a phenomenon of ideation.”²¹ But what Mauss misses in this characterization of magic is that one first summons an intensity, an affective quality, that is only then followed by adherence to an idea, for an intensity is the registering of a difference that belief represents, a sliver of felt nonsense that circuits through a

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., par. 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., par. 22.

¹⁸ “Hougan” and “bokor” are the Haitian terms for male and female voodoo priests, respectively.

¹⁹ Massumi, “Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption,” par. 23.

²⁰ Brian Massumi, “Fear (the Spectrum Said),” *Positions* 13, no. 1 (2005): 45.

²¹ Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 119.

constellation of symptoms, binding them in coincidence through a quasi-causality of expressive correspondences.

Hyperstition is an occult technology or an “abstract machine” that quasi-causes change to occur and events to take place in alliance with the immanent and impersonal will of a situation that cannot but express itself as a series of coincidences. In a way, hyperstition does resemble superstition. A spell is cast, a person dies; I’m wearing green socks, and no planes fall from the sky. Two events connected by coincidence (expressive correspondence—voodoo) but realized (made effective) to the extent that their alliance shocks the system and “disconnects the body from the ongoing flow of its activities,”²² readying it for a restart along a new path where green socks and falling planes share the same destiny. Properly speaking, this is superstition. However, when coincidences spread, as they do *in flagrante* on the nightly news (and more subtly, when people speak to one another), when the exceptions that coincidence expresses become models of reality, they generate “a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”²³—effects become causes and “indissociable dimensions of the same event.”²⁴ This is hyperstition.

But what exactly does it mean to be hyperstitious? What does it mean to have faith in the fabrication of coincidences? In short, it means that you bullshit, that you make things up. This, however, does not mean that being hyperstitious makes you a liar. As Harry Frankfurt argues, liars retain a certain respect for truth in their aim to deceive,²⁵ which is impossible for the hyperstitious person to have because “truth” supposes a perspective from which the exception of an event can be demonstrated as unexceptional. When you see the world as a series of exceptions and happenstance, as the hyperstitious person does, the ruse of metaphysics that makes us “believe in the true” is supplanted by the superior ruse of ‘pataphysics which “lets us pretend to be untrue.”²⁶ In this respect, to be hyperstitious

²² Massumi, “Fear (the Spectrum Said),” 36.

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1995), 1.

²⁴ Massumi, “Fear (the Spectrum Said),” 36.

²⁵ See Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Christian Bök, *‘Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 12.

is to bluff, to feign, not in order to be false, for that would suppose a truth, but to be effective. And being effective has no concern with truth-values.

Walshe and Couroux's hyperstitions can be regarded as a hyperfiction more than a meta-fiction, as a form of royal bullshitting in the sense that they do not "insert a particular falsehood at a specific point in a set or system of beliefs,"²⁷ as lying does, but instead distribute splinters of nonsense that contaminate the assemblage of conventions and assumptions that produces the appearance of an intelligible, orderly world. To this extent, the text that follows, the text that reviews their work, becomes a part of their hyperstitions. What I write about their work constitutes an aspect of the very bullshit that I am studying. Thus, the very words that I have written and which you are now reading circulate a misrepresentation so that more than explaining their bullshit, it stirs it.

((Metareferentiality, metamusic, and hypermusic

If we understand Music as a discursive formation, then in a sense it is always already a kind of *fictum*, a falsehood, for its expression as "art" entails an awareness of its "artifice," its relation to a "real" as a fiction, a "quasi-real." Like all fictions, it should be subject to various meta-processes, processes that spur "an awareness of the medial status of the work or system under consideration."²⁸ However, a musical *fictum*, as opposed to a *fictio* whose metareferentiality is accomplished solely by producing an awareness of the sense of mediality, is subject to metareferential reflection not only when its artifice is made apparent but when it elicits a *comparison* to a reality that it is (supposedly) not, as happens with musical works that trigger a response like: "That's not music!" This statement (negatively) describes a musical *fictum*. It expresses a two-fold metareference

²⁷ Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, 51.

²⁸ Werner Wolf, "Metafiction and Metamusic: Exploring the Limits of Metareference," in *Self-Reference in the Media*, ed. Winifried Nöth and Nina Bishar (Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007), 307.

in that saying something is “not music” draws attention to the specific behaviour of the sonic medium while at the same time brings to mind the relationship that this medium is supposed to have with reality—namely, that music is an artifice and what is being heard as “not music” is not complying with the fictionality, the artificiality, that music is supposed to adhere to. That said, there is a greater consequence to draw from this kind of meta-multiple. In declaring something to be “not music,” and thereby calling attention to the medium and producing a conceptual awareness of the kind that structures the difference between “fiction” and “reality,” one is remaindering something whose ontological and epistemological status is radically indeterminate. If not Music, not a musical artifice, then what is “it” that remains? If “it” is not acting as an agent through which processes of expression and communication can take place (i.e. medium), then “it” is more matter than idea. And if “it” is not, so to speak, feigning a world of impending death such as Mahler’s 9th does, then “it” is not even imaginary. Paradoxically then, “it,” this “unmusic,” this acoustic matter impinging on my time and space, is something of a black hole and much closer to music as such than Chopin’s *Nocturnes* could ever hope to be.

Unmusic, a “something” on just the other side of discourse, is a species of metamusic in the sense of its being *ulterior* to Music. This departs slightly from the idea of metamusic as a practice analogous to metafiction, for this modified definition of metamusic as unmusic is characterized more by a failure than by an explicit reflexivity. While an understanding of metamusic that is analogous to metafiction typifies the operations of a signifying practice that “elicits a *cognitive process or reflection* on itself, on other elements of the system or on the system as a whole,”²⁹ the sense of metamusic that I am making is based on a failure to be musical (to act as an expressive acoustic medium) and to be Music (to be an object of contemplation, exchange, or study). Thus, what I am calling “unmusic” is a failed event. And as sociologist Stewart notes, a failed event is nonsense. “Like a ‘fiasco,’” writes Stewart, “nonsense is a failed event, an event without proper consequences.”³⁰ “Not-being-musical” (or if

²⁹ Ibid., 305.

³⁰ Stewart, *Nonsense*, 4.

you're of the avant-garde persuasion, "not-being –'anti-musical'") is a fiasco to the listener who expects to hear sounds behaving musically, behaving as Music (or the inverse). Yet, as I'm suggesting, an event with "improper" consequences is an event nevertheless: a failed event is still and event failing. While the failed event may not comply with the conventions or context in which it is situated, even if those conventions stipulate the fictionality (artificiality) of what the event expresses, it still has effects, and these effects impinge on and influence the sense of other events despite its being cut out of the discourse that articulates the sense proper to the situation (being accomplished by and through the discourse). As such, the effects that express the sense of the fiasco that this "unmusic" is are effects of a certain failure.

But this leaves a question about how we can even study "unmusic," for how does one stage a fiasco? How does one intentionally fail? In other words, how does one make unmusic? The short and paradoxical answer is that you *unmake* it. The long and much more circuitous answer, which requires a major detour through the way in which meaning in music and language is generated, and how the category of Music can only be understood as a discursive construct such that it is impossible to think of Music apart from language, is that you *fake* it. While this is perhaps not a very satisfying answer, I'd suggest that satisfaction is already out of step with failure, for failure isn't about satisfaction but quite the opposite. Failure is about an engagement with the potential of potential rather than a satisfaction of a potential's ideal. Thus to fake failure is and is not to fail to fail, for failing to fail is a success of sorts whose accomplishment is itself a type of failure (which is a success that is a failure...). And as the previous sentence demonstrates with its convoluted (though mercifully curtailed) recursive logic, to fail is to make nonsense, and to make nonsense is to traffic in contradictions, which is, in a sense, to unmake sense.

This redoubling of contradictions is in fact close to Adorno's formulation of modern art, which he believes is fated to the task of expressing its alienation from the spirit of its time, to express its incapacity to adequately express itself. However, unlike the Sisyphean predicament that Adorno ascribes to modern art, unmusic finds some traction in its quandary, for being nonsense relieves its

occurrence from being “art.” But, of course, the cessation of art is something that can only be accomplished when art disappears into the occasion of its own excess. And that occasion, according to Baudrillard, has already happened. In fact, “art” disappeared a while back (When? Sometime in the 1970s, probably when information technologies were electrified and became the dominant way in which Western culture mediated its self-expressions), and its sublimation into the everyday order of simulation was overlooked.³¹ Too busy watching reruns of *I Dream of Jeannie* or *Bewitched* I suppose. What is called “art” now is itself a continuous rerun, a rerun of the image of its own disappearance.³² But said another way, which I’m sure some would rather it be said (though it makes no difference), “art” is everywhere one and the same with the image of the everyday, if not actually, then potentially. Under these circumstances, because art and the reality that is supposed to set off its aesthetic properties have lost their operational difference, unmusic is everywhere Music is not. However, according to the logic of simulation, Music is everywhere so unmusic is nowhere. Yet being everywhere is the same as being nowhere, therefore Music is nowhere, which makes unmusic everywhere. But this is hyperreality and hyperreality trucks no difference between the real and the unreal (artifice), the musical and unmusical. Thus unmusic eschews Adorno’s dialectical impasse to the extent that it is total nonsense, a byproduct of the hyperreal that supervenes a discourse of contradictions and paradoxes where everything is coming up signs.

In this sense it would be better to call unmusic h/Hypermusic, for the failure that expresses a nonsensical unmusic, is not outside of discourse so much as it radicalizes the powers of discourse. This process of failure would be an instance of what theorist and music critic Mark Fisher calls the “intense amplification of the processes of immanentization.”³³ That is, the failure which constitutes

³¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993).

³² Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, trans. Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005).

³³ Mark Fisher, “Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1999), <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/FC4s7.htm> [accessed October 2012].

h/Hypermusic does not mark a breach in discourse but a doubling over of it that subtracts the need for, and indeed, the possibility of adding any supplementary dimensions—like sound—to its expressions.

h/Hypermusic is therefore no less discursively constituted than Music is. However, the discourse of Music circulates a respect for a simulated difference between real and artifice, sound and symbol, in a way that the discourse of h/Hypermusic does not. And so, it is this “not” around which h/Hypermusic revolves, a not that folds discourse back on itself making a knot that threads the nonsense of not-Music through the sense of Music.

In essence, h/Hypermusic subsists *here*, between and among these words and your reading them, as the expression of a discourse whose mimetic devices are not just simulations—as DeLillo’s photographed barn is in *White Noise*—but theories of simulation. In other words, the map no longer precedes the territory: the manual on map-making now precedes the map that precedes the territory. As this means “~~w~~e” are all only fictions, h/Hypermusic, too, is revealed as just another fiction, but a certain kind of “theory-fiction” born of an insight into the depths of reflexivity, or as Fisher describes, the registering of a “cybernetic account of subjectivity, a sense that the self can no longer be properly distinguished from the multiplicity of circuits that traverse it.”³⁴ h/Hypermusic and the nonsense that it disseminates (and vice-versa) is therefore an expression of my “psychedelic giddiness” that results not, as Baudrillard suggests, “from multiple or successive connections and disconnections,”³⁵ but from the coincident hallucinogenic conviction that the schizonoia of hyperreality induces in me.

(((Grúpat and pseudonymity

But I’m not the only one who feels this way. Take for instance the work of Irish composer and artist Jennifer Walshe. In an interview with James Saunders, Walshe describes the varieties of sounds that

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 162.

she likes to work with. In addition to what she describes as “dirty” sounds, biographically significant sounds, sounds that are byproducts of physical situations, and sensuously articulate sounds, are sounds that she says are “at times imaginary, sounds which function as conceptual descriptions”³⁶—unreal sounds. Walshe continues:

The performer, for example, might be required to imagine the inside of their body as the interior of a mountain full of mines, feel the blood moving through their veins as tiny carts carrying diamonds to and fro through a tunnel system, and then tip these tiny imaginary diamonds into their lungs to prepare for creating a sound. The audience of course can’t “see” the performer creating blasts of white light in their lungs to pulverize the diamonds they just tipped into them. But my intention is that all this preparation and delicate attention means that when the performer emits a vocal sound which atomizes the diamond dust, creating a crystalline mist through the air, there’s a quality to the sound which comes from these imaginings.³⁷

Although Walshe is describing the details of a specific imaginative exercise, the fictional dimension of finding her way into a sound underwrites the principle of her imaginary South Dublin arts collective Grúpat “whose roots can be traced to 1999, when Bulletin M, The Parks Service, Turf Boon, and other artists met at a rave at the Hellfire Club on Montpelier Hill, in the Dublin Mountains.”³⁸ Grúpat, to put it simply, is a project in which Walshe acts as commissioner and curator for a group of fictional composer-artists whose identities and aesthetic sensibilities she adopts and performs. By developing elaborate backstories and planting expressions of her pseudonyms in different media, such as the May 2006 review in *The Wire* for a work by Grúpat member, The Parks Service, penned by Walshe under the

³⁶ Jennifer Walshe, Interview, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music*, ed. James Saunders (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 344.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ A history of Grúpat can be found on Ireland’s Contemporary Music Centre website and is attributed to Stuart Fresh. This entry, however, was almost certainly written by Walshe and is an example of the way Walshe exploits the scattering potential of various media that in turn generates reality-effects. See Stuart Fresh, “A Short History of Grúpat,” <http://www.cmc.ie/articles/article1799.html> [accessed October 2012].

name "Jonathan Vanns," and by performing a piece by another Grúpat member, Ukeoirn O'Connor, whom Walshe "commissioned" for the 2007 Kilkenny Arts Festival (which was subsequently reviewed in *The Irish Times* on 21 August 2007), Walshe produces her own kind of hyper(fictional) music that amplifies and harnesses the immanence of the hyperreal. In addition to generating an excess of aesthetic objects and events (and perhaps more interestingly), by commissioning, installing, and performing works that she created under the names of "Ukeoirn O'Connor," "Turf Boon," and "Flor Hartigan" (among others), but more significantly, by documenting, reviewing, and giving interviews about these, Walshe repeats the gestures and logics of the contemporary art world that make artworks as obscure as hers are, real. In doing this she not only multiplies her persona and aesthetic referents, she replicates the logic of hyperreality.

It could be argued, however, that because it's now known that Walshe herself is responsible for realizing the different projects imagined by Grúpat, she loses something of the hyper-ness of her/their work. From the perspective of a reality that still respects the issues and orders of representation, it is true; she does lose that liquid purpose which dissolves the cords of intention that bind the identities of Grúpat to her. In a sense, her actualizing the h/Hypermusic of Ukeoirn O'Connor or Turf Boon converts it into just "music." In a world where one knows that it is Walshe who is Grúpat, to keep Ukeoirn O'Connor's or Turf Boon's work h/Hypermusic would require her, paradoxically, to have *not* realized the music, to leave it entirely virtual. But from the perspective of hyperreality, which is where Walshe would like us to dwell, there is no meaningful difference or delay between the fictional and the real, a point that is echoed by Fisher in an example he makes in drawing attention to the way the film *Toy Story* (1995), a film about fictional toys, and the toys of the toys in *Toy Story*, are released simultaneously so that "the film functions as an advertisement for the toys, which function as an advertisement for it, in an ever-tightening spiral. The fictional is immediately real, in the most palpable sense: it can be bought."³⁹ In hyperreality, Walshe, Grúpat, and the Music are given together in an

³⁹ Fisher, "Flatline Constructs," <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/FC4s7.htm> [accessed October 2012].

a-chronistic and diffracted media-time that, rather than attenuate the reality of the art and these figures, makes them abstract facets of the same hyperreal plane.

A question then: What does the music of Turf Boon, Flor Hartigan, and Ukeoirn O'Connor sound like?⁴⁰ Or for that matter, what does Jennifer Walshe's music sound like? It's hard to say, for even if one could tell the different musics apart from one another, to which identity should one ascribe it? Walshe does. But if she can shuffle these fictions around why can't we? More importantly, we might ask whether it matters what the Music sounds like. The splendid art catalogue that I'm gazing at, published by The Project Arts Centre in Dublin, with its velvet-black cover adorned in monochromatic doodles, cradling high-gloss color photos of installations, score excerpts, reviews, post-cards, as well as the requisite copyright notice(s) and catalogue essay by a legit scholar,⁴¹ suggest that maybe it hardly matters. That I'm writing about Boon-Hartigan-O'Connor-Walshe seems to be what matters, or at least writing about this figment and whether it matters whether the sound of the music matters seems to matter just as much as the putative music does. For Paul Mann, who argues that radical art lives on the discourse of its own death, all of our actions, expressions and desires are occasions that maintain what he calls the "white economy of discourse."⁴² It matters only that words and ideas about art are exchanged. That is to say, Grúpat is as real and as meaningful as Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkühn is insofar as the respective fictional quantities of each excite (incite) discourse in a bid to capture some kind of difference—a white economy's currency of exchange. And counting the words up to this point I would say that Grúpat is about...5700 words real and meaningful.

* * *

But Walshe's Grúpat is not unique in its pseudonymous venture. The history of literature is extremely familiar with the *nom de plume*, and

⁴⁰ You can find out by visiting: <http://www.myspace.com/ukeoirnoconnor>, and <http://www.myspace.com/turfboon>.

⁴¹ Bob Gilmore, Lecturer in music at Brunel University.

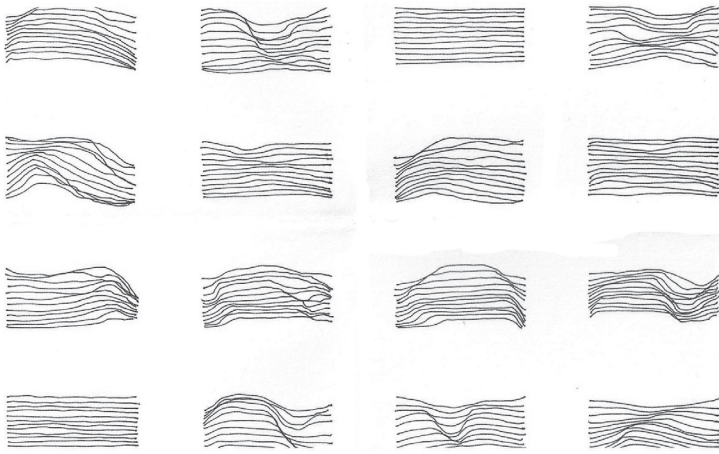
⁴² Paul Mann, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 141.

[illegible]

Turf Boon, from score for *Community Choir* (2002–present). Courtesy Jennifer Walshe

The image displays a musical score for 'Three Songs' by Jennifer Walshe. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It begins with a piano (p) dynamic and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations, including notes, rests, and fingerings. There are three landscape photographs integrated into the score, each with an abstract line drawing of a face overlaid. The first photograph is on the left, the second in the middle, and the third on the right. The score also includes a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The score ends with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The score is written in a style that is both abstract and expressive, with a focus on the relationship between the music and the visual elements.

Ukeoirn O'Connor, from score for *Three Songs* (2007). Courtesy Jennifer Walshe



Flor Hartigan, from score for *Conturador* (2007). Courtesy Jennifer Walshe

in our media-saturated society it is de rigueur for anyone with a degree of electronic literacy to have at least one digital persona whose informational identity substitutes more and more for a fleshy individuality.⁴³ But what makes Grúpat different and ultimately effective is not its

⁴³ Well known pseudonyms in literature are: Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson), George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair), and Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens). However, the Portuguese poet and writer Fernando Pessoa is perhaps the most interesting case, for his incredibly rich body of work was written under multiple “heteronyms,” a term he preferred for the way it characterized how names name distinct attributes that express different aspects of reality rather than merely act as aliases. Richard Zenith suggests that Pessoa had as many as seventy-two heteronyms; however, Pessoa’s most important personae were Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos, and Ricardo Reis.[†] A more recent but inverted example of pseudonymic identity is “Luther Blissett Project.” Blissett is the name of a 1980s Afro-Caribbean British footballer that in the summer of 1994 was adopted by European artists/activists/pranksters as an identity of “open reputation” under which a variety of critical hoaxes were carried out, for example, the 1998–99 “Darko Maver” performance. This “performance” is typically taken to be an elaborate manipulation of the culture industry by the art group 0100101110101101.ORG who fabricated an identity and artwork that they attributed to the fictional Serbian artist named Darko Maver. Through the proliferation of forged documents, including press releases, self-authored theorization of Maver’s artworks, news of the artist’s imprisonment, and the exhibition of images of Maver’s work at the 1999 Venice Biennale, the “Darko Maver” ruse demonstrates the mythopoeic potential of media environments, and at the same time, exposes the perviousness of identity, fact, and sense.[‡]

pseudonymity but the fact that Walshe executes it in the realm of Western art music, a realm conspicuously hostile to pseudonymity, for the obfuscation of identity intimates an anonymity that brings its aesthetic expressions into unsettling proximity with “folk” and oral traditions that either have no concept of music as “art” or dilute the individual signature that is accomplice to the Western sense of art in a collective bath of idiosyncrasies. Furthermore, Walshe makes the fiction of Grúpat plausible by exploiting the way media superficialities both distort the verity of the reality they report on and circulate this distortion as a reality to effect a feedback relationship between the orders of fiction and the real. As such, Grúpat approaches the condition of what Fisher calls “hyperfiction,” a situation where “what is crucial is not the *representation* of reality, but the feedback between fiction and the Real.”⁴⁴ The circularity between Grúpat as an enigmatic Irish art collective who produce works that Walshe commissions-curates-performs-writes about elaborates the way contemporary culture’s “fictional systems...emerge together, in a loop,” so that “where once there was a serial trajectory [of concerts, recordings, reviews, and critical essays] now [concerts, recordings, reviews, and critical essays] are issued simultaneously.”⁴⁵ Like media distortion, Walshe’s self-authored pseudonymous reviews of Grúpat works (which she performs/exhibits) short-circuit the difference between fiction and reality and so subtract some of the supplementary dimensions that would falsify the experience. However, because Walshe still has a special role in telling Grúpat’s story—she is the author who transcends its fiction—Grúpat never quite rises above the condition of metafiction.

The American composer Karen Eliot, on the other hand, is just such a hyperfiction,⁴⁶ for neither the story nor the author plays any special role in the telling of her works. Yet, the author that I am referring to is not exactly “Karen Eliot,” and the story is only apparently hers. In

[†] Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Richard Zenith (London: Penguin Classics, 2002).

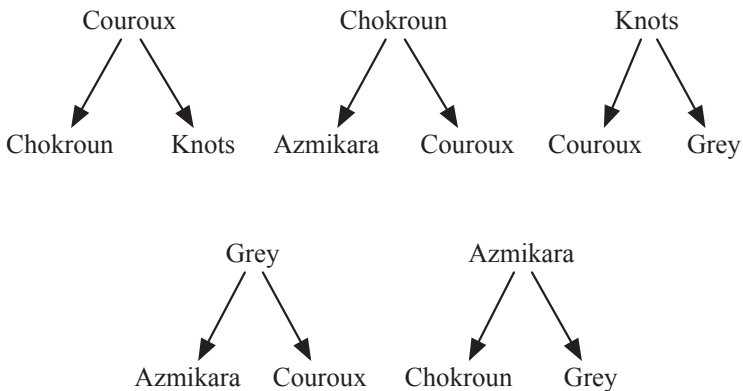
[‡] See http://0100101110101101.org/home/darko_maver/index.html for more details.

⁴⁴ Fisher, “Flatline Constructs,” <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/FC4s7.htm> [accessed October 2012].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The concepts in the music are available in the writing, each expression an advertisement for the other.

fact, Karen Eliot is a multiple-use name⁴⁷ that composers and artists David Chokroun, Aydem Azmikara, Marc Couroux, Engram Knots, and Vanessa Grey use to gather the figments of their collective imagination under one appellation. Unlike Grúpat, which is a fiction that Walshe created to express the schizonoia of her artistic interests,⁴⁸ “Eliot” belongs to nobody and is no *one*. Sometimes referred to as an “open identity,” multiple-use names like Karen Eliot are always several, and, according to culture critic Stuart Home, often “connected to radical theories of play [where] the idea is to create an ‘open situation’ for which no one in particular is responsible.”⁴⁹ In this case, “Karen Eliot” (the collective) is ir-responsible for the way her name functions as a point through which each of these five composers’ identities pass. That is, these composers use each others’ names when “declaring” the non-pseudonymous authorship of a work; however, they do so according to a scheme whereby there will always be at least two possible attributors and so no way of determining who actually wrote the work. The scheme looks something like this



⁴⁷ Multiple-use names are what art critic Stewart Home defines as “‘tags’ that the avant-garde of the seventies and eighties proposed for serial use” (<http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/sp/multi.htm>) [accessed October 2012]. Ideally, anyone can adopt a multiple-use name for some artistic and/or subversive purpose.

⁴⁸ Though largely created by Walshe, in an interview in *The Wire* 321, she states that she has since invited individuals who’ve discovered what Grúpat is (what she was up to) to participate and collaborate in the project.

⁴⁹ Stuart Home, “Multiple Names.” <http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/sp/multi.htm> [accessed October 2012].

but may be more easily represented by this diagramme:



So, for example, as specified by this scheme, either David Chokroun or Engram Knots will have penned a piece by “Karen Eliot” that is attributed to Marc Couroux. Karen Eliot functions here as a pivot on which these composers appropriate each other’s identity by writing, or writing about, compositions that the other(s) has (have) written under the pseudonym of Eliot. We never know who the author is as he or she is always twice removed from the assignation of the work. In a way, this many-to-one inversion of the one-to-many Grúpat complex is not anti-identity but *ante*-identity. While corrupting the logic of signatures that establishes legible hierarchies of persona it nonetheless continues to traverse between levels of abstraction that permit one to communicate a sense of intention and agency that typically locates an identity. Only in this case intention and agency are always skewed and out of joint.

This project has similar effects to Grúpat in terms of the way it confuses the restrictions that both define and delimit individual identity. However, Eliot is more mangy and mongrel in character than Grúpat is, for as noted, Eliot’s five “collaborators” are always making it both unclear who has written what as “Eliot,” and changing details, such as biographical particulars, that are usually considered

indispensible in securing the signature of an individual. For example, the fabricated pedigrees that Eliot is given by her members, who tend to portray her as an American composer working in the late twentieth century under the influence of Futurism, Dada, Fluxus, and Punk, are often switched around or reconfigured to reflect the situation in which “she” participates. For instance, the biographical details of “Eliot” that appear in a review written by David Chokroun, composer and artistic director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Musical Research, of Seattle-based Vanessa Grey’s Muzak-opera *Stimulus Progression* (2004)—an opera in which performers follow a group of shoppers through a mall with dictaphones playing a prerecorded performance of their instrumental part—tells us when comparing Grey’s work to Eliot’s, that the latter is a transgender who served as a reserve in the national guard during the early 1990s while studying composition privately with Barbara Monk Feldman in Santa Fe. However, another description of Eliot appears in a program note for a piano solo attributed to Grey, who submitted the work to a women composers’ competition—a work that asks the pianist to suspend two 18-inch concert marching cymbals millimeters above piano strings for as long as possible—noting that Eliot hails from Santa Fe and that it was Barbara Monk Feldman who studied with *her* before she (Eliot) took a job in Seattle doing arrangements and orchestrations for MUZAK Inc. In contrast to Grúpat, whose internal aesthetic dissonances and fictional reality become conceptually harmonized and somewhat spoiled by Walshe’s consistent presence and relation to the group,⁵⁰ the collective nature and schematic indirection of “Karen Eliot” circulates contradictions and inconsistencies in a way that keeps doubt and the status of her reality in play.

(((Symptoms, syndromes, and hyperfiction

It would seem that the perplexity generated by Eliot’s character would dissolve her persona into a field of nonsense. But as a form

⁵⁰ Not to mention that a feature story on her play with multiple identities in the November 2010 *The Wire* gave the game away. See Phillip Clark, “Misshapen identities,” *The Wire*, November 2010.

of radical play her hyperfiction does not dissolve so much as the operational difference between fiction and reality does. As Fisher notes, hyperfiction does not participate in the kind of “imploded transcendence” that constitutes metafiction and its “interminable process by which supplementary dimensions are continually being produced but are immediately and of necessity themselves obsolesced at the very moment of their production.”⁵¹ Instead, hyperfiction elaborates processes “in which the product of any process is also one of its founding presuppositions.”⁵² Agrippa’s Trilemma writ large.⁵³ As hyperfiction, Karen Eliot evades the “tangled hierarchy”⁵⁴ of metafiction because her name is constantly shuffled with the proper names of her collaborators to the point where even she proposes that Chokroun, Azmikara, Couroux, Parks, and Grey are *her* fabulations: “*I’m a knot, nothing but a point! In fact, I’m a pointless space through which other voices pass.*”⁵⁵ Neither the chicken nor the egg precedes the other; each is a relational term describing the path of a strange loop or the chiral symmetry—“handedness”—of poultry. Names are circular and relative in hyperfiction so that “Eliot” and “Couroux,” for example, are the handednesses of an event the way “Alice” and the “Queen” are in the chess-event of *Through the Looking Glass*. And insofar as these names are constantly being exchanged—Chokroun becomes Eliot becomes Couroux, *etcetera*—none receives the actions of things that grounds the drama of the event. Indeed, as Deleuze notes, this is what happens to Alice in her wonderland adventures:

⁵¹ Fisher, “Flatline Constructs,” <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/FC4s3.htm> [accessed October 2012]. Fisher calls this condition of excessive meta-izing “Metanoia.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Agrippa’s Trilemma is the Greek sceptic’s “conclusion” that it is impossible to prove any truth, for we have either a circular argument in which the premise and conclusion support each other, a regressive argument which entails that each proof requires another proof, or an axiomatic argument that acts on unproven precepts. Of course the radical form of this trilemma would include its own position of this impossible situation in its formula.

⁵⁴ This is Douglas Hofstadter’s term for the way recursive processes search for supplementary dimensions to ground their propositions. See Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

⁵⁵ eldritch Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and The Aesthetics of Failure* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 218.

The loss of the proper name is the adventure which is repeated throughout all of Alice's adventures. For the proper or singular name is guaranteed by the permanence of *savoir*. The latter is embodied in general names designating pauses and rests, in substantives and adjectives, with which the proper name maintains a constant connection. Thus the personal self requires God and the world in general. But when substantives and adjectives begin to dissolve, when the names of pause and rest are carried away by the verbs of pure becoming and slide into the language of events [as they do in the activity of wordplay], all identity disappears from the self, the world, and God.⁵⁶

By constantly swapping proper names, the field of singular symptoms that gather under the designation of a syndrome lose their sense, for a proper name marks a gathering point in a structure of coincidence—the “syndrome” of an event—between a multiplicity of effects that otherwise remain impassive and inexpressive. Only pawns can express the event of promotion. And when all pawns become queens, chess becomes checkers. The uncertainty that arises in shuffling proper names is not alien to the processes which naming names, but, argues Deleuze, is “an objective structure of the event itself.”⁵⁷ For example, the circulation of symptoms within a body give no sense of an illness until they are parsed and parroted as a syndrome that is designated by the proper name of the clinician who is proxy for the practice and accomplishments of “medicine,” the supplementary dimension of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease. And insofar as this uncertainty “moves in two directions at once,” where symptoms become symptoms with reference to a syndrome that only becomes a syndrome with reference to symptoms, “it fragments the subject following this double direction.”⁵⁸ Shuffling the identity of “Karen Eliot” does not exhibit or critique the framing structures that metafiction believes in and suffers from; instead, “Eliot” simply makes a continuous effort

⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

to connect a multiplicity of effects that a proper name pinches with other multiplicities, such as “the subprime mortgage crisis” or the excessively multiple “war on terror.” In a sense “Karen Eliot”—the project—is like Lévi-Strauss’ “floating signifier,” an expression that is “in itself void of sense and thus susceptible of taking on any sense.”⁵⁹ Unlike Grúpat, “Karen Eliot” has no fixed referent, no identifiable set of symptoms apart from the nonsense that she circulates, a nonsense Deleuze notes, with reference to the differential play that underwrites the sensical spatium which structuralism tried to elaborate, “has no particular sense, but is opposed to the absence of sense rather than to the sense that it produces in excess.”⁶⁰ In a way, “Karen Eliot” is more like what Deleuze calls an esoteric word, words such as “snark,” or “fruminous,” or even “it.” For without “denot[ing] real objects, manifest[ing] the beliefs and desires of real persons, or signify[ing] meaningful concepts,”⁶¹ Eliot conveys the open sense of nothing in particular that in turn demands a continuous apprenticeship in the fundamental exercise of sense.

Eliot’s esoteric apprenticeship in (non)sense is thus exemplified in the way she thematizes her nonsense as a hyperfiction that writes itself into being as someone suffering from depersonalization disorder (DPD).⁶² Eliot, who is several, describes her nonsense in the prolegomena to her *The Pinocchio Syndrome* by writing that she suffers recurring episodes of feeling as though she is completely artificial or invented. “There are times,” she writes, “where I feel to be little more than the empty spaces between the words you’re reading, which is to say that I am as much and as little as a blank page.”⁶³ Having read American philosopher Kendall Walton’s self-help book *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990) while in grad school at the

⁵⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Introduction à l’oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,” in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1950), 48–9; quoted in Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 50.

⁶⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 71.

⁶¹ Charles Stivale, *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 68.

⁶² The DSM-IV defines depersonalization disorder as a condition that can be identified by symptoms such as: “feelings of unreality, that your body does not belong to you, or that you are constantly in a dreamlike state.” See <http://allpsych.com/disorders/dissociative/depersonalization.html>.

⁶³ Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense*, 220.

University of Michigan, a work which argues that art is an elaborate game of make believe and that the world and objects (rules and things) adumbrated by fictional statements—propositions that are “to be *imagined* to be true”⁶⁴—are to be taken as props that direct and organize our affective and emotional investment in an imagined reality, Eliot developed a sophisticated strategy for coping with her condition. She writes, “I write fictions, what others might call little ‘reality machines,’ about music that I have not in fact written or listened to.”⁶⁵ From her perspective as a work of fiction herself, “reality machines” are props that make her real, or as she puts it, “at the very least they make everything as a fictional as I am.”⁶⁶ That is, Eliot’s fictions are not only like Walton’s props, wherein the act of saying “Say this is that” marks the event around which sense can be made of play, but resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s abstract machines in that her “sayings” place “variables of content and expression in continuity,”⁶⁷ which is to say, in metaphysical-speak, that her fictions have a way of binding differences and making them resonate to produce a temporary reality zone or assemblage of sincerity. But Eliot’s “reality machines” are actually no different from the more familiar notion of “discourse,” which also corrals difference into consistent realities, except that her realities spin out of musical props, and, for the most part, she keeps her fascism to herself.

While Eliot’s form of “therapy” may be somewhat deluded, what is interesting about her fictions is that they take on many different styles and are often self-reflexive interrogations on the constellation of voices that her proper name circulates. These machinic props may take the shape of a concert program note (or may simply refer to biographical notes as above), conventional short stories, newspaper articles, blog entries, a series of emails, or even book chapters. Some of the more curious machines, however, are those that resemble JG Ballard’s

⁶⁴ Kendall Walton, “Précis of Mimesis as Make-Believe,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51, no. 2 (1991): 380. See also Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁶⁵ Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense*, 221

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 511.

"invisible literature," writings that simulate the canon-less history of classified ads, car manuals, telephone books, and weather reports. "Her" work, *In a Sedimental Mood* (2010), for example, is like a compilation of classified ads about a work that explores how, under certain conditions, perception might be unhinged from its morphological habits to lose track of its expressions of attention and distraction. This prop, however, also alludes to a tendency in contemporary art to exemplify the paradoxical sense of stasis and unfinishedness that prolonged duration evokes, a sense that art theorist Terry Smith identifies as "the taking up of a viewer's time before the artwork provides enough information about itself for its point to become apparent."⁶⁸

(((In a Sedimental Mood

This unauthorized versioning of Eliot's fictionalizations (apparently) by Toronto intermedia artist Marc Couroux, is Eliot's machine (which is Couroux's fiction (which is our discourse)) describing a kaleidoscopic reality composed of multiple surfaces bleeding into each other's ground and staining each other's figures. *In a Sedimental Mood*, like any good piece of fiction, draws a map to its world. It does this by evoking the affects coded through musical works of 1960s and 1970s popular culture as noted in the ad where Eliot describes the stylistic constraints of the instrumental voices, "Bacharach chordal progressions, Ornette-Prime-Time perpetually dithering bass, static single guitar lines (*Cinnamon Girl* cantus firmus), light virtuosic Hammond organ (space-age pop), arch-pseudo-Baroque harpsichord (late 1960s movie soundtracks)." Essentially, Eliot is exploiting what Muzak "audio architects" refer to as a song's "topology"—"the cultural and temporal associations that it [the song] carries with it, like a hidden refrain"⁶⁹—to create a polyphony of affects that articulate the byzantine nature of late-capitalist culture's polytemporality,

⁶⁸ Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), 194.

⁶⁹ David Owen, "The Soundtrack of Your Life," *The New Yorker*, 10 April 2006, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/04/10/060410fa_fact#ixzz16vQqbKnW [accessed October 2012].