

The noise in the noise: micro-perception as affective disruption to listening and the body.

Sounds...dematerialize the substance of things they resounded and extend their own patterns...they drift off things and link up with one another¹.

1. Introduction: vibrational symbiosis

The pitcher plant and the wasp have come to an arrangement: when the wasp enters the plant's flower and buzzes at a specific pitch (880 KHz) the stamen release their pollen in an emphatic burst of rhythmic (vibrational) sympathy. No other pitch will do, the flower is indifferent to all other notes. It waits; it *listens*, attentively, for the wasp's particular calling card.

And yet... This is a plant – it has no ears, no brain. How is it that it listens, with what does it hear, how does it pay attention? And, one must ponder, how is it that it knows what it hears when it has no brain to perceive with? Perhaps, just as the brittlestar has no eyes yet is all eyes², it is all ears – literally – its whole surface attuned to the potential of a frequency, sensitive to the particular oscillations of one vibrational speed for which it has an appetite.

The dance of the pitcher plant and wasp hints at the micro-perceptive potential enriching heard sounds – the transversal agency of sound-as-vibrational force coursing through ecologies at pre-subjective, pre-content and pre-contextual levels, enveloping all in resonance: the vibrational diffraction of enmeshed relational difference³. At this affective level, interactions – immanent relations – with sounds are not limited to the ear and the brain but stretch across the entire surfaces of bodies attuned to the sensations of their particular ecologies, a 'listening' independent of cognitive capacities and body boundaries. Sound, this strange pitcher-wasp symbiotic relation seems to indicate, contains, or is contained within, sonic excess⁴: a silent, contagious life as force and as potential force, enveloping all in the ecology of the unheard.

This paper then attempts to consider some of the affective potential of sound as creative disruption, its micro-perceptive productions of and with bodies through vibrational diffractions: its potential as parasitic relation to activate change.

2. Micro-perception

¹ Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 99.

² Its calcite structure focuses light directly onto bundles of nerve endings, thus its whole surface functions as a multiple, 360 degree eye. It too has no 'brain' with which to perceive such sensations, yet responds to light. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2007), 369-384

³ Resonance, as Deleuze defines it, is the 'combat of energies' of forces confronting each other. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. (Cornwall: MPG Books, 2002), 65-68.

⁴ Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear*. (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2010), 9.

Micro-perception, as it will be discussed in this paper, is not understood as being merely smaller or unrecognized perceptions – though the physical presence of the unheard begins to indicate some of the potential of micro-perception in relation to sound – but rather, as Massumi asserts, as ‘perception of a qualitatively different kind’⁵. It is, he explains, pitched at the level of affect, ‘hitting’ the body, not with a perceivable content but as a noise or interruption, perceived only as this interruption and transition, thus it is a ‘purely affective re-beginning of the world’⁶. Affect is here a primary creative force⁷, that is, Fristch argues, it is the ‘dynamic unity’ of an event as it is also its extension or excess: ‘pre-personal, pre-individual and non-conscious but real in so far as it offers potential for action’⁸. As such, he argues, affect questions easy distinctions between event, subject and field⁹. It is, Bertelsen and Murphie write, a transitive force that connects and remains in excess of its effects, retaining the capacity to effect (its virtual dimensions or plane) as it moves cross-temporally towards the future¹⁰.

Micro-perceptive sound then might be seen to offer potential as a transductive force, disrupting boundaries as it drives creativity through differential resonance/connection. Understanding the act of hearing as one of transduction potentially alters our whole conception of the act. We do not even, one might argue, ‘hear’ the sound per se – rather, the sound waves activate a sympathetic resonance in the mechanisms of the ear, which in turn are transduced into electronic pulses in the nerves and then to neural firings in the brain. This suggests that the act of hearing is intensive – the sound in the environment is a prehension in Whitehead’s terms, but the actual hearing-event is self-contained, self-actualized in a separate event that is internally driven and satisfied¹¹. In this sense sound does not pass into the body as such, but there occurs a sympathetic resonance between the two systems.

Interlude: Artaud’s scream

‘The scream is the very sublimation of speech into the body.’¹²

⁵ Brian Massumi, in Brian Massumi and Joel McKim. "Of Microperception and Micropolitics, 4.

⁶ Ibid, 5. As a sound pulse in the singular hits a surface, a shock that in itself cannot be understood as sound, which exists only in the felt interval/rhythm or difference between pulses.

⁷ That is, it is seen in a process-based understanding of the universe as existing prior to, and bringing into existence, object and subjects and relations between such entities, which arise out of the play of forces. This has a basis both within ‘process’ rather than existential philosophies and within non-Newtonian (quantum) physics. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. (New York: The free press), 1978, and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, for clear examples of process based approaches from the perspective of philosophical and quantum physics respectively.

⁸ Johan Fristch, "Understanding Affective Engagement as a Resource in Interactive Design." In *Nordic design conference*. Oslo: Nordes, 2009, 5.

⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰ Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie. "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers", 140, 145.

¹¹ Deleuze here uses the example of a needle in the thigh: the pain felt is not the needle, but the actions of the nerve endings in the flesh. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 96. In this, as Whitehead states, an entity is responsible for its own ‘satisfaction’ or concrescence, even as it draws prehensively on its relation to other entities. A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 126, 153-156, 236-8.

¹² Alan S. Weiss, "Radio, Death and the Devil: Artaud's Pour En Fin Avec Le Judgement De Deiu." In *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*, edited by Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead. (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1992), 288-289.

Artaud's radio play *To be done with the judgment of God* pierces and vibrates the listener with wild screams and glossolia¹³ that can never be confused for nor contained within representational meanings. But more than this: the words themselves - sung, shouted, agonized and whispered – are in themselves so charged with affective power as to 'illuminate the entire nervous system'¹⁴, as forms (bodies and meanings of words) become again force. The play's broadcast is an act of transduction as its transmission disperses the actors' bodies through the airwaves¹⁵ as disruptive vibrations. Artaud incites this ability of sound to transverse the body, turn it inside out, to make organs of its surfaces, to empty its interior of meaning: Artaud-the-chemist¹⁶ uses 'radio magnetism as a counter shock to achieve...the destruction of bodily hierarchies through vibrations'¹⁷.

Artaud's scream is made a 'physical substance in space'¹⁸, a disruptive vibrational force that encapsulates his 'vast project of physical transformation'¹⁹. Broadcast, it seeks to invade the sanctity of the listener's home and body. But the scream is transmitted not just in the literal scream that punctuates the radio play, but also saturates every sound of the event, as micro-perceptible affect coursing through and tearing open bodies it encounters. It proposes to fold out the listener's body, makes their whole surface an organ that is invited to resonate in sympathy with the a-perceivable force of the sounds.

The problem Artaud addresses through his particular use of language/vocalization is one of how to extend the tension of contrast of the micro-perceptive without providing resolution – to suspend the body within the processes of multiple 'tendential unfoldings' as Massumi phrases it²⁰, that makes felt also the potential for 'different capacities for existence'²¹ outside of the major and the molar. It is an 'exploratory dancing of the extremities of the body'²² an adventure into excess, a plunging into the multiplicity, where body, home, language as ground have been invaded and shattered.

3. Body as ear

¹³ Such glossolia are parasites to language, 'ruptures' and 'stoppages of flow'. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 189.

¹⁴ Artaud, quoted in Alan S. Weiss, "Radio, Death and the Devil", 275.

¹⁵ This enacts Artaud's philosophy that '[M]an is not only dispersed within his body, he is also dispersed in the outside of things.' Artaud, Cited *ibid*, 253.

¹⁶ The play is Artaud's 'most intensive realization of his plan to atomize and recast the entire conception of the human body.' Stephen Barber, *Artaud: The Screaming Body*. (S.I.: Creation Books, 1999), 6.

¹⁷ Mihai Lucaciu, "This Scream I've Thrown Out Is a Dream: Corporeal Transformation through Sound, an Artaudian Experiment." *Studies in musical theatre* 4, no. 1 (2010), 72.

¹⁸ Stephen Barber, *Artaud: The Screaming Body*. (S.I.: Creation Books, 1999), 106.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 93.

²⁰ Brian Massumi, in Brian Massumi and Joel McKim. "Of Microperception and Micropolitics", 11.

²¹ *Ibid*, 12.

²² Stephen Barber, *Artaud*, 103.

*The ear is no more located in one place than the skin...the body itself is caught up in a process of hearing, which implicates skin, bone, skull, feet and muscle.*²³

At the same time as it is a pre-bodily force *of* the world, it must be recognized also that micro-perception is always implicated in the bodily, in that it acts on and through a body, shifting it through the creation of a felt difference pre and post micro-perceptive event – an affective attunement²⁴ - affects that can be known as such only through their effects on bodies²⁵. Such bodies – be they speakers, walls, pitcher plants or ‘organisms that person’, have an affective ‘appetite’: that is, a potential to affect and be affected²⁶. Each, in its own way, performs a particular way of ‘knowing’ the world – a specific engagement with certain vibrational frequencies²⁷: the human ear to vibrations roughly between 20Hz and 20 KHz²⁸.

But the human body is receptive to a much wider spectrum - outside of this heard frequency range lies, as Steve Goodman evocatively terms it, ‘unsound’: the infrasonic and ultrasonic²⁹. To this list of the imperceptible we might add, as Roads does, the subsonic – sounds too soft to be perceptibly heard – and ultra-loud sounds – those that are ‘felt by the exposed tissues of the body as a powerful pressure wave’ more than they are recognized or processed through the ears³⁰. Such vibrations might be said to act synesthetically on bodies, they affect the body at a base level of vibrational force that disrupts and stimulates multiple sensory capacities: the pain of high volume shock waves forcibly vibrating flesh, the infrasonic beat of a sub-woofer that reaches you through the soles of the feet, the prickling sensation on the skin of high frequencies, the physiological effects of these frequencies on stimulating neural activity³¹. To this we might add the emotional effects of such unsound: the anxiety or edginess that might be evoked by either the very high or loud, the coercive effects of deep beats, the lure of the just-too-quiet to be heard. As affects these unsounds are known to us through their formative effects on our emergent bodies.

4. *Space-Shifter*, 2009: Sonia Leber and David Chesworth

Entering the environment of *Space-Shifter*³² one is bombarded by strange voices - part language, part guttural exclamation – that saturated and resonate every surface, as much unsound as sound in their violent a-rhythmic shaking of the entire space. Floor,

²³ Conner, Steven. "Michel Serres' Five Senses." In *Michel Serres conference*, Birbeck College, London, 1999, 4.

²⁴ Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie. "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers", 5, 6.

²⁵ Ibid, 4.

²⁶ An ‘appetite’ as opposed to the Teleos of an ‘instinct’, the former suggests potential or a virtual multiplicity of future creativity rather than the linear and prescriptive nature of the latter system of thinking.

²⁷ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 379.

²⁸ Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, 7.

²⁹ Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, 17. See also Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, 7, for more detailed explanation of the physics.

³⁰ Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, 7.

³¹ Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, 184.

³² Details of the work can be found on the artists’ website at:

<http://www.waxsm.com.au/spaceshifter.htm>, and a short video demonstration can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c8gLZq1BQM>.

walls, air, speakers, sheets of metal and bodies are invaded, vibrated, penetrated and turned outward, made into surface. Metal buzzes with secondary resonances, feet become ears as they oscillate with the floor, waves of vibrations bounce off windows, walls and flesh taking on new and singular speeds through their interactions with the differing viscosities of surfaces. The speakers, room, floor, the sheets of metal, bodies all (re)perform (express) these vibrations in their own way, transduce according to their own affordances. Thus a speculative vibration launched into the space by the speakers proposes to these various surfaces a multiplicity of responses, combining their various and singular capacities to resonate into a machine that produces vibrational difference.

The event of their penetration of the space makes these new and contingent surface assemblages, machines that attract and modulate sound and unsound³³. It rearticulates all bodies/entities into ‘shifters’³⁴, new combinatory propositions glued together by the force of vibration.

4.1 Parasitic diffraction: the vibrational as differential force

*‘Affect allows us to think of the human in terms of what surpasses it, undermines it, fragments it, but also in terms of what supports it, energises it and holds it together.’*³⁵

What happens when we think this not as ‘sound art’, but as a series of vibratory propositions encouraging trans-body resonances – think the productive disruptive potential that such micro-sound initiates rather than its aesthetic or representational qualities: for its political or ethical potential as disruptive relational force that breaches thresholds, folds and splits entities.

To begin this, we need to first understand something of vibrational diffraction and its role in producing difference through parasitic disruption. Sound as micro-perception is sound understood in its larger iteration as vibrational force, a ‘variation in pressure over time’³⁶ encompassing all the perceived elements of a sound that will be contracted - tone, pitch, rhythm, volume³⁷ – and the unsound, the micro-perceptible remainder. The physics of sound clearly demonstrates that the basis of all components of sounds is as vibrational difference³⁸ - questions of speed and interval of oscillation, and sound becomes a way of expressing this modulating difference³⁹.

³³ See DeLanda, Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), for an extensive discussion of the role of attractors in modulation of forces within states.

³⁴ ‘Shifters’ – mythical tricksters capable of changing appearance who disrupt semiotic order are invoked by the artists in their explanation of the work. David Chesworth and Sonia Leber, “Space-Shifter”, <http://www.waxsm.com.au/spaceshifter.htm> accessed 5/7/13.

³⁵ Alan Borassa, “Literature, language and the non-human”, 65. In Massumi, Brian (Ed.). *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

³⁶ Aden Evans, “Sound Ideas”, 171. In Massumi, Brian (Ed.). *A Shock to Thought*.

³⁷ Composed from waves that differentiate in frequency, amplitude, phase and shape. Ibid.

³⁸ Pitch and rhythm for example as a continuum of the same wave phenomena of differing duration - 1/16” to 1/3200” for the former, 6” to 1/16” for the later. See Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, 55, 73.

³⁹ Aden Evans, “Sound Ideas”, 171. The vibrational is felt as duration: change over time. This duration is then contracted in perception to a quality, in itself timeless.

But as vibration is always as an event of difference, disrupting any continuum that it converts instead to a rhythm of contrasts, so in its actualization as waves in space it must always be a parasitic act that diffracts. Diffraction in physics ‘has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction’⁴⁰. As waves, sound then ‘intra-acts’ in this manner⁴¹, individual wave patterns engaging in disruption and interference with one another, entangling in complex ecologies, always immanently expressing their differences. For example, as a sound wave generated by speakers in *Space-Shifter* hits and reflects off a surface (returning as a repetition but of a different speed) it will diffract with the incoming wave, producing new modulations that then also interfere and combine with both incoming and reflected waves, producing further modulations and so on – each is implicated in the individuation of all the others. Such noisily productive enfolding, disruption, complication and interference can be encapsulated in Michel Serres’ concept of the parasite – the noise in relation that is its creative force, a third, mobile position⁴² that complexifies, blurs distinctions between cause and effect⁴³ and destabilizes exchange⁴⁴.

Due to diffraction we can say that a vibration in *Space-Shifter* always also produces parasitic vibrational forces immanent with its actualization, and doubles by producing also parasitic disruption on all other vibrations. *Space-Shifter* proposes to construct vibration-surface assemblages that form parasitic machines operating on multiple fronts: producing difference within waves through diffraction as a multiplication, a driving towards novelty of the event. I want to propose that it employs the parasitic potential of micro-perception tactically in several different ways, and I want to speculate that the experience of *Space-shifter* is primarily that of an event that explores the parasitic potential of sound and unsound as creative force.

The heard and unheard components of the sounds affectively engage the body with vibration in ways that create new contingent bodies of components of the body-artwork assemblage (machines within machines). The vibrational excess of sensation experienced by the skin-as-ear drum⁴⁵ over what sound is perceived by the ear itself envelops the body - creates feedback loops of skin and world - which create a shared vibrational zone, an intra-active ecology of diffractions. Surfaces are implicated in each other’s becoming(s): speaker surfaces affecting and affected by the vibrational capacities of the metal plates, floorboard oscillations meeting and conversing with

⁴⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 74. See pages 71-96 for a detailed explanation of the phenomena.

⁴¹ ‘Intra-actions are non-arbitrary, non-deterministic causal enactments through which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is iteratively enfolding into its ongoing differential materialization’. Ibid, 179.

⁴² In that each position operates as parasite on the other positions. Parasitic actions create an equivalence between positions, interrupting orders and hierarchies. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*.

⁴³ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁴ The parasite is a (self-organizing) multiplier of relations – it bifurcates any stable exchange, has an ‘abuse-value’ rather than exchange-value. the parasite is always interrupting exchange and a ‘derivation from equilibrium’ Ibid, 17, 221.

⁴⁵ Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. (London & New York: Continuum, 2008), 119. As Connor states in reference to Serres’ work on the senses, ‘Just as the ear consists in part of a skin, so the skin itself is a kind of ear, which both excludes and transmits exterior vibrations’. Serres five senses, 5. Sound, Goodman asserts, is synesthetic, ‘us[ing] the full body as ear, treating the skin as an extended eardrum membrane’. Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, 149.

vibrations of shoes, skin and walls bifurcating each other's projected vibrations in the shared space in-between, bodies remade as speakers, receivers, reflectors: resonating surfaces.

Space-shifter proposes space/floor/feet/metal as ears/transducers – vibrational ecologies nested within ecologies. This is a doubling of the surface into a field-body machine, an in-between alive with productive potential – a ‘sound envelop’ that is as much a sieve as container, a topological space/brain, a ‘sensate surface’ of connection⁴⁶. The force of this sensorial meeting of surfaces, pressure/resistance meeting pressure/resistance - a vibrational interaction - with another leads us out of ourselves, as Lingis says, and into an experience with the world⁴⁷: a worlding that the sympathetic resonances enact: our surfaces taut drum skins⁴⁸. This is a sympathy with the forces of a world (re)generating, perception as performed by the body⁴⁹.

Here *Space-shifter* makes explicit the vibrational forces surrounding and interpenetrating the body, the body's ability as a conductive surface to transduce vibration and the diffractive resonances with and resistances to the power of the external vibrational rhythms that are folded into the body's own rhythms and speeds to create a third shared potential, a parasitic body disrupting prescribed boundaries.

Both audible and inaudible elements of a sound set up diffractive patterns with each other⁵⁰, a resonance that Steve Goodman terms the ‘hypersonic effect’⁵¹. This parasitic noise operating on the audible range produces timbres, just as they must act to parasite unheard vibrational modulation. This production is not only tonal colour, rhythmically this multiplication produces a syncopation – surfaces acting as attractors in the system of modulation of beats⁵² - *Space-shifter* an affective ‘rhythm machine’⁵³ organizing relations between pulsating bodies. Rhythm then is playing out the problem of the disjunction of differing vibrational speeds, a gathering of these differences on a plane.

As such the parasitic actions of wave diffraction more than multiply the vibrations to be experienced through diffraction, they are a micro-perceptive machines that produce

⁴⁶ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 62, 9. Anzieu theorizes a ‘sound envelope’ as one of a series of sensorial envelopes (also including olfactory and thermal envelopes) extending the body into the world that construct a ‘skin ego’ which both supports the construction of the psyche and provides an extended space of exchange with the world (some parallels might perhaps be drawn with the ‘landing sites’ of Arakawa and Gins that extend the body). He proposes the sound envelope as an initial primary envelop, drawing an awareness of the internal space through bodily sounds and the external space through environmental sounds, but also most importantly of the exchange between the two. See 157- 171 and passim.

⁴⁷ Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative*, 135

⁴⁸ The skin ‘forms a hollow and becomes an ear...[e]verywhere else, be it ear-drum or drum, it hears more widely and less well, but still it hears, vibrating as though auricular.’ Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, 52.

⁴⁹ An organ here is a ‘capacity for doing’, a potential for relating. Michel Serres, Steven Conner, "Michel Serres Five Senses", 3.

⁵⁰ Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, 33

⁵¹ Steve Goodman, *Sonic warfare*, 184.

⁵² A syncopated rhythm has two or more attractors (potential modulators of forces), while a simple beat has only one. Steve Goodman, *Sonic warfare*, 116.

⁵³ Connections between entities are assembled via sympathetic rhythms, Goodman states. Ibid, 111.

a *multiplicity* – a virtuality - to the sound event, a system of potential disruptive production of ‘new rhythms, resonances, textures and syntheses’⁵⁴ that is immanently produced with the audible: an excess that is potential – as the waves are distorted and doubled through their machinic play.

Micro-perceptive sounds are parasites on cognition, on the hegemony of perceptive reduction of sensation of vibration, and on the easy distinction between listener and the listened-to (receiver and received). The insistence of vibration in its not-fully-formed or cognizable state that then requires of a body that it compose organs to cut or actualization perception from a virtual plane of vibration, but it also keeps it on the edge of the virtual, still at its most open to different combinatory possibilities, suspended in the not-quite decided. This is the parasite as creator of ‘fuzzy’ relation⁵⁵ as sounds in *Space-shifter* lose their beginnings and ends into refoldings and held dispersions, and there is a heightened sense of the presence of a ‘more than’ that cannot be contained within the audible, that refuses contraction but insistently is felt on the body. There is an unease in the encounter with these heightened disturbances, an edginess that the lure of the unheard performs that disturbs easy enjoyment or contemplation of the work as one is thrust into the middle of its machinations. In this way it acts parasitically on one’s emotion state (a metaphorical diffraction) as Artaud’s scream does – disrupting the contraction of sound to signification, acting heterogeneously on established language-sound hierarchies.

On all these levels *Space-shifter* is insistently not just ‘sound’ to be contemplated and comprehended but affective force in the event, a ‘performance of the world in its ongoing articulation’⁵⁶, a way of ‘knowing’, a specific engagement of the world⁵⁷ across a vibrational plane.

4.2 Multiplicity: the aliveness of the virtual

*Every sound masks an entire history of sound, a cacophony of silence. Even our bodies hum along with the noise of the universe.*⁵⁸

So we might then ask, how is it that, from this ‘noise’ of micro-perceptions diffracting and multiplying – these potentially heard/felt/expressed relations – we can perceive sound (whether through the ears or body as a whole), construct a useable set of vibrations? Clear perceptions, Deleuze argues, are actualized out of the potential of the micro-perceptions that form their virtual – the multiplicity from which they concreate: each is a singular configuration of ‘compossible minute perceptions’⁵⁹ that yields a perception as a cut in the multiplicity of such potential combinations (a ‘zone of clear expression’⁶⁰). These micro-relational vibrations – complex systems of enmeshed feedback/relational forces form an affective entanglement, without

⁵⁴ Steve Goodman, *Sonic warfare*, 191

⁵⁵ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 379.

⁵⁸ Aden Evans, “*Sound ideas*”, 177.

⁵⁹ Gilles. Deleuze, *The Fold*, 90. Deleuze here uses the term ‘minute perceptions’ interchangeably with ‘micro-perception’.

⁶⁰ Gilles. Deleuze, *The Fold*, 90.

necessarily being distinctly expressed in and of themselves. It is the act of perception – of productive resonance with vibration - that cuts into this virtual plane, actualizes a particular expression of the relations between micro-perceptions. That is, the perception expresses some diffractive combination (a relation between, expressed *as a movement*) of micro-perceptions in a particular way that yields a focus, but retains also some relation to all the micro-perceptions of the multiplicity. Each perception then is a ‘monad’⁶¹, actualizing its relationship to the entire field in its own way, and the multiplicity is alive in its ever-diffracting evolution in each heard or felt sound – a future-feeling driving further individuation.

As always, perception is a result of the differentials of differential equations⁶². This dynamic (unheard) virtual of the perceived sound actively disrupts its stable status as ‘object’, (with determinate or idealized status⁶³), and becomes instead the product of differential relations of affects expressed in conscious perception. There is always a ‘more than’ that is a forward movement (a future implicated in the present) drawing the sound towards further perceptive concrescence. *Shape-shifter* draws these unheard relations into a clearer zone of expression (as it positions also what would habitually be clear into a zone of indeterminacy). This acts not to provide a more stable picture, but rather the opposite, it makes evident the dynamic complexity of vibrational forces present and makes felt something of their relation to the perceived sound in a way that disrupts clear, distanced or stable readings, as it invites us to suspend ourselves in this individuating process. One is thrust into (or emerges tentatively out of) a seething ecology of sensations – the body reconstructed as synesthetic machine, skin as sensual topological palette⁶⁴: drawing vibratory sensation from its various surfaces-as-organs to construct a perception. In this respect the work might be seen to be ‘ethical’ in a sympathy with Jane Bennet’s proposition of ethics, in that it cultivates sensitivity to a wider range of forces instigating sound events, encourages awareness of a

⁶¹ Ibid. Thus one hears the roar of the ocean, a sound gathered from the individual potential combinations of all the waves and drops of water, but each listener from their singular position hears an ocean composed of different combinations of variously distinct and indistinctly expressed sounds – each expresses the whole but in their own way. Ibid, ? (See also A.N. Whitehead, *Process and reality*, on ‘extensive connection, 294-301). The multiplicity of micro-perception remains autonomous from individual expressions of it as perception – it is not defined by singular expression, but remains always open to further expressive potential. See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation* Post-Contemporary Interventions. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 35.

⁶² ‘Sound is a modulation of difference, a difference of difference.’ Evans, 177.

⁶³ That is, it has no primary or ideal identity to which it refers (rather what it refers to is its virtual plane, its unactualized potential), but can be understood only in relation to and in the movement of relation. See Andrew Murphie, "Becoming Interactive - Interactive Becomings: A Deleuze-Guattarian Approach to an Ethics of Interaction." (Macquarie University, 1997), 326.

⁶⁴ Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Sense (I)*. (London & New York: Continuum, 2008), 79-80. The skin, Serres writes, is a sense organ, it ‘flows like water, a variable confluence of the qualities of the senses’. Ibid, 52. It is synesthetic in that it enhances the more-than qualities of sound in a way that emphasizes how these elements combine to provide a clearer zone of perception. More than simply demonstrating synesthesia, it opens one to the possibility of becoming a new synesthetic machine, hearing with the an extended body (composed of both body parts and relations with other surfaces), it invites a fuller participation in a vibrational ecology. See David Abraham, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in the More-Than-Human-World*. (Toronto and New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 59.

‘vitality’ of nonhuman composition and the ability ‘to become perceptually open to it’⁶⁵.

The conception/experience of the concrescence of a remarkable or clear perception⁶⁶ out of the field of noise is made problematic, simple perception troubled as the insistent continued dynamic pull of the mutating potential of the micro-perceptive affective qualities of the environment are brought to the fore. ‘Perception’ of sound is revealed as contingent, in process⁶⁷: sounds that have denied representation on a more superficial level (by emphasizing part words and vocal expression over easy signification) work also to draw the participant into implication in the processes of diffraction and production as a series of interactive surfaces that assemble as differential machines⁶⁸.

Micro-perception is here configured as a problem, which finds an expression in perception (though not as a ‘solution’ as such, more a ‘working through’) - it is a system ‘advanc[ing] through problems and not through victories, through failures and rectifications rather than by surpassing’⁶⁹. Engaging with *Shape-shifter* one tries to comprehend the voices, to make the vocalizations, resonance of the metal sheets, vibrations heard through the soles coalesce into ‘sounds’ - into a readable text – but the magnitude of the differentials, the speeds at which they move, and the unbalanced relationship between the heard and ‘unheard’, disrupts this contraction. The work’s affectual force leaves one disorientated, perceptually unresolved, still searching for the body, space, sound as definable object on which to steady one’s subjecthood.

In *Shape-shifter* it is the foregrounding of the disruption of vibrational wave by vibrational wave - always multiplying - and the resonance of differing speeds of the bodies intensified as conjunctive surfaces⁷⁰, that gives this richness of the virtual from which the participant struggles to perceive (a process not only foregrounded but stretched or preserved). It is the vibrational ‘aliveness’ of the event that the body of the participant comes to feel itself explicitly implicated in. Thus as feelings – as prehensive resonance with other entities⁷¹ - the affectual qualities of micro-perceptible vibrations become evident and new sensitivities to the vibrational ecology in which we are immersed are proposed and can be experimented with⁷².

⁶⁵ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham N.C. : Duke University Press, 2010), 14.

⁶⁶ See Giles Deleuze, *The fold*, 91.

⁶⁷ As differentials differentiating, which is ‘an expression of the in-between’. Andrew Murphie, “Becoming Interactive”, 326.

⁶⁸ Writing about other art events in a similar context Murphie says “Such performative interactivity tends to create a series of skins as planes of interaction.”, Andrew Murphie, “Vibrations in the Air: Performance and Interactive Technics.” *Performance paradigm* 1, (2005), 34.

⁶⁹ Serres, Michel and Bruno Latour. *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 188.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: The Politics of Bodies*. (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995), 198.

⁷¹ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and reality*, 220

⁷² The field of the virtual multiplicity of micro-perception is in this way *propositional* of perception, propositions being ‘not primarily for belief, but for feeling at the physical level of unconsciousness’. *Ibid*, 186.

5. Conclusion

The concept of micro-perception places the emphasis clearly on the act of combining an enactive relational process and the potential – the virtual inherent within this process – rather than on the perception of somehow individual ‘completed’ sounds (a representational process). Or rather, it places an essential rupture (parasite) within representational processes, a gap, within which the participants ‘perform’ some new version of themselves as part of the artwork/event. *Shape-shifter* tentatively both bridges the gap between ‘sound’ and ‘unsound’ as it makes evident their interconnectedness, and extends awareness of the unresolvable nature of this gap into clear perception, so that one is suspended within this process of perception-from-the-field. This, I would suggest, is ethical in that it ‘increases the clear zone of expression or perception’⁷³ - that is, it increases various bodies’ abilities to affect and be affected, to engage and make relation with, to propose new potential for interaction (as indeed it immanently composes new bodies with new capabilities).

Shape-shifter works against easy synthesis and resolution, emphasizing instead singularity and the temporal through the mediation of rhythms of the vibrations disrupting and combining⁷⁴. It approaches what Braidotti has proposed as a ‘nomadic music’, concerned with a becoming interval – difference differing – and a dynamic relation to the field, to the inaudible and imperceptible, to ‘the roar which lives on the other side of silence’⁷⁵.

A ‘nomadic’ music suggests shifting ideas of sound design from completed or wholly realized sounds to mobile assemblages of micro-sounds as micro-perceptions, enabling a shift from a representational model to one of production. That is, to a sound perceived that is actively produced through combinations of micro sounds and the parasitic actions of diffractive resonances of their differences (rhythms and intervals and textures) in machinic operation with both the means of broadcast and reception, which are in themselves conflated. *Shape-shifter* approaches the limit of what can be heard or understood as sound, and in addressing this limit of the perceptible it proposes new organizations of surfaces (assemblages) with which to perceive.

Here sound in an art event is potent not for its ability to extend meaning and communication beyond the capabilities of the eye (as it is so often utilized), but rather to problematize such notions of communication-between, as it is harnessed at the level of affect to open potential for new bodily individuations. It is the space of the body that *space-shifter* vibrates as much as the air or floor, set resonating to crack its hermetic seal, awakening new appetites, new sympathetic resonances and dissonances, tuning it into the multiplicity of the vibrational ecology within which it becomes.

⁷³ Andrew Murphie, "Becoming Interactive", 332-3.

⁷⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. (Cornwall: MPG Books, 2002), 154.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 155.

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