Sébastien Pluot

A Matter of Fidelity

The phrase “high fidelity” might be said to be “tuned to moral resonances”. The promise of technological transparency implies that sounds should not be altered during translations between recording, restitution and reception. High fidelity sound technology would aim at invisible translations, sanitising anything that might “parasitise” the “original”. The equipment should function as though the medium supporting the sound were non-existent. However, it might be argued that a recording sounding exactly like the “original” and effacing the medium that sustains the sound would be, as such, a betrayal of the nature of translation.

Sensitive to indexical and language issues, many artists during the 1960s voluntarily damaged or misused the medium in such a way that the result would question what lies behind the aesthetics and politics of transparent translations. They experimented with what today would be referred to as a “mistranslation” and, therefore, what might constitute an alternative for hermeneutics based on the idea of transparency and truth. Opposed to the ideology of sanitisation, these artists were faithful to the imperfections, the noise that any translation entails, and claimed any malfunction of the medium not as failure but as supplements. Whereas according to customary bias the *noises* of media and language should go unheard, with the supposed aim of remaining faithful to the “original”, these artists on the contrary let noise speak.

In the fields of visual and sound arts, the voluntary act consisting in degrading media has led to the dimming of certain aspects of sound and image to the threshold of audible and visible perceptibility in order to let the medium in itself become audible. Some artists[1] manipulated and altered documents to the point where their authenticity is compromised, while others produced signal jamming, short-circuiting, code substitution or derivations. Others made static noise phenomena conspicuously audible, tactile or visible. These artists all subverted the “high fidelity” expectations of media while opening up new possibilities for disseminating the experience and meaning of sound.

When new electric media were invented, the magical influence of recorded sounds and voices was certainly the result of hi-resolution or hi-fi clarity but also a side effect of the grain and gaps of the medium – which should remain unheard – and their unexpected ambiguities that could stimulate uncanny idiosyncrasies. This residual supplement became the favourite locus to be inhabited by ghosts[2] and/or the unconscious. In other words, despite the successful restitution of recorded voices – i.e. what has been lost – the dysfunctional matter could be heard as the uncontrolled voices of what is still missing.

Marcel Proust was fascinated by the theâtrophone. This sound retransmission system made it possible to listen, at a distance, to Wagner performed live at the Opéra Garnier in Paris. Designed in 1881, just three years after the city’s first telephone network, the equipment was installed on demand and could be found in public places such as “chic” restaurants or wealthy private mansions. Microphones installed on either side of the stage captured the opera to be broadcast in mono. Soon, the low resolution of the theâtrophone technology became legendary. Proust adored the unexpected effects of its pitiful sound quality. He cherished the way the deficient transmission, the cracklings and absences, allowed him to fill the music with his memory of the opera he knew by heart. He felt his mind could inhabit the failures of the medium and the unheard content. He had the impression of feeling the music more inwardly, more unconsciously and therefore more intensely, as he felt he was in some way its co-author.

To Geneviève Strauss, Proust said: “I can be visited in my bed by the birds and the brook from the Pastoral Symphony, which poor Beethoven enjoyed

Fig. 01: Image "Terrors of the Telephone", from the cover of the *Daily Telegraph*, New York, March 15, 1877.

no more directly than I do, since he was completely deaf. He consoled himself by trying to reproduce the song of birds he could no longer hear. Allowing for the distance between his genius and my lack of talent, I too compose pastoral symphonies in my fashion by portraying what I can no longer see."[3] Luc Fraisse, a specialist of Proust, analysed this phenomenon: "The music-loving subscriber sees in this modern process a symbol of his status as a writer. Abolishing the distance from absence, the theâtrophone is similar to writing according to Proust, in that it restores in its own way a founded music, a founded time. It also recreates an inner song, an intimate melody that, like Vinteuil, inhabits every artist. Thus, Proust's true theatrical voice is his imagination."[4] In the middle of the 1970s Laurie Anderson also encountered a new technological prosthesis: an electric typewriter. At the time, she was undertaking a new textual project but could not write a word. Frustrated, she took her sleepy head between her idle hands and realised that her bones and flesh conveyed the drone of the machine towards her crackling ears. This is how she conceived *Handphone Table*. A table she designed in such a way that no sound can be heard except if one places the palms over the ears and the elbows in direct contact with copper slabs inlayed in the wood. Playing the text of the seventeenth-century British metaphysical poet George Herbert: "Now I (left) in you (right) without (left) a body (right) m... o... v... e... (from left to right)", the sound haunts the body from one arm to another and sometimes moves from left to right. The telepathic-like relation which it implies is materialised in the display the table organises between two distant bodies in contact only through a sound no one else can hear. As Anderson stated in an interview, the uncanny sound of which the bodily origin remains mysterious is connected more with "remembering than immediacy".[5] In other words, the sound is already doubled, reiterated and constantly moving from one part of the body to another.

As Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell stated, technological media has always been invented to compensate for something missing, absent or a wound of some sort to be healed or cured. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone to find a way to reconnect with his dead brother and Thomas Watson, his assistant, was a medium who couldn't bring himself to mourn his vanishing ability to talk with the departed. Significantly, he was particularly attracted by the poor sound quality produced by electromagnetic dis-

Fig. 02: Laurie Anderson, *Handphone Table*. 1978, Installation view, La Panacée, Photo credit: Olivier Cablat.

turbances. Rather than perfecting the signal, the electrician was filling this gap, listening to the "noises" which, in his opinion, were tangible paranormal manifestations of ghostly or extraterrestrial speech. He also supported the hypothesis of the media's ability to autonomously produce "transcendental noise". But isn't that the case with any spatial or temporal remote transmission media? Transmitting from a distance is a ghostly affair that Jacques Derrida called a science of "*fantômachie*". Recording is literally a way to bring back something that has disappeared in the past. Following the same logic, Avital Ronell explained that the "telephone tunes language to its most random frequency"[6], implying that language in itself is already noisy and unfaithful.

During a telephone call, when the voice is separated from the context in which it is heard, we never know if a "word" was indeed heard, in the phonic sense and therefore in terms of commitment. We also do not know what has been said and may not have been transmitted. Marcel Broodthaers, who had been exploring various technological mistransmissions, named one of his exhibitions *Ne dites pas que je ne l'ai pas dit*[7] (Don't Say I Didn't Say So) which can mean both that something was said and not heard, or that one should not repeat that thing that should have been said and was not said. Even if the meaning of the sentence seems to be clear, it is language itself that is turned to its most random frequency. In a way, the media accentuates or stages a condition of language as structurally unfaithful and not as parasitically attacked from the outside.[8]

If we can state that language itself carries these phenomena of misunderstanding and disjunction, the telephone – and we could include telecommunication objects in general – outsources and delegates a phenomenon that necessarily implies and increases the factor of randomness, radically accentuating the failure to take full control, which hi-fi pretends to achieve. For some artists, the sound imperfections enable the subject to fill empty or randomly defined spaces that could be reappropriated, and for others, the unintentional noises of the media can be potential spaces for paranormal activity. In both cases that which is supposed to be unheard becomes a projection space to be invested and not erased.

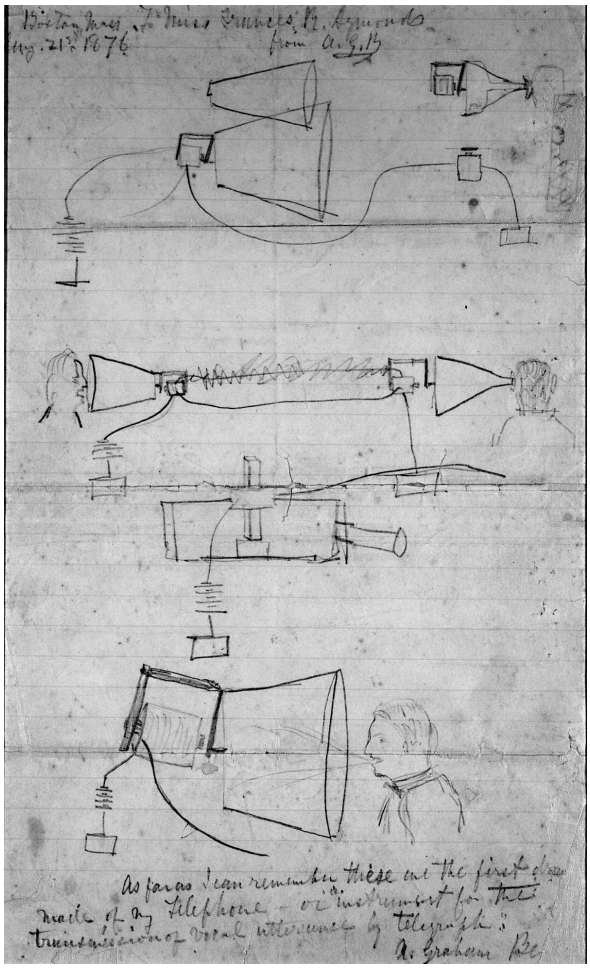


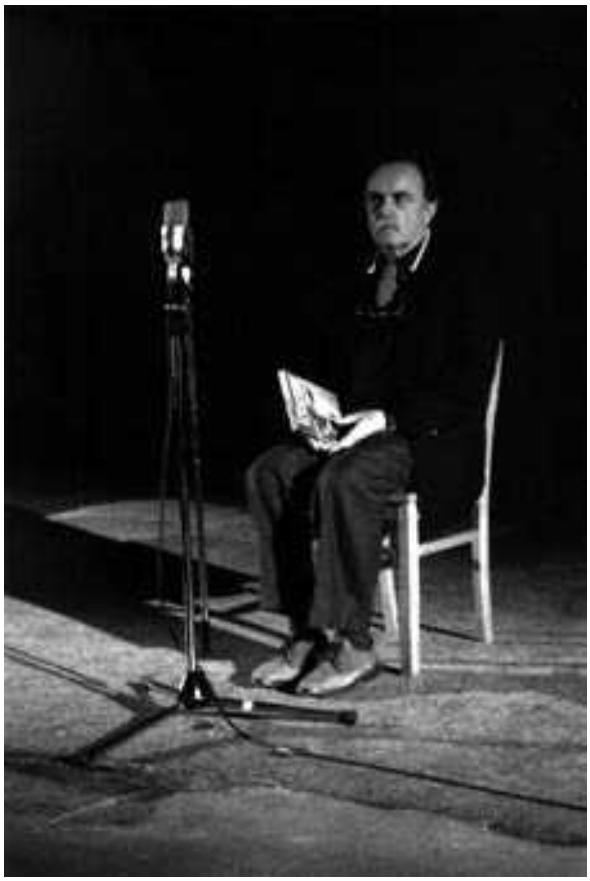
Fig. 03: Alexander Graham Bell, *Drawing of the telephone*, 1876, Library of Congress, The Alexander Graham Bell Family Paper.

Loops between a speech and its representations

> "I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have."[9]

I am Sitting in a Room was performed and recorded by Alvin Lucier in 1969.[10] The speech is progressively altered by the successive recordings until, near the middle of the piece, it becomes unintelligible. The flattening of the "irregularities" of his discourse can be interpreted as a paradox according to which stuttering speech is dissolved in favour of technological stuttering (the sentences are repeated)[11], where understanding is no longer the purpose of the work. This sound matter is the result of this back and forth movement between speech and the space, i.e. context, via recordings, in such a way that the media as well as both space and speech are equally unfaithful to each other, yet equally meaningful. What the ideology of high fidelity would have dismissed in favour of transparent clarity of sound and discourse is, on the contrary, taken into account to produce even more entropic irregularities for sound experiences emancipated from discursive understanding. It puts into practice the drift of the material and meanings of the message. As Lucier said in an interview, it was John Cage who advised him not to consider his stuttering as a disabling constraint but as a phenomenon from which he could produce singular sound experiences. Lucier refers to Cage's dehierarchization principles according to which any sound is different from, yet equal to, any other sound. The alteration of language was no longer an incapacity or a parasite of language but was to be considered a component of his work and being.

Fig. 04: Alvin Lucier, *I am Sitting In A Room*, 1968, Image of the performance, © Alvin Lucier



In resistance to an ideology of cleanliness, sanitation and purity of sound transparency, Lucier and Cage engaged what I would define as an aesthetics and ethics of noise that welcomes indeterminacy and uncertainty as possible spaces of emancipation from hierarchical systems and stimulates zones of imagination from unintentional sound materials.

These works not only acknowledge but emphasize the necessary distortions and alterations resulting from translation and more specifically the translation or transposition between sonic matter and the medium. They take into account what is conventionally not kept and heard but which nonetheless represents a structural component of any production of sound and linguistic meaning: the intonation, texture and grain of the voice, rhythm and tone.

According to me, these works contest the ideology that sustains the principles of high definition and high fidelity that became the principal aim and ultimate value of modern technology. Any media tends to produce an immediate and transparent contact between intention and perception. This wish was comforted by digital coding that pretends to translate any kind of message without alteration, according to a principle of total convertibility. Since the pervasive outcome of digital technologies, quantity became the defining condition of quality. Digital sounds are governed by algorithms that are designed in order to correct and sanitise any anomaly, dysfunction, parasite or static noise. In this data zone, the average values and statistical norms govern what is translated.[12]

Feedback and entropy

Some of these works using reiteration procedures have been associated with the logic of feedback as theorised by cybernetics which, as we know, has been

pervasive in the arts since the early 1960s. The purpose of cybernetics was to reduce chaos within a system through feedback and looped information processing. Similar to the logic of high fidelity, this principle was based on an ideology of transparency. According to Norbert Weiner, cybernetics was meant to control human language and behaviour. The role of cybernetics is "always fighting nature's tendency to degrade the organized and to destroy the meaningful; the tendency […] for entropy to increase."[13] Unlike the aim of cybernetics, the artists I refer to here are engaging with works that demonstrated an acceptance of entropy and acknowledge infidelity towards a so-called truth of intention during translation operations. These works not only agree to mourn the impossibility of fidelity but consider translation as a structurally unfaithful means to allow difference to survive.

During the 1960s and 70s – at a time when cybernetics infiltrated the fields of art, poetry and architecture – a fundamental antagonism was regenerated between, on one side, analytic philosophy defending "universal" rationalism and for whom the logos stands as an absolute truth, and, on the other, post-structuralism assuming the inadequacy of language to convey a stable meaning. According to computational logic, language should be essentially reduced to a utilitarian (and archetypically modernist) task: to communicate a message without ambiguity, leaving no possible interpretation. Such an impulse towards truth in meaning would be guaranteed by purity of sound allowed by an immediate media (a paradox in itself): a media that accurately translates sound, i.e. a transparent media. The idea of a translation that should be "faithful" begs us to ask a series of questions: What should a media be faithful to while in the process of transmitting? Should the medium be faithful to the texture, the meaning, the form, the content? As Walter Benjamin stated, "what does a literary work 'say'? What does it communicate? It 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential."[14] Moreover, wouldn't this promise of an inaccessible transparent fidelity be misleading and therefore unfaithful, but without anyone being aware of it?

Déjà Vu is a work Dick Higgins proposed for the exhibition *Art by Telephone*. This 1969 exhibition was curated by Jan van der Mark, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, as a response to an exhibition of the work of László Moholy-Nagy that included his famous *Telephone Paintings* from 1922. In 1969, Van der Mark invited many artists from the neo-avant-garde associated with Fluxus, conceptual art, land art, minimalism, nouveau réalisme and pop art to send instructions for a work by telephone that would be activated, constructed or performed on their behalf by the staff of the museum or by local craftsmen.

Fig. 05: Dick Higgins, *Déja Vu for Art by Telephone*, 1969. Installation view of *Art by Telephone Recalled*, La Panacée, 2015.

Higgins wrote a short description of his piece in the publication (an LP with texts on the cover): "Museum visitors are invited to record their voices via a telephone onto a tape loop. As the voices build up an overlay the sound becomes denser and eventually it will be impossible to distinguish individual voices. You will gradually obtain a vocal collage which in essence makes it a musical piece."[15] But the oral transmission through the telephone was also recorded and available on the LP.

Listening to the crackling sound recording of the instructions given by Higgins over the telephone gives a sense of how the exhibition relied on a defective technology that the work was reflecting.

As opposed to the *Telephone Paintings* by Moholy-Nagy in 1922, many artists from this exhibition responded to the invitation in a way that did not celebrate the technology of the telephone, but as a way to deconstruct the fantasy of the transparency of the media. Using the voice and the uncertainties of the telephone allowed them to acknowledge and even generate misunderstandings, distortions and other kinds of parasites. Higgins accumulated and overlapped the transmissions rather than considering them as a transparent flux. The voice no longer conveys semantic content that is supposed to be understood but rather proposes to experience other sound qualities. We could otherwise say that what is transmitted cannot be subject to a hermeneutics based on the logos which aims to be comprehensible.

At this point, it is useful to refer to the etymology of the word "comprehension" which comes from the Latin *cum prehensio* (with seizure) which comes from the Greek *kata* (thoroughly) and *lepsis* (towards seizure). *Katalepsis* can be interpreted as "towards the control of meaning", the grasping and stabilisation of the meaning, the condition of dominating the discourse as a closed whole. Concerning our subject, we could say that, as opposed to katalepsis, the work and what is transmitted has more to do with what Roland Barthes[16] defined as, the *kataleipsis*,[17] i.e. the divestment of meaning, considering meaning as riddled, incomplete, falling and in constant movement. *Leipsis* comes from the Greek *leipo* which means to drop, to let things go. Barthes stressed the fact that kataleipsis is open to the principle of "adding or subtracting the meaning". It is quite significant that he said he conceived of this neologism in order to talk about what he refers to as *A Lover's Discourse*. In order to talk about the discourse of love, he had to move away from a form of discourse that belongs to katalepsis to an alternative approach governed by the rules of kataleipsis.[18] The opposition between logos and affect is paradoxically and symptomatically blurred in technological discourse and in analytic philosophy's rational theorisation of language whereby terms such as "high fidelity" are used to promote the efficiency of a system that "faithfully" reproduces the "original", and the need for a performative utterance to be "faithful" to a supposedly identifiable "intention" in order to be successful.

These works by Lucier and Higgins, like many others in the 1960s and 1970s, both engage kataleipsis, meaning successive movements of repetition. They insist on testing and reiterating, instantiating – not as a way to increase or stabilise the clarity of the meaning, like the positivist methodology of cybernetics claims – but as a way to let it drift. The sound that comes and goes from space to recording in Lucier's piece, the succession of sound layers in Higgins', the never-ending overlapping recordings of Christine Kozlov,[19] the reiteration of the permutations of specifications for houses in Knowles's *House of Dust* that contradict the functionalist attempt to clarify and rationalise the relations between forms and behaviours.

We can also mention *Transduction*, a contribution by Mel Bochner for *Art by Telephone.*[20] For the exhibition, Mel Bochner called the museum in Chicago, read a text that was recorded by the curator who then wrote it down[21] and called someone in Italy. This person wrote down the text, translated it into Italian and then called someone in Germany, and so on and so forth, through Swedish, English and then American. The initial text that contained formal, logical statements about language was initially impossible to understand,[22] yet, ironically, the translation brought some meanings that did not correspond to the "original".

The trajectories of reiterated translations from one language to another deconstruct the myth of transparency in a quite amazing parallel with "Signature Event Context" a lecture given by Derrida in 1971. This lec-

Fig. 06: Christine Kozlov *Information No-Theory*, 1970, © Christine Kozlov

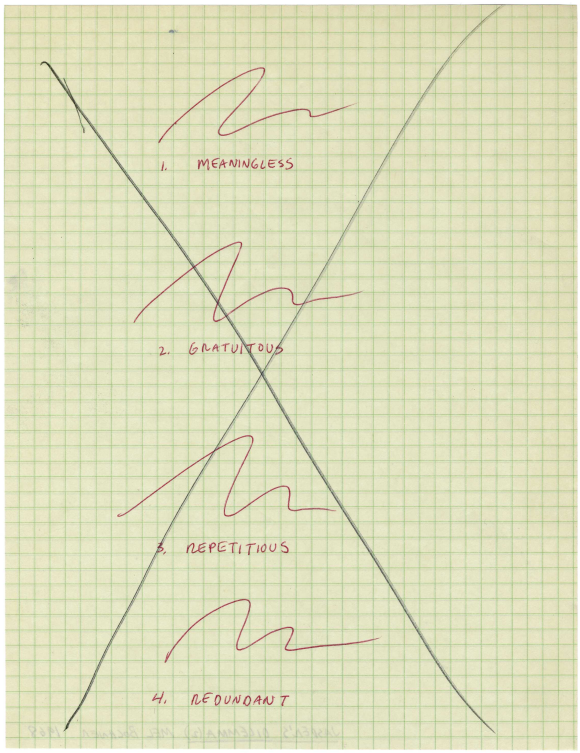
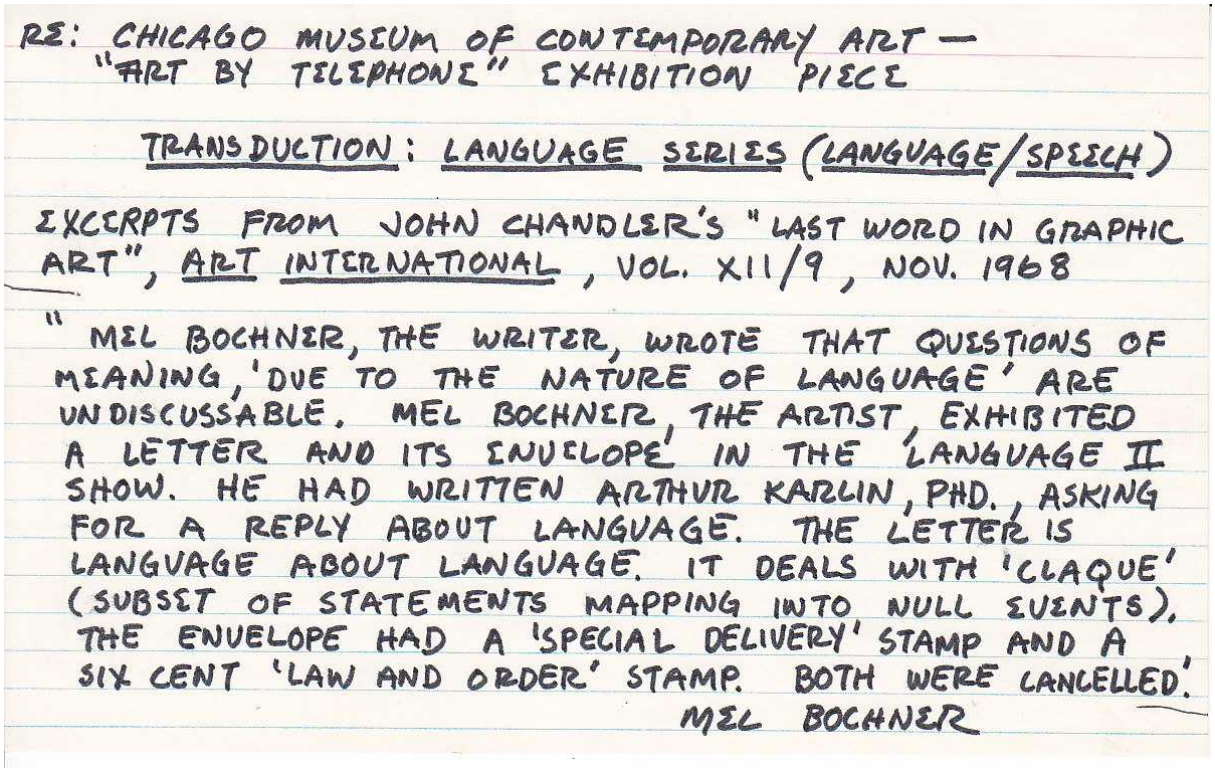


Fig. 07: Mel Bochner, *Jasper's Dilemma (2)*, 1968, Drawing on graph paper, © Mel Bochner

ture, later published in English, was known for debates between analytic and continental philosophy. *Jasper's Dilemma (2)* that Bochner made on graph paper in 1968 also engages a series of interpretations of similar graphemes that mimic something that could be a signature or an expressive trace. They look similar but are different. Words are associated with each one. The first reads: "1. Meaningless"; "2. Gratuitous"; "3. Repetitious"; "4. Redundant". Even though the markings look identical, the terms that are associated with each of them are different.

According to Derrida, a signature must necessarily be reiterated in a similar but different form in order to deliver its authenticity without the presence of its author. In *How to Do Things with Words* – which Derrida critiques in his text "Signature Event Context" – J. L. Austin stated that an utterance can be "successful" or "unsuccessful", "true" or "false", "serious" or "non-serious", depending on various elements of the context.

Fig. 08: Mel Bochner, *Language is Not Transparent,* 1968, Rubber stamps on graph paper, © Mel Bochner


RE: CHICAGO MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART —
"ART BY TELEPHONE" EXHIBITION PIECE

TRANSDUCTION: LANGUAGE SERIES (LANGUAGE/SPEECH)

EXCERPTS FROM JOHN CHANDLER'S "LAST WORD IN GRAPHIC ART", ART INTERNATIONAL, VOL. XII/9, NOV. 1968

" MEL BOCHNER, THE WRITER, WROTE THAT QUESTIONS OF MEANING, 'DUE TO THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE' ARE UNDISCUSSABLE. MEL BOCHNER, THE ARTIST, EXHIBITED A LETTER AND ITS ENVELOPE' IN THE 'LANGUAGE II SHOW. HE HAD WRITTEN ARTHUR KARLIN, PHD., ASKING FOR A REPLY ABOUT LANGUAGE. THE LETTER IS LANGUAGE ABOUT LANGUAGE. IT DEALS WITH 'CLAQUE' (SUBSET OF STATEMENTS MAPPING INTO NULL EVENTS). THE ENVELOPE HAD A 'SPECIAL DELIVERY' STAMP AND A SIX CENT 'LAW AND ORDER' STAMP. BOTH WERE CANCELLED'.
MEL BOCHNER

Fig. 09: Mel Bochner, *Transduction for Art By Telephone*, Notecard, 1969 © Mel Bochner

It is important to emphasize that all these terms have strong moralist connotations. For Austin, on some occasions an utterance can be "false" or "unsuccessful" because of what he calls "parasitic" elements coming from the context that would invalidate its intention or its understanding (such as a quotation, a fictional situation, a metaphorical language, the fact that it's a lie, etc.). Austin's aim is to be able to identify every element of a context in order to reach a transparent, clear and stable meaning. In other words, for the utterance to be "faithful" to the intention. Derrida disagrees. He states that the contexts in which an utterance is enunciated are uncircumscribable: "For a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense demanded by Austin, it at least would be necessary for the conscious intention to be totally present and actually transparent for itself and others, since it is a determining focal point of the context."[23] According to Derrida, these parasitic elements are not contingent or accidental as Austin describes them, but structural conditions of any act of language. Then Derrida analyses the function of any marking. He says that "it belongs to the sign to be legible, even if the moment of its production is irremediably lost, and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor meant consciously and intentionally at the moment he wrote it, that is abandoned to its essential drift."[24] In order to work, a signature must be detached from the singular intention of its production and needs to be reiterated. For Derrida, as for Bochner, given the structure of iteration, the intention which animates an "utterance will never be through and through present to itself and its content."[25]

The question of instantiation, that implies the incalculable encounters between an utterance and its context is specifically the ontology of scores that are bound to the condition of being translated into another media and to be reiterated. It is also the case for the work of Alvin Lucier and Dick Higgins where the sound repeatedly meets different contexts. The ontological condition of these works lies in the relations between the score or the sound, its various instantiations and the fact that each instantiation is a renewal of the work since it is carried by a new interpretation.

In a sense, each interpretation "plays the sound" of the subjectivity of the interpreter, the "media", as Duchamp called the viewer, or what we can also call "the context of instantiation".

In a text about George Brecht, Julia Robinson says:

> "4'33" functions as a theoretical extension of the readymade: it is an object defined by its context, but its meaning is updated, even renewed, whenever it is experienced. Existing in the ideal, liminal state of a score, constantly awaiting enactment, it stands as the very marker of the gap between intention and realization."[26]

Perhaps we can interpret these acts of reiteration and the non-discursive noises they generate as a way to simultaneously test and challenge the logos and consequently to experience the irretrievable gaps that exist in the relationships between signifier and signified and between mark-making and context. At each reiteration, it is a matter of highlighting the inadequacy between these agencies. These works state that an aesthetic experience – and language as well – are not solely grounded on abstract "understanding" – a hermeneutic process by which a stabilised "truth" should be obtained – but imply the reiteration of a coming and going between the materialisation of an intent (through sound or any mark-making) and perception, by which the experience is based in its variability and inadequacy – what Derrida calls "iteration". Repeatedly testing the arrival of sound in the world through the media, i.e. engaging in a succession of translations, reinforces the variability of unexpected, unstable phenomena and the way they are perceived. These operations will not lead to transparency, truth of meaning, alleged "fidelity" to the phenomenon, but, on the contrary, to a renunciation of this very idea of truthfulness to a disregard towards what could be established as a transcendental truth. The media is thought of as structurally unfaithful in the sense that what is missing might be the space that cannot be filled by anything stable or sizeable. The unheard we pay attention to would be that which in sound and language materialises and symbolises that which resists translation.

Endnotes

1. See for example Walid Raad, Joachim Koester, Nam June Paik, Silvia Kolbowski, Alvin Lucier, Dick Higgins, Christine Kozlov.
2. "Once memories and dreams, the dead and ghosts, become technically reproducible, readers and writers no longer need the powers of hallucination." Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 10.
3. William Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 537.
4. Luc Fraisse, *Proust au miroir de sa correspondance* (Paris: SEDES, 1996).
5. Interview of Laurie Anderson in *The Record of the Time: Sound in the Work of Laurie Anderson*, exh. cat. (Lyon: Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, 2002).
6. Avital Ronell in the film *Circle's Short Circuit* (1998) by Caspar Stracke.
7. This 1974 exhibition at Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp comprised a caged parrot installed between two plants and a tape machine playing a recording of Broodthaers reading his poem "Moi je dis Moi je dis".
8. See the essay "Signature Event Context", in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977).
9. Alvin Lucier, *Reflections. Interviews, Scores, Writings*, Second revised edition, Köln, Edition MusikTexte, 2005, p. 312.
10. The first performance of the piece happened in 1969 at the University of Brandeis near Boston. He then performed the work on several occasions and also got other people to perform it as well.
11. "Stutter" deviates from the Low German word stotten, to knok – to strike against and to cut, stop and hesitate. In this sense the speech is stopped, cut and replayed in a loop, each time with an additional distance from the original. We can say that stuttering leaves the original – the idea, what the author has in mind – at the threshold of being expressed. Its coming into the world is compelled and reiterated.
12. See François Lyotard, "The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 3–6.
13. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), p. 17.
14. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 70.
15. Jan van der Mark, *Art by Telephone*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1969).
16. Roland Barthes, *Le Discours Amoureux, Séminaire à l'école pratique des Hautes Études* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2007).
17. I would like to thank Barbara Cassin who told me that kataleipsis is probably a play on words by Roland Barthes based on kata and the word leipsis that comes from leipo.
18. See the letter to Antoine Compagnon dated 23 June 1976 in Roland Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): "Has literature ever served any purpose other than telling all without telling all? It alone can represent the 'slip' (the leftover, the badly said, the on-the-tip-of-the-tongue, kataleipsis and not katalepsis.)"
19. Christine Kozlov, *Information: No Theory* (1971). "1. THE RECORDER IS EQUIPPED WITH A CONTINUOUS LOOP TAPE.
    2. FOR THE DURATION OF THE EXHIBITION (APRIL 9 TO AUGUST 23) THE TAPE RECORDER WILL BE SET AT "RECORD" ALL THE SOUNDS AUDIBLE IN THIS ROOM DURING THAT TIME WILL BE RECORDED.
    3. THE NATURE OF THE LOOP TAPE NECESSITATES THAT NEW INFORMATION ERASES OLD INFORMATION. THE "LIFE" OF THE INFORMATION, THAT IS, THE TIME IT TAKES FOR THE INFORMATION TO GO FROM "NEW" TO "OLD" IS APPROXIMATELY TWO (2) MINUTES.
    4. PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE INFORMATION DOES IN FACT NOT EXIST IN ACTUALITY, BUT IS BASED ON PROBABILITY."
20. See the text in the book *Art by Telephone Recalled*, ed. by Sébastien Pluot and Fabien Vallos, ed. Mix, Paris, 2014.

21. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
22. Impossible to understand even for someone knowing formal logic since it was written by a biologist who tried to imitate the best he could this artificial language based on mathematic formulas that paradoxically was imagined in order to be as transparent as possible.
23. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, *op. cit*., p. 18.
24. *Ibid.* p. 9.
25. *Ibid.* p. 105.
26. Julia Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht's Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s", *October 127* (Winter 2009), p. 77–108.

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Abstract

The phrase "high fidelity" might be said to be "tuned to moralist resonances". The promise of technological transparency implies that sounds and images should not be altered during translations between recording, restitution and reception. "High fidelity" technologies would aim at invisible translations, sanitizing anything that might "parasite" the "original". However, it might be argued that pretending to efface the medium would be, as such, a betrayal of the nature of translation. Sensitive to indexical and language issues, many artists during the 1960's such as Mel Bochner, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Alvin Lucier, Christine Kozlov, and later such as Laurie Anderson, voluntarily damaged or misused media in such ways that the result would question what lies behind the aesthetics and politics of transparent translations. They experimented reiterative procedures of translations as alternatives to hermeneutics based on the idea of transparency and truth. Opposed to the moralist ideology of sanitization, these artists were faithful to the imperfections, the noises that any translation entails, and claimed any malfunction of the medium not as failures but as supplements. Whereas according to customary bias the noises of media and language should go unheard, with the supposed aim of remaining faithful to the "original", these artists on the contrary let noises speak.

Author

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