

Can You Hear Me? Can We Hear Them? Can They Hear Us? Can You Hear Yourself? Can You Hear Us? Can They Hear Me? Can You Hear Them? Can They Hear You? Can I Hear You? Can They Hear Themselves? Can I Hear Myself? Can I Hear Them? Can We Hear Ourselves?

### Questionable - Questioned - Questionnaire

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How to reconcile the absolute necessity for these gatherings with the fact that most of the time they lead to nothing concrete, no lasting effect, no collective endeavour, no propulsive project?

Or should we just acknowledge that the true benefit of these meets is not the stated purpose but the tangential in-between conversations over a meal, a drink, a coffee?

Is the sociality of the event as described above akin to an *affect world* as articulated by Lauren Berlant: “worlds to which people are bound, when they are, by affective projections of a constantly negotiated common interestedness”?<sup>1</sup>

Do the conditions of possibility for a negotiation have to be a sharing of core principles or can they just be basic parameters like a time and place?

What happens when what we thought we had in common dissipates the longer we spend time together?

Can a plethora of differences be harnessed as an attribute rather than a hindrance to future alliances?

Can differences be amalgamated but not subsumed?

To what degree is a consideration of the sonic dimension of the social different than the implicit purpose of music—if defined in the expanded sense?

Does the expansion of any field lead to amorphous generality at the expense of incisive specificity?

If the term ‘sound art’ is as absurd as ‘steel art’ as Max Neuhaus has asserted, then why does it persist, how has it become the default? Should we accept it or dismantle it?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011) 226.

Is a medium-centric approach appropriate for these times or is it retrograde and revealing of a reductive and remedial tendency in our thinking process?

Might a medium-centric focus be productive only in instances where advocacy is called for? If so, who has time to spend on the considerable (and largely thankless) work that advocacy requires?

If complaints lead to—after extensive consultation—a list of demands, which are then submitted to the powers that be, does the whole process not confirm our subjugation? Or is that routing part and parcel of the work entailed by the pursuit of a more equitable share of resources?

Is the advocacy required vis-à-vis funding agencies the sole common point, and even then are the discrepancies amongst those present too disparate?

How to take the spirit of the second part of Emmanuel Madan's land acknowledgment, the part that essentially stated that there is still a lot of work to be done, and actually apply it, make it tangible, incorporate it within the aims of this gathering?

To what degree should a sound art gathering require listening more than talking?

To what degree does a predisposition towards listening and a concomitant reluctance to talking accomplish more in the long-term than any more immediate initiative or resolution?

Do we subscribe to Ultra-red's notion of *intentional listening* as one that can "support longterm political organizing."<sup>3</sup>

Are we able to recognize the moments when speaking *is* a necessity, when it is imbued by urgency, when it is induced and informed by previous endemic exclusion from the conversation?

Can we accept that speaking is sometimes the result of a bona fide enthusiasm that might be well-intentioned but lacks self-awareness?

Can we each take up space in a shared place?

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<sup>2</sup> Max Neuhaus, "Sound Art?" was first published as an introduction to the exhibition *Volume: Bed of Sound*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, July 2000. Cited in numerous sources. Text online: [max-neuhaus.info/bibliography](http://max-neuhaus.info/bibliography).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Sember (Ultra-red), "Strong People Don't Need Strong Leaders: Intentionality, Accountability, and Pedagogy" in *What Now? The Politics of Listening*, ed. Anne Barlow (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2016) 71.

Can we give each other some time?

Are idealism and utopianism strategies with any redeeming force on the ground when pitted up against rationalizations imposed by institutions that output expedient answers and demand quantifiable results?

Can we account for the fact that a significant proportion of the people present have lived in more than one city, more than one province, more than this country and use that local/regional/national/international blur to our advantage?

Can we coalesce around the fact that we lack cohesion?

Can we celebrate each other's accomplishments without displaying any tinge of the type of envy that precarity and austerity exacerbates?

How can we factor in those who were absent, and their manifold constituencies: those who were invited but couldn't make it, those who were but did not want to come; plus, those who weren't invited because they are not on the radar, and those who weren't because they were perceived as not being relevant?

Could sound art be postulated as a post-discipline discipline? If so, can it from the onset incorporate its own discontinuation within its very definition?

Or, is interdisciplinarity the most accurate descriptor of the variegated communities we stem from and thereby our only possible rallying point?

Or, should we dispense with the word 'discipline' altogether and assemble instead around the notion of *interconnectedness* that Timothy Morton uses to characterize ecological thought?<sup>4</sup>

While we are there and at it, should we also consider his call for *radical openness*?<sup>5</sup>

Do the four entries immediately above seem to render sound (art) superfluous? Or could it be that it is so integral that it need not be singled out? Also, could it be that it fares fine on its own and does not need our constant claiming?

If sound art is understood to fall within the so-(formerly)-called rubric of *new media*, then what is its position with regards to the several appearances of the word

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2010) 7.

<sup>5</sup> Morton, 15. Tracing the genealogy of calls for 'radical openness' is beyond the scope of this text, but bell hooks would be an obvious place to start, e.g. the chapter "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in her book *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990).

*new* in Chantal Mouffe's following incitation: "The objective of artistic practices should be to foster the development of those *new* social relations that are made possible by the transformation of the work process. Their main task is the production of *new* subjectivities and the elaboration of *new* worlds. What is needed in the current situation is a widening of the field of artistic intervention, with artists working in a multiplicity of social spaces outside traditional institutions in order to oppose the program of the total social mobilization of capitalism."<sup>6</sup>

While *new media* may arguably be the antiquated moniker (in lieu of the now commonly understood but descriptively void term *media arts*), should we not nevertheless assess our capacity to participate in these shifts towards the *new* (without disregarding our complicity in enabling recuperation)?

Can the predilection towards the *new* be sustained rather than fleeting?

How do we celebrate incremental steps while still conceding that we are miles behind?

Can one of these steps simply be a move *towards* in the way that Félix Guattari in "Free Form Radio" theorizes it: "Languages of desire... invent *new* means and have an unstoppable tendency to lead straight to action; they begin by 'touching', by causing laughter, by provoking, and then they make one want to 'go towards,' towards those who speak and towards those stakes that concern them."<sup>7</sup>

Or is move *towards* already too overdetermined and therefore runs the risk of funnelling our hopes and desires into a sterile programmatic agenda?

Can we supplant the perception of inadequacy and inferiority that we may harbour with respect to our activities and their supposed lack of recognition, and replace it with an genuine eagerness to just carry on doing what we currently do?

Should we just accept that distribution and dissemination, even amongst ourselves, are woefully deficient and therefore splintered, sporadic and consequently amnesiac?

Are we content to conclude with this series of purposely thorny polemical questions, rather than a plan of action as outcome?

Should our plan be merely the refinement of existing questions and articulation of more?

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<sup>6</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Globally* (London, UK: Verso, 2013) 87. Emphases added.

<sup>7</sup> Félix Guattari, "Popular Free Radio" in *Radiotext(e)*, ed. Neil Strauss (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1993) 87. Emphasis added.

Or should we dispense with questions and plunge into however many contingent attempts and provisional experiments we can devise?

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