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## The Technology of Entrapment

### *Open Your Mouth and Let the Air Out*

#### A RADIO-IMAGINARY CONVERSATION

John Cage: Sometimes when I speak, I give the impression that I am against feelings. But what I am against is the imposition of feelings. [1]

Daniel Charles: So in your ideal society, people would be near each other, but not communicating.

John Cage: They would not communicate, but they would talk, they would carry on dialogues, I much prefer this notion of dialogue, of conversation to the notion of communication. Communication presupposes that one has something, an object, to be communicated. Communication is always imposing something: a discourse on objects, a truth, a feeling. While in conversation nothing imposes itself.

Raymonde: You play mute, I don't know if you play deaf too. [2]

Erik Satie: We must bring a music which is like furniture - a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration. I think of it as melodious, softening the noises of the knives and forks, not dominating them, not imposing itself. It would fill up those heavy silences that sometimes fall between friends dining together. It would spare them the trouble of paying attention to their own banal remarks. [3]

Brecht: It was suddenly possible to say everything to everybody but, thinking about it, there was nothing to say. Radio should be capable of not only transmitting but of receiving of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him. [4]

Diana Burgoyne: By placing the viewer in a position of control, it takes them out of passive role and places them in a very active one ... setting up relationships which raise broader questions about human co-existence with technology. [5]

Sol Yurick: Now, it is said, all can be linked: electrical grid systems, voice conversations, on-line-in-real-time accounting systems, financial markets telemedical diagnostic and treatment-delivery networks,... All change the notion of time and timing. The movement of humans, matched up to the movement of the records of humans and their endeavours change the notion of time, timing and human behaviour. [6]

Marshall McLuhan: Radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself. Is it not worthy of our meditation that radio should be specially attuned to that primitive extension of our central nervous system, the vernacular tongue? [7]

Jean Baudrillard: The non-directed interview, speech, listeners who telephone in, participation at all levels, blackmail through speech - all say: "It's your concern, you are the event, etc." More and more information is invaded by this sort of phantom content, this homeopathic graft. It is a circular set-up in which the desire of the audience is put on stage, an anti-theater of communication. [8]

Canetti: All questioning is a forcible intrusion. When used as an instrument of power it is like a knife cutting into the flesh of the victim. The questioner knows what there is to find, but he wants to touch it and bring it to light. He sets to work on the internal organs with the sureness of a surgeon. But he is a special kind of surgeon, one who keeps his victim alive in order to find out more about him, and, instead of anaesthetizing, deliberately stimulates pain in certain organs in order to find out what he wants to know about the rest of the body. [9]

Milan Kundera: The only person who ever had ever really interrogated her was her husband, and that was because love is a constant interrogation. In fact, I don't know a better definition of love. Which means that no one loves us better than the police, ... and I wouldn't be surprised if lonely people secretly yearn to be taken in for cross-examination from time to time to give them somebody to talk to about their lives. [10]

Benveniste: From the utterance stems the establishment of the category of the present, and from the category of the present is born the category of time. The present is precisely the source of time. It is that presence in the world that only the speech act makes possible, since (if we reflect on this) man has no other way of living "now" at his disposition besides the possibility to realize it through the insertion of discourse in the world. [11]

David Wojnarowicz: I'm a xerox of my former self. I am a stranger to others and to myself. I am shouting my invisible words. I am vibrating in isolation among you. I am signaling that the volume of all this is too high. I am waving. I am waving my hands. I am disappearing. I am disappearing but not fast enough. [12]

## THE TECHNOLOGY OF ENTRAPMENT

For all of radio's broad and far reaching casts, the radio booth rather resembles an implosion. A foreboding cubicle at its point of production in antithesis to its expansive space of diffusion. Wired, convoluted and cramped, the radio booth resembles an inanimate brain rather than a great communicator. Radio is not only constrained by commercial interests and governmental regulations but by itself. The obfuscation of its apparatus is endemic.

Radio naked, stripped of its hardware becomes radiophony, becomes metaphor. Radiophonic sites are numerous and refer not to radio's technology but to its character. The confessional is one such radio phony, a radio without transmitter. As with radio the confessional's claustal architecture exists in paradox of its far reaching impact. Naked, radio becomes the in-between

separating one from another. In the case of the confessional, the partition traditionally transmits sins and absolutions. This separator can juggle several transactions, it incites transgressions and secretions in Bataille's "Story of the Eye", and performs a radio conversation in the installation "Open Your Mouth and Let The Air Out".

In the installation, the radio booth –cranium cockpit– was transformed into a computerized and personalized confessional. A call-in radio program becoming a call-within program; a site where obsessions, absurdities, non-sequiturs, and frustrations find a home. Radio does not knock at your door, it lets itself in. Once in, it hunts you down with game calls, calling to air your confession.

The airwaves are the ideal playground for two strangers to have an intimate conversation. You can perform a *pas de deux*, you can step on each other's toes in the imaginary confines of the radio confessional. The conversation does not have to go anywhere, like a dance, it can twirl and twine. I bored her, *You bore me!* she said. I said: *I think your voice became mine as soon as you called.*

Bound tightly in the radio confessional we amalgamate via mimicry. Roles confuse themselves and I find myself ousted from my radio booth chair by my desire to wander in the rough terrain, controlling not even mouth and feet. Trapped into a confession, we can unravel ourselves by stumbling noisily into thousands of ears.

Trapped into a radio, we sink our teeth into its electricity and find our speech running away without us.

Note

Text based in part on a text included in a booklet produced by the artist which accompanied the installation.

## RADIO CONFESSIONS

### Confession 1

Hello

Hello

**Is that my voice? Talk! Talk!**

It sounds like mine. I think your voice became mine as soon as you called

**How could that be?**

Oh, some kind of relationship that began

**And does it end?**

It ends as soon as you hang up

**Are you trying to tell me something?**

I think so

**Should I be insulted?**

You should be happy, angry, insulted....

**Does that make sense what you just said? I don't think so**

What is sense?

**What is what? Are you nervous?**

No, but I was earlier

**I still think you're nervous, I think I know that you're nervous**

Ya. I think you know everything about me

**Only if I want to**

Do you want to?

**Not really. You don't intrigue me. Does this thing ever end?**

**Describe yourself**

I have knobby knees and a rib cage

**And a tattoo. I know all about it**

You do? Describe it then

**We won't get personal now**

Why not?

**I don't think it's the time or the place**

This is not a time nor a place

**So what is then, if it's not a time nor a place, what exactly is it?**

It's in between

**In between what? Can you be a little bit more specific? Is that where you are?**

That's where I try to be, so that only few people can find me

**Who are you waiting for?**

Somebody who can find a place and a time.

Who are you?

**Who am I? Just another nameless, faceless being in this planet**

And...

**There's lots to say that hasn't already been said**

That's true. It's becoming kind of empty

**Does this ever end?**

It's just you and me

**Strange. It feels like I've had this conversation before. Are you still you?**

No. I think I've changed

**Grown within the past minutes have you?**

No. I haven't progressed or regressed, just changed

**You bore me.**

Sometimes I bore myself too

**This conversation is going nowhere**

I agree. Goodnight

## Confession 2

Testing 1,2 3...

**Is that my voice? Talk! Talk!**

It's been 3 years since my last confession  
**How could that be?**  
I suppose I should have gone to church, but I didn't  
**And does it end?**  
Anxiety, money, anxiety  
**Are you trying to tell me something?**  
Totally abstract you  
**Should I be insulted?**  
I spread the Ritz Cracker with peanut butter  
**Does that make sense what you just said? I don't think so**  
Oh, sorry  
**What is what? Are you nervous?**  
No, but I was earlier  
**I still think you're nervous, I think I know that you're nervous**  
What about you?  
**Only if I want to**  
Do you want to?  
**Not really. You don't intrigue me. Does this thing ever end?**

**Describe yourself**  
What do you want to know about me?  
**And a tattoo. I know all about it**  
Can you hear me?  
**We won't get personal now**  
Why not?  
**I don't think it's the time or the place**  
I don't know what to do about that  
**So what is then, if it's not a time nor a place, what exactly is it?**  
Revisit the spots I once knew  
**Can you be a little bit more specific? Is that where you are?**  
This is off the topic, but I saw 'My Private Idaho', which is really bizarre  
**Who are you waiting for?**  
The idea as it dissipates

What about you?  
**Who am I? Just another nameless, faceless being in this planet**  
I wonder if there's somebody in there doing this  
**There's lots to say that hasn't already been said**  
You won't listen, it's your fault  
**Does this ever end?**  
The idea as it dissipates  
**Strange. It feels like I've had this conversation before. Are you still you?**  
We're all us  
**Grown within the past minutes have you?**  
I'm just a generic type fellow  
**You bore me.**  
Who's the artist who put this together?  
**This conversation is going nowhere**  
Aren't you going to tell us a story?

### Confession 3

I don't hear anyone.. oh, I see a light now

**Is that my voice? Talk! Talk!**

Show me the on button

**How could that be?**

What does that mean?

**And does it end?**

You're talking to me or am I hearing your confession?

**Are you trying to tell me something?**

Totally abstract you

**Should I be insulted?**

No, you should not be insulted

**Does that make sense what you just said? I don't think so**

There somebody in there isn't there?

**Are you nervous?**

No, but I was earlier

**I still think you're nervous, I think I know that you're nervous**

Can you describe yourself?

**Only if I want to**

Are you nervous, really?

**Not really. You don't intrigue me. Does this thing ever end?**

**Describe yourself**

I feel like a comedian or something

**And a tattoo. I know all about it**

No way

**We won't get personal now**

Why not?

**I don't think it's the time or the place**

I don't know what to do about that

**So what is then, if it's not a time nor a place, what exactly is it?**

Looks like a confessional

**Can you be a little bit more specific? Is that where you are?**

It's very interesting here

**Who are you waiting for?**

Is this a dialogue with a computer, or is this a dialogue with other people?

Um.. ya , um so how are you doing today? Ya, this is wild

**Who am I? Just another nameless, faceless being in this planet**

Weird, some chick just said who am I?

**There's lots to say that hasn't already been said**

It's becoming rather metaphysical

**Does this ever end?**

Did you say something?

**Strange. It feels like I've had this conversation before. Are you still you?**

No way

**Grown within the past minutes have you?**

We all need contact, we all need communication

**You bore me**

Oh, sorry

**This conversation is going nowhere**

See ya later

### Notes

The 1st confession is the original conversation between myself and a caller on CKUT-FM, Montréal Fall 1990. Confessions 2 and 3 are a composite of the responses from people who interacted with the computer in the confessional of the "Open Your Mouth" installation.

### THE STORY OF IMPACTED RADIO RELATIONSHIPS

Radio relationships develop inside the bone. Conversations occur first, then the roots. If the conversations last long enough, the relationship can erupt and be aired. If the conversations are not long enough, the relationship stays impacted inside the bone. Impacted relationship can cause: *A.* Infection of the air over and above the two involved; *B.* Destruction of the next caller; *C.* Destruction of the bone by the formation of a sound; *D.* Other relationships pushed out onto the airwaves.

### CREDITS

Henry See - hypercard design, Bruce Gottlieb - video, Pier Lefebvre - kneeler.  
Thanks to all at the Walter Phillips Gallery, especially Mimmo.

### Notes

- [1] John Cage, **For the Birds** (Marion Boyars Publishers, London, 1981), p.148 .
- [2] Raymonde, transcribed from audio material used in "Open Your Mouth and Let the Air Out" installation.
- [3] Erik Satie in **The Recording Angel**, ed. Evan Eisenberg (Viking Penguin, New York 1987), p.75.
- [4] Bertol Brecht, "Radio as a means of Communication: a talk of the function of radio" in **Screen** winter 1979/80 vol.20 number 3/4 London), p.24-25.
- [5] Diana Burgoyne, **Siting Technology** (Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff 1988), p.37.
- [6] Sol Yurick, **Metatron** (Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, New York 1985), p.156.

- [7] Marshall McLuhan, **Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man** (McGraw-Hill 1965 Toronto), p.302.
- [8] Jean Baudrillard, "Implosion of Meaning in the Media" from **In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities** (Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, New York 1983), p. 98.
- [9] E.Canetti in Jean-Jacques Lecercle's **The Violence of Language** (Routledge, New York 1990), p.46.
- [10] Milan Kundera, **Book of Laughter and Forgetting** (Penguin, New York 1981), p.163.
- [11] E. Benveniste in Giorgio Agomben's **Language and Death** (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p.36.
- [12] David Wojnarowicz, "Spiral" **Artforum** (March 1992), p.100.