

## Disrupted Attention

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**WORDS:** Music. [*Imploring.*] Music!

[*Pause.*]

**MUSIC:** Rap of baton and statement with elements already used or wellhead alone.

[*Pause.*]

**WORDS:** Again. [*Pause. Imploring.*] Again!

**MUSIC:** *As before or only very slightly varied.*

[*Pause.*]

**WORDS:** *Deep sigh.*

CURTAIN

- Samuel Beckett, *Words and Music*<sup>1</sup>

At the end of Samuel Beckett's radio play *Words and Music* (written, recorded, and broadcast in 1961), the cantankerous Croak abandons the drama's other two characters, Joe-Words and Bob-Music, leaving the vocal arena to those whose mutual hostility sets the plot in motion. Joe-Words delivers speeches as if he were reading a transcription, exposing the tension between the word's semantic meaning and its physical-phonetic existence. Bob-Music likewise operates in a literal manner, and he, too, has something to say. When one of them starts talking or making music, the other interrupts him, producing a cacophony which leaves them no choice: either to reconcile or break off all contact. The

moment in which Words complies and asks Music to cooperate opens up a quietude which implodes into complete silence, with neither harmony nor resolution.

Vocal tensions, collisions between mechanical objects, and vain attempts to foster cooperation and harmony between objects, sounds, and narratives, characterize Guy Goldstein's work, which oscillates between the visual and the sonic, employing the materials and tools of music and sound. *Theme Tonight...* (2017)—a wall installation with eight sound channels created by Goldstein especially for his exhibition at Petach Tikva Museum of Art as an independent production after Beckett's radio play *Words and Music*—elicits questions about disruption and interference without settling for the battle between words and music.

The audience is invited to sit facing an acoustic wall in an auditory space reminiscent of a theater, and listen to a radio drama emanating from a screen shaped as an acoustic wall in theaters, consisting of panels bearing drawings of noise frequencies. Initially, Goldstein created these drawings with graphite sticks and pencils attached to a drill, outlining a drawn vibration on paper. In the next phase he placed strips of masking tape on the drawings, which "absorbed" the data therefrom, and these strips were subsequently attached to the panels to produce a "spectral waterfall" or a spectrogram—a graphic representation of sound frequencies. The wall-facing audience alludes to the passive act of listening to radio plays in the past, while the noise recordings serve as a ground for the dispersion rather than absorption of sound, as required of an acoustic wall. The occurrence, which was restricted to the sonic space and the limited means of a radio play (words, music, sound effects, silences), emanates from a live wall installation created by visual means, involving deviant elements such as staging directions, drawn music or the music of

drawing. The theatrical staging is accompanied by two static stage props only—a male shaver and a female hair dryer—which function as either additional visual images for text-music relations or as "microphones" which are plugged in, but neutralized of use value, like Marcel Duchamp's erotic pseudo-machines. The movement potential indeed exists, but it remains static and impotent, sterilized from the act of lovemaking.<sup>2</sup>

Goldstein's hybridizations are antithetical to the effort to synchronize narrative and music to produce a harmony, as an attempt a-priori doomed to failure, fluctuating between states of control and loss. In the radio play, Goldstein forces confrontation between protagonists who refuse to work together, who quarrel and interrupt one another. This unraveling echoes in the alienation and distortion of Beckett's stage directions which are visible on an electronic board (much like the translation appearing above the stage in the theater), unsynchronized with their original location. Throughout the radio drama random, "small accidents" thus occur, which shift the meaning of the occurrences to the inter-media (text-sound) narrative. Thus, for instance, when the music beats in full force, the instruction "Silence" flickers on the board, causing chaos and introducing a split which only further ridicules the vociferous conflict between Words and Music.

Goldstein attempts to give new life to forgotten objects from the past of auditory culture, such as the pianola, the radio, and the vinyl record. Various acts of translation spawn new contexts for the performances of text and sound, to which Goldstein refers as material, while altering the objects' mode of appearance and function. This sound-material is "the new materiality," to use Manuel DeLanda's terminology—"an active matter endowed with its own tendencies and capacities, engaged in its own divergent, open-ended evolution, animated from within by immanent patterns of being and becoming."<sup>3</sup> This

"materiality" is ambiguous: its features are actual (namely, it is present), but its existence is virtual, as an infinite space of evolving capacities. Various conversions manifest diverse capabilities in the material's qualities, which sustain a causality all their own.<sup>4</sup>

The virtual materiality of sound enables Goldstein to mold it into a form that holds a multiplicity of possible positions, an abstract diagram which is capable of materializing in countless manifestations. The radio play is akin to a raw material which incarnates in various manners in the exhibition space: primarily, the text and stage directions as an actual realization of the radio drama, while giving interpretation to the text and the pronunciation of the words. The play is, however, also a linguistic code, sound which transforms into language. The acts of conversion, performed by Goldstein via technical means, oscillate between different languages: between translation of sound with a drill to produce a drawing and a vocal translation into a visual installation (*Theme Tonight...*); between conversion from record to film and image (*Silence isn't Very Much*) and the use of a Wagner libretto for a graphic representation of a music box (*Freigedank, Free Thinker*). All these acts may be described as conversions between technologies and between the analog and the digital, whereby the record becomes a multi-channel image, and the radio broadcast transforms into a digital recording or a theatrical installation. The transition from one language to another and from hearing to seeing enables one to "see the sounds," when the synesthetic encounter with another lingual system furnishes the signs with a different meaning, extolling the multiplicity of positions and material possibilities.

"Polyamorous" relations which do not come together to form meaning are also found in *Yes/No Questions* (2013)—an apparatus comprising 44 loudspeakers built by Goldstein in three standard sizes, as a super-image which holds its own historical incarnations. This

time the "interruptions" ostensibly mesh to form an orchestrated, well-timed harmony, when the voices emanating from the loudspeakers repeat the words "yes" and "no" in different languages. The front side of the devices vibrates as the sound passes through them, and the "stains" of time remaining on them are tantamount to signs of the awakening past. The musical conversation does not, however, amount to a meaningful exchange. It remains as an opposition which passes between the various languages, implying a conflict that cannot be reconciled since it cannot put behind its violent history. The conversation continues to carry its physical and emotional testimony in the polyphonic "stereo" constellation: yes and no, affirmation and negation, pro and con (which echo the voices of the UN vote over the Partition Plan establishing the State of Israel), confirmation and revocation; a blend of sounds woven together into a single conversation in one time, one meaning consisting of antithetical statements in the space of possibilities of a conflicted installation.

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He wound the watch a few times and its second hand twitched, then started to tick, tick, tick on its clockwise circuit. He held the watch to his ear and listened to the precise movements of time. Tick, tick, tick...

- Raymond Watson, former IRA activist

Gilles Deleuze identified an "exhaustion" of the narrative space in Beckett's work—extending possibilities devoid of all hierarchy, and leaving them all actual. Among these he mentions several languages. "Language III[...]no longer relates language

to enumerable or combinable objects, nor to transmitting voices, but to immanent limits that are ceaselessly displaced."<sup>5</sup>Language III does not entirely extract itself from the words; rather, it emanates from the holes, hiatuses, and silences of language; "no longer a language of [...] voices, but a language of images, resounding and coloring images"; a language which appropriates the image and the space of any other use or purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Such a language, which functions as both silence and sound-image, beats in Goldstein's *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere* (2017)—a video-sound installation centered on a player piano (pianola), a music playing device which preceded the phonograph. Data about sounds and words was pierced into and stored on a paper roll (piano roll) which activates a piano whose keys are mechanically moved. The roll now stands silent, while the music played—a song describing an island in a utopian paradise—acquires an interesting twist; concurrently, an animated image based on an etching depicting William McKinley—25th President of the United States, who was assassinated by an anarchist in 1901—is screened next to the silent pianola (the song was played in McKinley's funeral, and has since become a prevalent soundtrack in funeral services). The minor animation of the portrait is barely felt, and the scarce motion of his face elicits the sense that something is happening, without being able to quite name what that something is. The "living" presence of the depicted figure echoes the absent pianist, illustrates the words of the song, and conducts the music with a barely moving face. The installation-image weaves narratives from different temporal axes together: that of the piano roll which holds the musical data, and that of the past, in which the sounds had taken a tragic turn. Both these narratives seem to move by themselves, fusing into a new narrative in the exhibition space.

Beckett toys with various combinations of language, sound, and space to produce meaningless configurations, while exploring language and the possibilities innate to it. Goldstein's inter-medial conversions and translations unfold varying combinations of raw materials, possibilities of irregular repetitions. The work *Two Moments* (2017), for instance, which activates mechanical clock apparatuses, operates between the orderly-systematic and the uncontrollable-random, while deviating from the linear course of time. The hands of the clock are removed, the mechanism is taken apart, and Goldstein uses only the second hands in two different clocks. A small lock of horse hair revolves; it is dipped in a small cup of ink, and then softly caresses the work surface. The second hand thus becomes a brush which stains papers placed on the table, imprinting them with ink marks which accumulate to form the signs of time. The clock hand turns around itself, marking cyclical time, only to erase the signs of its history, in the next rotation. The clock's movement draws the temporal duration, but the repetition generates a multiplicity of lines, some of which erase their predecessors, while others cumulate or draw new lines with different qualities. Such a temporal permutation also appears in the background panels of the radio play; the "colors of noise"<sup>7</sup> of a sonic frequency that has transformed into a visual drawing. The repetitions are thus different realizations of the abstract sound diagram, presented together as an unfolding of multiplicity.

The movement of the clock hands in a closed, multi-layered circuit, a cycle of marking and erasing, raises thoughts about the super-mechanism that animates the hands, moving time and the world. The motion of the clocks illustrates the visual aspect of the passage of time, signifying man's constant attempt to control and regulate the relations between space and time. Unexpected encounters between the hands constantly occur

within the orderly array on the table: they meet, get stuck, struggle, and randomly break free. The amount of ink on the "brushes" likewise changes, so that at times they are more saturated and at others—drier; accordingly, they sketch smooth-textured lines or contourparts, or squirt uncontrollably, as they dance on the paper amidst their own traces. The sheets of paper, collected every now and then, are presented in the exhibition as drawings of an accumulation of time, as representations of different temporal perceptions: permanence vs. change; as a line which guides from the beginning of the world to its end, or as its recurrent cyclical antithesis.

Another struggle for attention occurs in *Timetable* (2010)—parts of radios rearranged as a broadcasting apparatus and as a setting of sounds which generates meaning only through a combination of the different signals. Since the devices broadcast a concurrent, incessant buzz at an identical pitch, nonnarrative prevails over the others. While their combination does not yield a coherent language, a "conversation" of waves and narratives is nevertheless created. Each radio set is tuned to a different station received on the air, so that one is confronted with an authentic jumble of voices of battling contents, broadcasting languages, and spontaneous volumes. Every hour on the hour most of the stations broadcast the news, so that some of them unite and defeat the others, and their energy changes. The resulting sounds have no beginning and no end, but they do have rhythm. The chaos is more than a mere noise since it represents a multiplicity of messages, as a vocal image of a cultural and political conflict between different realms struggling for the listener's ear.

Deleuze's "language II" is a type of meta-language, a language that does not consist of element combinations, but rather of current fusions. The voices are the waves or the



currents, which guide and disseminate the linguistic elements. The volume of the voices lends a constantly changing reality, and the silence, too, provides meaning that can be annulled. The voices are strong, weak, and then fall silent, they branch off and then confront one another as opposites; at times they cannot be told apart. It is the reality of the radio sounds that gives the voices their feasibility, inspiring the recounted worlds with a truth value. The old medium of radio transmits messages in real time, as opposed to today's multiplicity of on-line messages, which is revealed to be futile and unmappable. But this device, too, fails, producing a cumulated sound of blended messages which may be aesthetically appreciated, but nevertheless devoid of logic. As with the clock hands which sketch a course of evolving time, here too, the mutability is constant, the sets broadcast ceaselessly, and only the news signal recurs every now and then, introducing rhythm to the cacophonous chaos.

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During the whole 'put to prison experience' and before prison, sound was a very important thing, but especially within prison. We were locked up 24 hours a day. There were people who you spoke to, and you'd never seen their face. You didn't know what they looked like, but you knew the sound of their voice, which isn't kind of how people recognize each other on the street. But because we couldn't see each other, if you were talking to somebody, you would of shouted out their name, like: 'John boy, are you listening?' and they would of shouted back: 'Yeh, *lean ar*

*aghaidh!* '*Lean ar aghaidh*' is Gaelic for 'go ahead,' and then they would of spoken, had a conversation, and at the end of every sentence you would of continually say: 'Are you listening? Are you listening?' to make sure they were still there and listening, and they had to get up and stand at the door on the inside of their cell to hear the conversation properly, so you had to keep checking that they were listening, and they would of shouted back that they were.

- Raymond Watson in conversation with Guy Goldstein

Sentience is the leitmotif running through the three-channel video installation *Silence isn't Very Much* (2017), in which the sense of hearing is accompanied by the senses of sight, smell, and touch, and the contemplation of the place of the senses in the shared political space, as fluttering contact between people. The voice, friction, and conflict characterizing Goldstein's work are this time directed at flesh and blood heroes who appear on the three screens; at a combination between historical archival materials and original materials; at a bruising tension between faiths and religions, stories and sounds—materials which Goldstein absorbed during his artist's residency in the Northern Irish village of Cushendall. Songs from Goldstein's album, *Memorable Equinox*, which he created in a two-hundred-year-old Curfew Tower in Northern Ireland, serve as the installation's soundtrack.

The citizens of Northern Ireland still vividly remember the bloody conflict in the late 20th century known as the Troubles, during which the ethno-religious factions populating the region fought one another with extreme violence: the Protestant-unionist majority, whose goal was to sustain the hegemony and the affiliation with the United Kingdom, and

the Catholic-republican minority, whose goal was liberation and independence. The complex political situation of the place contributed to Goldstein's ongoing research into the notion of "noise," while examining it in various encounters between sound and image. The conflicted setting and the long history of physical, concrete as well as mental "background noises" colored noise with political hues this time. Goldstein met with village inhabitants and asked their opinion about "noise": he talked with Catholics and Protestants, with simple folk, clergymen, and musicians. He recorded voices and calls at a hurling tournament—an ancient Gaelic sport—and was exposed to Irish culture and mythology. All these are documented in the film which accompanies the album, combining stories, sights, sounds, and words with his own playing and singing, to form a single work which captures the harsh intricacy still present in this place, projecting on other areas under violent strife.

The inter-technological combination unique to Goldstein proposes a different perception of time-space relations. Time is present as a crossing of different times and origins and their projection onto one another, as historical conflicts remain unresolved in a never-ending cycle of ebb and flow tides, which sweep the work's three protagonists: Zippy Kearney, the village butcher, whose life revolves around preservation of the hurling tradition; Raymond Watson, an ex IRA-activist who was incarcerated at the infamous Maze Prison; and Liz Weir, a storyteller.

In the film, Kearney oscillates between past, present, and future, between his work as butcher and his social activity as the person in charge of the Curfew Tower; his figure is echoed in Goldstein's song "The Mighty Zoo," which is based on the end-of-the-world prophecy by Mórrígan (great queen), goddess of war and fate in Irish mythology.

Raymond Watson, an artist, a writer, and a former IRA activist, was incarcerated in 1978 in the Maze Prison for twelve years, where he participated in one of the best known strikes, the blanket and no-wash protest, which culminated with the deaths of several prisoners. In his conversations with Goldstein, Watson speaks about sounds and noises as the only means of communication between cells, between prisoners and guards, and even with himself. The voices of the communicating prisoners are bound up with the noises of cell windows opening and closing, rattling keys, and slamming of grille doors, like a dance of footsteps and shouts; a ring theater performed in a cyclic space. "And then at the end of it, it was like the screws knew there was a 'rhythm' and a 'dance' or something [...]. If you think of it in theatrical terms, the circle is a place in the theatre [...], but the circle in the prison was the central security area." Watson's sphere of action becomes a vocal image; an extraordinary, powerful sound experience.

Liz Weir, who holds weekly workshops hosting musicians and storytellers, locals as well as tourists, at home, alludes to gatherings around the tribal campfire in which knowledge was passed down and tradition was recorded in story and song. Weir recounts sensual folktales to Goldstein, in which smell and hearing seem to battle—e.g. when an old woman is accused of stealing the smell of bread from the bakery, repaying the baker with the sound of her coins.

Goldstein is the fourth character. Throughout the film his figure is seen on the top screen, sometimes "trickling" to the other screens as well, as if he were supervising the events taking place in them, or even pulling the strings; as an omniscient narrator who also listens to the album and dances to its tunes in his ivory tower; as an actor who plays various roles; and as one who outlines the space and distorts it at will, crossing exterior and interior,

intertwining layers and narratives into one multi-sensory installation. The various narratives in the film do not come together to form a linear temporal sequence, while the album's songs are interspersed with the surrounding sounds, like the calls of the hurling players running on the field, or the noises made by the policemen as they chase protesters. Each figure brings a different world to the screen, an independent story of its own in a space whose contours are sensory: a clock's ticking, tapping steps, a gramophone's needle scratch, and the burning of peat. Goldstein sings, but time remains fragmented, and the exhibition space offers a split gaze that zigzags between the different screens and the ambient sounds, which convey some connection to the concrete reality.

Exploring the relations between the senses in the arts, Jean-Luc Nancy observed that sight neither sees, nor hears sound, although in itself it touches on and is touched by non-sight. "The *morphē*, the 'form' [...], is immediately thought or grasped on the visual plane. The sonorous, on the other hand, outweighs form [...]; it gives it an amplitude, a density, and a vibration or an undulation [...]. The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence."<sup>8</sup> In *Silence isn't Very Much*, as in the exhibition as a whole, noise is not perceived as a strident disruption, but rather as an ambiance rife with pain, difficulty, and trauma. Goldstein proposes releasing the clutch of the words and the fragments of voices to escape the weight of memory and wisdom, to confront the sights, the sounds, the conflicts, the data layers heaping one atop the other, asking questions about sequence and order, truth and fiction. Along the way to the solution or resolution, while moving between sounds and silences, the viewer's senses are immersed in listening and observation, "Once, a Beat, Second Hit."

## Notes

1. Samuel Beckett, "Words and Music," in *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006 [1986]), p.294.
2. Two bodies which are synchronized by machine operation are the fans in *Sixteen by Eight by Two by One* (2013), which are installed facing one another, held by strings. Each uses the other's qualities, and they still shake their heads from side to side at each other in a gesture of negation, pulling the ends of the strings connecting them in opposite directions as in a tug of war: when one pulls, the other lets go. The attempt to examine the possibility of collaboration between them ultimately fails, since the analogue-mechanical "machine" goes out of sync, generating tension. A byproduct of this tension is a shadow-drawing on a two-way screen as in a shadow theater. The light coming from the projector and the shadows coming from the fans and strings spawn a complex object which struggles against a vague act of string-pulling to survive, ultimately being fixed as a drawn-musical shadow-image.
3. Manuel DeLanda, "Emergence, Casualty and Realism," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Herman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), p. 392; a later version of the text was published under the title "The New Materiality" in *Architectural Design*, 85:5 (2015), pp.16–21.
4. See *ibid.*
5. Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," in Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 158.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 162.
7. See Avi Lubin's essay in this catalogue, pp.

8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), p. 2.