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THE SOUND OF VISION/THE VISION OF SOUND.

Don't you wonder sometimes
About sound and vision

(David Bowie, Sound & Vision, 1977)

Sound and picture as basic fields that allow an individual to perceive the world do not carry the same intensity of meaning in the contemporary world. Images and scripts fight each other for dominance; the sound, be it voice, sound, or tune, with an agreed meaning or without, remains left behind. The rule of the image and script and the insignificance of fleeting, uncatchable sound extend far in the past and are certainly connected with the possibility of preserving one or the other. Man was able to preserve images as early as 40,000 b.c.; the first scripts were presumably invented in Sumer, but sound in its expression remained uncatchable until the emergence of the first audio technologies.

Sound inhabits its time and disperses itself in a moment. Its life is too fleeting to attract a lot of attention or let alone allow the time needed to apply research methods. The image was easier to catch and therefore it overpowered sound and prevailed as a more faithful assistant to the exegetical mind. Of course note scripts existed, with which one could interpret sound, while at the same time neither paintings nor photography could ever offer a total record of reality. Still the registering of sound was not possible until 1877, when Thomas Edison recorded the human voice - a children's song, *Mary Had a Little Lamb* to be exact - on a tinfoil cylindrical phonograph on December 6th (he had perhaps recorded the word *halloo* on an early paper model of a phonograph in July of the same year).

The existence of technologies that make sounds accessible at all times gave hearing a new status and sound recordings entered archives, libraries, laboratories, art, and philosophies. Sound could now travel far away from its creator and seperate itself from the body, which lost control over it exactly

because sound no longer vanished. The technology did not record only the human voice, it also annotated all the sounds that it sensed. With the help of this technology, which enabled individuals to hear their own voice for the first time, the voice also became the means of imperialist exploitations, mass culture, global militarism, scientific explorations, communication technologies, etc. The birth of sound recording technologies brought about a balance between the meanings of sounds and images in society, but this balance also offered the means to misuse this previously so fleeting sound.

With the help of technologies sound was now able to anchor itself as one of the means of expression in modernist art. Because of technologies one could now hear heterogeneous sounds which also changed the way of listening. West European music did not use the multiple options offered by sound recording for a long time, but film welcomed the recorded sounds heartedly. Not only is movie sound a phonographic form at its foundation, but both film and phonograph owe their birth to Thomas Edison as well. When the principles of montage were introduced to the concept of sound movies, when sound was no longer directly linked to the image, speech, or story, that started the complex relationship between them (Kahn 2001, 11).

In the middle of the century the abundance of media expressions caused a growing and faster accumulation of sounds, which again stimulated the development of new technologies for recording, storing, and playing sounds. More people could hear more sounds in a shorter period of time, which expanded even more with the introduction of digital media.

In the age of modernism sound found its place even in the visual arts: Luigi Russolo, the Dadaists, Dziga Vertov, Antonin Artaud, John Cage, William Burroughs, the composers of *musique concrete, Fluxus,* and many other artists were thinking about sound in many different ways and used it in their work. For the designation of merging different expressions – in this case the merging of sound and picture - the history of art invented the expression intermediality, which became widespread and popularized especially after 1990. The spreading use of this term points to the fact that many different media in the area of contemporary art connect with our attention in complex configurations

. In the early phases of the development of media and media art the technology itself led to the dividing line between the separate media (just consider the silent movie or gramophone).

When video was born in the 1960s, as was the case with many other technologies stemming from the alliance between western military and industrial corporations, the sound in it occupied the secondary position. Video can exist without sound but rarely without the image. Nevertheless, video art became one of those fields where sound, image, or their *realistic* harmony could be questioned, as Richard Serra did in *Boomerang* (1974). In the hypnotic *Lip Sinc* from 1969 Bruce Nauman slowly separated speech from lip movement and merged them together again. Similar use of sound and image happened again in the *Stamping in Studio* (1968) video. Nauman achieved asynchrony in video, where sound and image are always simultaneously recorded, with a small corrigendum that was introduced to Portapacks (the first portable video device) at the end of the sixties. The device now offered two sound channels. The first one was synchronised with the image, but the second channel was independent and worked as an audio double, which the author could insert into the original recording. From that moment on artists could record commentaries over the previous recordings. A few years later new questions about the relationship of sound and image were raised in Gary Hill's video *Why do things get in a muddle?* In Hill's video sound and images run in different ways. The modernists played with conventional notions of sounds and images, asked questions about the transparency of media and created an extraordinary dream world.

In the year 1970 David Bowie understood the merger of sound and image as a positive novelty, while today this phenomenon is present all the time in the form of movies, commercials, television, music videos, video art, sampling in the work of dj's and vj's, videogames, etc. The possibilities for the connection of sound and image in the field of art are numerous.

The technology enables a wide spectre of various explorations in the field of images and sounds. *Globalscreen/Appendix* explores the possibilities for the use of sound in video art at a time when the difference between movie and

video is becoming almost unidentifiable due to the universal adoption of digital techniques. Whatever formats are used for recording, with rare exceptions , almost all end being handled on the computer screen, although later they can again take any existing form of record.

The history of video art has long been connected with music. Nam June Paik was a violinist by education. Woody Wasulka was engaged in electronic music, and also Tony Oursler tested his powers in the worlds of music. When sound and image in an art video are created by a musician and video artist the manner of cooperation becomes especially important: "I've never done a traditional soundtrack, I've never gotten a project where someone had a finished edit and said: here, put music on top of it. It's always been: someone has an idea, maybe they have some images, I start to create sound, they might even shoot while listening to my sound. […] In the end there is some kind of really tight collaboration in which image and sound come together. And it's a luxury: I could never do this if I was to work in a commercial area," (Vitiello).

Nevertheless, the visible line of separation between art video and the kind that musical groups use as a means of expression is becoming smaller and smaller. The sound is the key element in music videos and the image is just a companion, but in the art video, despite the listed examples, the image was dominant until very recently. Music and art videos – the dividing line is no longer strictly drawn– have access to the infinite archive of heterogeneous sound and image materials that resides on the internet and in other archives, or to the creation of new sounds and images, digital, or analogue and digitalized only later.

In both cases video can operate as a means of resistance, as technology offers possibilities for its informal circulation out of the dominant channels of politics and the economy. But only a moment and not an era as in the old days of Ruttmann and Paik is needed to transform these new avant-garde attempts into mainstream culture.

Not only has the border between sound and image become fluid, but so has the one between aesthetics and pragmatic technologies. This border

becomes unidentifiable in some of the video works. The artists that engage in the transformation of sounds into images or images into sounds explore the possibilities of synaesthetic technologies. Neuro-biological explorations show that synaesthesia is not only a state of illness, but is also present in each newly born individual, who has yet to learn to differentiate between sounds and images. Maybe works of art in which the image pours itself into sound and sound back into image express the wish of returning to the primary state, when the stimuli from the world outside were connected in a totality.

Globalscreen/Appendix also explores the possibilities of critical evaluations and explorations of control and the invasions of new technologies into the human body, which sound offers in contemporary reality imbued with technologies. A new smaller version of *Bluetooth* appeared on the market recently which can be adapted to the needs of the individual and enables enhancement of the sound input, becoming a prosthetic that changes man into a cyborg,.

On the other hand, the field of sound is used for state and corporate purposes of supervision and control. A report entitled *An appraisal of technologies for political control*, which assessed that the use of many technologies for eavesdropping and bugging in the private and political sector is increasing, was drawn up for the European parliament in the year 1998 (Wright 1998). Many of these technologies - hidden microphones for eavesdropping, phone bugging, devices for establishing identities through voice recognition – are connected to sound.

In contrast to the exhibitions which explored the relationship between sound and image historically - *Für Augen und Ohren. Von der Spieluhr zum akustischen Environment* (1980) or *Vom Klang der Bilder* - *Globalscreen/Appendix* is focused on exploring the diverse possible contemporary expressions of connection between images and sounds in the sphere of video art. This annual collection of video works, which in the past few years was focused on exploring the concept of home (2003/4) and different points of view (2004/5), and which connected various European

artists and institutions, this year travels into an area that, like technological sound and image, no longer acknowledges any borders.

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