





The world is a noisy ball
-John Oswald

1 } The Secret Artist's Secret Statement: The Psychic Radio

When Guglielmo Marconi, arguably the inventor of radio, died in Rome in 1937, all the radio stations of the world paid tribute with two minutes of silence. A felicitous inverse-eulogy for a man who, in his later years, believed sound to have an infinite envelope of decay; that is, that no sound ever truly died but at some point fell beneath the threshold of perception. Beneath the illusion of silence persists the echo of all that was ever sounded. 1

In this vision, one could resurrect the voices of the dead if one possessed the technology, or sensitivity, to do so. If it were only a question of technology, then, this in-audibility would of course be only temporary: the exponential trajectory of our mechanical industries makes once-improbable amplifications inevitable. John Cage's wish to hear the amplified sound of molecules may be made possible simultaneous to the resurrection of his voice, speaking that wish. The secrets of our surroundings would be revealed, our ancestors would be reawakened, and we would truly be "hearing voices". 2

Socrates has said that "our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness". The madness of voices has afflicted many who have bestowed blessings, both sacred and profane: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Pythagoras, Teresa of Avila, William Blake, Zo Wannamaker and Ghandi; the list goes on. Inspiration for the Duino Elegies arrived for Rainer Maria Rilke, hearing the voice of a "terrible angel" in the crashing surf. Socrates himself was guided by the voice of his daimonium, encouraging him to eschew all that which was not good for him. The voice spoke nothing on the famous day of his trial, and its silence was answered shortly after by Socrates' own. 3 4

A comic book, as colors and patterns that live on paper, is a "silent" medium- its intensities thrive both far beneath, and far above, the audible spectrum. Despite a veneer of geometry, a comic- in ways like all books- is

5 a secret disorder. It seems to exist as a whole until you try to read it, then it
6 fragments into parts. The panels are fault-lines, the fault-lines are time: a
comic is an assemblage of moments.

Fragmented time can only have the illusion of fluidity- like the stut-
tered film cell, or the crystalline audio sample, its sensation of smoothness
belies the cracks within; fissures and yawns of secret space, of silence. If
those silences- those spaces inbetween- are stretched too far, too long, then
the silence rises up, threatening to overcome and wreak havoc.

7 Since the mechanism of the mind has been destroyed in its continuity, I
can no longer think except in fragments. When I do think, the major part
of the stock of terms and vocabulary which I have personally accumulad-
ed is unusable, being rusty and forgotten somewhere, but even after the
term has appeared, the underlying thought collapses, the contact is sud-
denly broken, the underlying nervous response no longer corresponds to
the thought, the mechanism has broken down- and I am talking about the
times I am thinking!!!

8 A fragmented mind can have no illusions- it's "images" are gone, as
Antonin Artaud constantly mourns: "There is no point in looking for my
images. I KNOW that I shall never find my images". Images that, as a
"degree of mental firmness, of inner compression that would enable me to
meet or recover myself," keep understanding whole and not broken into lit-
tle worthless bits like Schopenhauer's shattered diamond. Only the voices-
the voices of gods, voices of daimonium, voices of the dead- can serve as
guide.

9 Radio is the loadstone for the invisible voice. Marconi's "wireless"
merely gave mechanical form to the phenomenon of reception. As such,
radio has had a vital existence before it was invented; since humans have
heard invisible voices, "in the wind, in thunder, in the dream". The gods
10 speak to mortals on an invisible wavelength; the dead as well. A voice
thundered and caused Saul of Tarsus first to cower, then to convert; Joan of
Arc was led to raise the seige of Orleans but die in flames; William Blake's
dead brother informed him of a new painting technique.

As an exception that perhaps proves the rule, there is a story of
Chilperic, the Merovingian king:

11 King Chilperic sent a letter all written out to the tomb of St. Martin
which contained the request that the blessed Martin would write back to
him whether it was permissible to drag Gunthram from his church or
not. And the deacon Baudegisih who brought the letter, sent to the holy
tomb a clean sheet of paper along with the one he had brought. And after
waiting three days and getting no answer he returned to Chilperic.

While Chilperic's method was ill-conceived, one understands completely

the sentiment, that of seeking advice from beyond the grave. But his failure is equally understandable: radio has always been the mainline through the ether, connecting this world with others.

Strangely enough, since the technology of invisible voices has become prevalent, the profile of those able to listen, unaided by machines, has slipped from prophecy to madness, leaving the ethereal wavelengths to become choked with the prosaic voices of the living. For even while Nikola Tesla began his quest for wireless radio trolling for dead voices, and while Konstantin Raudive harvested them with a germanium diode radio-receiver connected to a tape recorder, the rest of the world succumbed to the more prosaic "radio-as-music-box"- even as the impassioned voice of Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti, arguing for the "picking up, amplification, and transfiguration of the vibrations emitted by living beings, living and dead spirits", slowly faded and died.

Secrets live beneath the veil of silence. At least mostly; a secret may surface every once in a while, to be told. The awakening of secrets, the dredging beneath the threshold of silence, could only lead to anastasis ton nekron; a resurrection of the dead. Such must have been the case in 1989, when the East German Stasi files were made public, or, even earlier, in 1975 when the amendments to the Freedom of Information Act opened the vast secret library of the FBI, grown labyrinthian under the long reign of J. Edgar Hoover.

Staring at Toronto's Canadian National Tower, one can only be witness to its smooth, needle-like finger pointing straight to the heavens; one cannot hear the secret chatter, the bouncing frequencies of invisible voices. "This tower is a source of ghostly voices, turbulent speech, stray notes and static, an infinite variety that may bear no single message."

It is a noisy silence. Like the hallowe'en graveyard, the veil is thinnest here by the antenna. It is itself a cemetery cross that stands above secret lives, decaying utterances, a vibrant radio afterlife that still pulses beneath a thin veil of soundless soil.

The secret is this: King Mummy is both alive and dead; an Asante fetish and a crucified savior. The cross, while in Roman terms an effective machine for punishment, and in early Christian terms a transcendence of suffering, has been for far longer a symbol of the crossroads; that is, an intersection between worlds. The shape of King Mummy Doll is the shape of a spiritual antenna, granting access to the invisible necropolis of our utterances. Like the schizophrenic- the prophet slipped to madman- with a radio receiver in the head, King Mummy is a blind, unwilling, but aurally attentive exhumers reading fortunes in decomposing vibrations of bones.

A fetish with arms in both worlds, King Mummy Doll is broken, his

mind split; as the Greek roots *schizein* and *phren*, "to split" and "mind". From the fragments comes a fabrication of memory, which becomes an allegory, which in turn becomes a mythology: a story of origins, fragmented by reflections of the immediate. Or, rather, it is a series of acute perceptions, so broken that the act of reparation can only be an apotheosis of the repairer.

Notes on the text:

1. Gregory Whitehead, *Bodies, Anti-Bodies, and Nobodies*, in *Sound by Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, (Toronto : Art Metropole; Banff, Alta: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990) 199-201.
2. Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988).
3. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield, (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2002) 25.
4. Plato, *Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant, (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 68-9.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari speak of books in a similar manner: A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Part II*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Quote is from page 3.
6. Comic Book artists and theorists Will Eisner and Scott McCloud investigate the role of time in sequential art. For specifics, refer to Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*, (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1985) 39, and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Kitchen Sink for HaperPerrenial, 1993) 94-117.
7. Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1998).
8. *Ibid.*
9. R. Murray Schafer, *Radical Radio*, in *Sound by Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, (Toronto : Art Metropole; Banff, Alta: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990) 207.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Originally from Gregory of Tours' *Historiarum libri decem*. This translation is taken from Paul Halsall Internet Medieval Sourcebook, 8 Jan. 2000, <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/gregory-hist.html>> (28 Mar. 2004).
12. Konstantin Raudive, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead*, 14 Mar. 2003, <http://www.worlditc.org/c_03_raudive_break_first.htm> (24 Apr. 2004)
13. Gregory Whitehead, 199.
14. comment?
15. Toronto's Canadian National Tower is a telecommunications hub in the form of a 553.33m needle-shaped building. It is a tourist attraction, with restaurants and motion simulation rides, as well as a symbolic edifice in Bruce Powe's haunting novel about Toronto, *Outage: A Journey into Electric City* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1995), from which this quote is taken.
16. An early cross appears in a stele from Kalah, Iraq, depicting Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) holding a rod with a wide flanged cross- later called a Maltese cross- atop it. The cross also had an established ornamental usage in pre-Columbian times by the Mochica Indians of Peru, in Aztec Mexico, and in Hawaii. The ansata and ankh, both cross-type forms from ancient Egypt, symbolized the sexual union of Osiris and Isis, while in pre-Christian Celtic lands, the 4 arms represented the 4 elements intersection that made up the world. (It is also interesting to note, by way of comparison, that the Celts would sometimes sacrifice humans on large crosses, later dismembering the victims and distributing

the pieces to be buried in fields to encourage crop growth; while the Osiris myth (re-enacted in early Egyptian Mystery Cults before evolving into the Dionysian Mystery Cults of Greece, Asia Minor, and eventually Rome) involved the god being dismembered and ultimately reformed by his consort Isis, all except for his phallus). There is a cross symbol used in Hindu sacred art, where the vertical arm represents the celestial states of being, while the horizontal represents the earthly. It goes on... some of the history of the cross can be found in J.C. Cooper's *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) 68-9.

This text is an extract from a series of essays on the January 2004 show, *The Variegated Receptions of the Psychic Radio, or, Imbolc: The Strange Becoming of King Mummy Doll*. The comic-images from the show may be found at the website: <http://leda.ucsd.edu/~nsclark>. I may also be contacted at nsclark@ucsd.edu