

## Resonance

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To resound is to sound again, to carry on sounding. Resonance is then the characteristic catachresis of our strange, resounding time, in which time can no longer be counted on to pass as it used to. Sound is time's skintight silhouette, for there is no sound that perdures, no sound whose outline is not drawn out in, and out of, time. But, in resounding, the twinning of time and sound is loosened, and sound starts to fill space. Resounding is the holding back or spreading out of time, transforming it from a taut line into a lazy, doodled pool or slowly loitering lasso. In resounding, time seems to coagulate into a sort of pseudo-matter, vapid, viscous or oily, that swells and shivers rather than advancing in any particular direction.

But to resound is not entirely to set time at naught, for resounding is as mined with motion as any other kind or quality of sound. To resound is only to last out, to put off passing away; to subsist as a mode of desisting, to delay in decaying, to die away in delay. And, indeed, all sounding already has resonance in it, for a sound is nothing but an oscillation, a rocking back and forth that riddles and dilates simple passing away.

Resonance requires interiority, or, in its absence, requisitions it. A desert gives back no echoes. Sound, the nature of which is to propagate outwards from its point of origin, can only be bent back in its tracks by some form of obstruction or limit. Echo-location is only of use within some locality. To sound and, even more, to resound, is to sound in and thereby to sound out such a locality, to draw out the audible map of what baffles the indifferent dissipation of sound and thereby lets it persist in brief self-interfering.

Murray Schafer suggests that the qualities of European music are defined largely by the fact that music has progressively been designed to be played and heard indoors – that European music is all, in fact, chamber music. But this could be turned inside out. Perhaps music, which is anyway only another name for sound that has been brought back to itself, turning elapsing into pattern, occurrence into quasi-object, provides the condition for all forms of enclosure and introversion. Every piece of music is a music-box, it makes room for itself. The primary form of all life, the cell, is just this kind of eddying or introversion, which resists flow by routing flow back into itself, creating a living room, a temporary space of reprieve from the

otherwise irreversible onward slide into entropy, a living room. Life is hesitation, standing aside, suspended sentience.

A room in which all reverberation has been damped down seems alien and isolating, for such a room has thereby been rendered stone deaf, to us and to itself. But let us remember that stones are not in fact deaf at all, but are sharply, sparkingly resonant. Counter-intuition: soft, compliant or moist substances (human bodies for example) amorously soak up sound, but thereby annul it; it is the obdurate substance – stone, wood, crystal – which, by resisting sound, rings and responds to it, giving it back to itself, completing it by rebuffering and doubling it. A warm, responsive place damps sound off; only hard, dry places can give mellowness and body to sound, and cold flint is needed to strike a spark.

This resorting of a space to itself can seem to give to space a kind of reflexivity, creating the beginnings of proprioception. A room or other resonant enclosure that is rich in echoes seems not only to answer back to the sounds we make, but also to be able to hear, or overhear itself. Its resounding is a kind of reflection on itself, and its reverberations make rumour of itself. What sound engineers call *room-tone* is the quality possessed by a particular space of being able thus to listen in to itself, to revolve and ruminate on the intramural murmur of wall to wall. Hopkins compares the inscape or expressive essence of things to the ringing of bells; things give out their being as ‘each hung bell’s/Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name’. Bells have often been given names – Hautclere, Doucement, Great Tom, Big Ben – and even baptised; but the capacity of bells to announce their own names, as well as their privileged role in acts of ceremonial annunciation of all kinds, depends upon the fact that their sound is first internally wound up, or multiplied on itself, inside the secret throat of the bell’s chamber: *reculer pour mieux sauter*. Language suggests that sounding must precede resounding; but a bell, like any instrument that has a resonating chamber, must first internally resound, before it can sound itself out, out loud.

When I hear my own recorded voice, I recoil, as everyone does from theirs, from its shrillness, its parched ugliness. The recorded voice is a shrivelled changeling, a skinned lizard usurping the place of the full-bodied phantasmal organism that ordinarily occupies our heads, amplified and fattened by the bones of the skull. Not only is resonance in itself a kind of incipient selfhood, selfhood is a reflux of resonance, every *ego* an echo. The way to rehabilitate this disowned, desiccated thing is to add echo to it. A recorded voice envolumed with reverberation I can acknowledge mine. By being doubled it is made our own again: enlarged, recharged, enchanted, adored.

Aura Satz's *Glissolalia* provides an enactment of evicted sound seeking to come home to itself. Theremin players, having no frets or other articulations of the air to help them pick out their starting pitches, must rely on their own postural memories, fine-tuned by a process known as 'pitch-fishing', a tentative, miniature trial-and-error, by indirections finding directions out. Like a radio-listener scanning the waveband for a station, the writer casting for a rhyme, the fly zigzagging at random to pick up a wisp of rot or sweetness in the air, a singer probing her voice for the right register in which to pitch her song, the accompanist striving to fit his fingers in the sockets of what is sounding in his ears, *Glissolalia's* parabolas of rising and falling tones sound as though something, perhaps it's us, were trying to get into a groove, to tune up, or to tune in. *Glissolalia* seems to function by echo-location, the sending out of sounds to pick up whispers of a place, and its own place in it, like the whisker that gives the cat an index of its width.

Resonance is not just time put on the spot, not just the hiccup or dimpling of space, for it involves more than simple self-relation. Resonance is also that which sets aside and moves across monadic pockets of introversion. Resonance can therefore seem reparative, a rejoining of what space has arbitrarily or violently set asunder. Resonance is a work of communication, in the literal sense, of a making common. A note plucked on one lute will cause another unplucked lute in the vicinity to thrill faintly in sympathy. Sing into an open piano and certain strings will give back buzzing assent to your voice. Resonance is therefore to be understood, not as conduction, but induction, not as effect, but as affinity. The note does not seem to have travelled from one instrument to another; it is rather as if the same note sleeping inside the two instruments had been awoken at the same moment. A resonant world is one implicated with itself, in the sense in which particles subject to what Einstein described as 'spooky action at a distance' are said to exhibit quantum entanglement, so that a change in the state of one can affect the other even though they are light years apart. Resonance discloses a magical economy of inductions in place of the more familiar economy of productions. Instead of the effort, calculation and hard bargaining required to produce mechanical effects in the material world, resonance seems to offer something for as-good-as-nothing. It takes much more energy to set a pendulum swinging than it does to amplify that swing by timely nudges on the beat of its oscillations.

*Glissolalia* is a choreography of such rhymes and chimes and affinities. Looming and receding, the resonance and resemblance of sounds with each other in space here comes to enact a resonance or rhyming of sound with space. The arcs and swags of sound, rising and falling like scales, sirens, fans or engines, graph in the air, or on the ear, the insinuations that sound itself may be made to score in sand, water and wax, as well as the sine-curves

made visible by the oscilloscope. Nothing here is quite itself, all is ghosting, surrogacy and vicariance, mirror on mirror mirrored, everything loaning and borrowing being to and from the never-quite-isomorphic forms that come and go about it.

We are sympathetic to ideas of sympathy. But there is more than community and meeting of minds in resonance, which can also be murderous. The soprano who smithereens a glass by hitting on its resonant frequency induces in it a catastrophic apoptosis, or suicide by self agitation. The wind buffeting a bridge at a frequency that locks step with its secret note of disaster can make it buck and writhe in spasm. Resonance can lend a lethal vitality to death. The gratuity of resonance is what leads to its darker, more demonic aspect – for the self-propagating power of resonance is the engine also of the cyclone and the tsunami, the scandal and the stampede, the avalanche, earthquake and epidemic. In such cases, when undulation enlarges into inundation, the internally-resonating enclave expatiates, the inside engrosses its outside, broadcasting to all quarters the howl of its feedback.

For this reason, the soaring and swooping parabolas of *Glissolalia* continually deflect or seek to defect from the convergence towards which they seem to tend. There must be some dissonance, shortfall or overshoot. Amid this structure in which nothing stays long enough in one place to become separate, there is nevertheless a kind of discretion. The twenty-one minute loop of *Glissolalia* creeps up on but never quite comes back to itself. Perhaps it keeps itself from itself to keep at bay that absolute coming together that might shiver it and us apart.