

# LISTEN . CARE . FULLY .

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Essay in *Cavity: The Capacitive Version* by Gert-Jan Prins.

Clear vinyl with booklet.

*'L'aria è piena d'infinite linee rette e radiose insieme intersegate e intessute senza occupazione l'una dell'altra [le quali] rappresentano a qualunque oggetto la vera forma della loro chagione.'*

*'The air is full of infinite straight and curved lines, altogether crossing each other and textured with no interference, which represent to any object the real shape of their cause.'*

Leonardo Da Vinci [1]

## Listen

A BUNCH OF CD'S BY GERT-JAN ARRIVED IN THE POST A FEW DAYS AGO. I LISTEN TO THEM, AND TRY TO DRAW A SPATIAL STORY OUT OF THEM BY PROJECTING PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND MIXING IT WITH THE SOUNDS THAT ARE GIVEN TO ME. IT'S A HARD TASK, THIS PROJECTION ONTO SOMETHING THAT IS NOT THERE YET. NOT BEING *THERE*, I CANNOT BUT LISTEN TO AN IMPRESSION OF THE *CAVITY*, EXUMED FROM SIMILAR SOUNDS AND DESCRIPTIONS IN WORDS. TRYING TO PROJECT AURAL ASSUMPTIONS, ACROSS MY NOTION OF SPATIAL SOUND, BACK INTO THIS PAGE AND IN A WAY THAT COULD RELATE TO A SPACE ELSEWHERE. A SPACE ELSEWHERE? DOESN'T *ELSEWHERE* ALSO EXIST INSIDE THE SAME ROOM, INSIDE THE SAME SPACE? BUT THEN AGAIN, ISN'T ANY WRITING ON SOUND A VACILLATING TRANSLATION INTO THE *'NOT-THERE'*?

Gert-Jan Prins knows of spatial sense: both the sense of sculpting space with frequencies, and the sense of space inside electronic circuits. Combining the use of self-built analogue equipment with a high awareness of aural surfaces and dimensions, he creates dense soundscapes coloured by rumbles, inner bass waves, a rattle, a flow. There's an insistence inherent to his rhythms and it is that of a dedicated scientist probing his material. His sounds feel at once very controlled, and very urgent. He knows how to empty a space after saturating it, how to play with expectations by reversing them. Simply put, he knows how to compose – not only structurally, but also aurally. He is well accustomed with an art that unites the uncharted feel of an exploring attitude with the detail of extreme attention in construction; which at once makes something exist as utmost fleeting, and yet consistent; he highlights missed bends and hardly captured passages, the moments in which what's continuous and related and in motion is illuminated by a single instant of displacement.

SLIDE DOWN THESE SLEEK AUDIO SURFACES, SLIP OVER THEM, SKATE.

AND WHAT IS THE POINT OF ACCESS TO A SOUNDSCAPE?

Max Neuhaus wrote of the entrance into his *Place Works* as of a change of scale in the perception of a space, on the verge of the plausible sounds that shape that space, and that are not quite entirely in tune with its normal aural dimension. He called it 'an air of another density', implying that a sonic palette is intensified, or rarefied, to delimit a soundscape as it is modulated by an external source. Prins seems to take this idea of access and sonic plausibility one step forward, into the question of

what happens once you've entered an aurally defined space. He places the listener in a variety of modulations, that circulate and echo, scattering the sonic matter and then re-collecting it – physically and mentally. A sense of organisation of space is proper to his work throughout and is requested of the listener, who is drawn to outline a personal, INNER CHART.

TO ORGANISE A SPACE AURALLY DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU CANNOT DANCE IN IT, WHILE LISTENING THROUGHOUT. THIS IS A DANCE STRIPPED DOWN TO THE ESSENTIALS IN A RAREFIED ATMOSPHERE, PUNCTUATED BY MOVEMENTS OF MACHINES THAT DREAM OF GAMELAN WHILE THEY UNHINGE THEMSELVES.

## Care

NOW I SPEND SOME TIME THINKING OF FREEK'S WORDS: '*Cavity: the Capacitive Version is a new work in his study to bring forth the dynamics of interplay within an architectural (atmo)sphere. The visitors, man, are brought about into this sphere as an electromagnetic wave. Do our bodies and minds indeed integrate into the mechanical and (digital) electro-technical order of our cultivation? If indeed so, what would this mean to our sociability? What does it mean, after all, to socialise as an electromagnetic wave in a hollow body where you, as a wave, reflect and resonate?*'

I suppose this has got something to do with the notion of walking across screens. As Andreas Broeckmann has written: 'The most fundamental question as to what constitutes a 'screen' is posed by Geert-Jan Prins in *Make Before Break: the Cavity version*, a visually neutral space of pure, non-representational sound that is, however, rich in associations and acoustic structures. The continuum between the sound sources, the spatial distribution of the sound waves, the human ears and the listening minds form the perceptual field in which the sonic artwork takes shape, and makes sense. Visuality does not necessary constitute an image. Sound and touch also get in the picture. Opening up surfaces.' [2] Not only does Prins' work open up surfaces. It also poses questions about navigating across them, hence about *practicing* a space. Following Michel De Certeau's proposition that '*space is a practiced place*', and that '*every story is a travel story – a spatial practice*' [3], I wonder how one moves within the spaces created by the frequencies injected by Prins into them, and what spatial stories are possibly told within them. A space – namely, a CAVITY – is built, and you access it 'as an electromagnetic wave'. An open nerve is touched, as the interplay here does not occur in a dumb machine responding to a dumb individual, but its very nature bounces back onto the sociability of human beings who meet while they traverse a space; in the care they take in each other.

Prins' work could ideally be placed at the end of each spatial story that one happens to tell in each new space: like those nonsense rhymes (locked grooves, I'd call them) that traditionally punctuate or close a tale, where repetition and rhyming in a canon, break a verse into delays and disrupt an initially still structure by creating motion across an aural space. Talking of rhyme and rhythm, it is no wonder that Prins chose to title one of his pieces *Break Before Make*, where construction and destruction stand on the same plane yet are joined by a temporal succession that implies the breaking being functional to the making. It is left to us to imagine what happens *after* the break: and I would be tempted to see it not as an extreme destructive proposition but rather as a cycle, a circuit that coils and recoils in a double reciprocal feeding-back.

## Fully

FREEK'S WORDS TRIGGER FURTHER THOUGHT: '*Between feedback and composition, the free will of human improvisation and the determinism of electronic laws, Prins operates as a sculptor and an experimenting scientist. [...] Prins stripped hardware, separating the electronic components, until bare frameworks, with a specific body to voice, remained.*'

In his reflection on artistic creation, *Introduction To The Method Of Leonardo Da Vinci*, Paul Valéry wrote: 'The image of this world is part of a family of images, an infinite group, all the elements of which we possess, but unconsciously – consciousness of possession is the secret of the inventors.' [4] Prins is in fact an inventor, and his consciousness of possession of forms goes on to opening up his array of machinery. It is as if those invisible, yet highly dense fields of rumbling noise could only be dealt with by unmasking their inner workings. Knowledge, then construction, comes for Prins by moving across the insides of his material, not just by observing or using it.

According to Nicolas Collins, one of *The seven basic rules of hacking* is: 'Fear Not!' [5] And for sure Prins fears not, when he sets out to open up his machinery, spending time with it until he can nearly hear the sound of its own making. The REDUCED OBJECTS are meant as 'studies on the interior architecture of electronic machines in relation to his sound systems'. But what is the inner sound of the components of a sound-making object, of their interior landscape? I would say that, internally, these machines laugh a lot. Sure, it is a suffocated laughter, retreating into a detached smile at times, but it undoubtedly voices the undertones of irony within Prins' sounds and into the very statement that lies within the REDUCED OBJECTS, which seem to exist in direct connection with a piece like *Break Before Make*. In comedy writing, one of the most popular devices is the defeating of expectations. *Break Before Make* does exactly that. On paper, it could function as your safe aural mess of analogue-gizmo-meet-circuit-bending extravaganza. Then your glance and ear get closer, and the titles with the sounds start blurring and exploding this vision of cool geekiness. *Ritmokickcercando*: the maddened techno of small machines awkwardly mocking the idea of *ricercandos* in classical music. Overexcited pieces of equipment ringing and running around. And for whom? Who is it that listens? It is *Drindustriaagitato* and its moments of sonic exhilaration and saturation. Or the disjointed rhythms that shatter *Intro elastico*, the same sense of playful exaggeration. Or the scratches in *Voceevocando*, where remnants of voices are torn apart repeatedly.

IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT PRINS APPROACHES AND OPENS UP HIS OBJECTS AS IF THEY WERE A TEXT TO DECIPHER.

Text, and sound:

I THINK OF DAVID TUDOR and his piece *Phonemes* [6], for percussion generator and vocoder, and the voice/machine interplay between short and long sounds that takes place throughout, stretching and bending aural particles.

I THINK OF VILÉM FLUSSER when he wrote that 'texts do not signify the world; they signify the images they tear up. Hence, to decode texts means to discover the images signified by them... Texts are a metacode of images.' [7] Prins' REDUCED OBJECTS are metacodes of sounds. These sounds lie on the organisation of percussive patterns, as arrangements of rhythm elevated onto a higher dimension. Prins himself said: 'I still believe that I think like a drummer' [8]. What sort of drumming are we talking about? Rather than the strictly melodic, I would tend toward the homolodic: thinking of a sonic dimension which is spatial, which traces its choral, overarching lines along an inner rhythm, and which, right as the inner sound, guides and arranges.

In the end, I THINK OF BRUNO LATOUR and his book *Pandora's Hope* [9], where he states that the sciences construct representations that seem always to push the world away, but also to bring it closer. A farewell thought here could revolve around the instant that brings together the 'away' with the 'closer': when a sign, or a sound, is abstracted from its matter: to think of how loaded and complex this operation is, of the long chains of transformations that occur before distilling it. Which raises again the need to Listen, and to Care, and Fully.

[1] As quoted in Paul Valéry, *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo Da Vinci*. (1894). In "Selected Writings of Paul Valéry" (1950), New York, New Directions

[2] Andreas Broeckmann, *Deep Screen. Art in Digital Culture*. (2008). Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum

[3] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice Of Everyday Life*. (1984). Berkeley and Los Angeles, University

Of California Press

[4] Paul Valéry, *ibid.*

[5] Nicolas Collins, *Handmade Electronic Music. The Art Of Hardware Hacking* . (2006). Milton Park, Abingdon, Routledge

[6] David Tudor, *Phonemes*, 1981, in *Three Works For Live Electronics* . (1996). CD. New York, Lovely Music

[7] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy Of Photography*. (2000). London, Reaktion Books

[8] Gert-Jan Prins, *RISK, the use of high frequency radio-electronics for audio recreation* , Leonardo Music Journal, 2004

[9] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* . (1999). Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press

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