

Reading Diary

Remembering spaces

How does the human body and mind orient and understand itself relation to space? How do we create memories of spaces and how does our memory and conception of space become distorted and incomplete; can we find these holes and reap the excitement of their discovery and use? How has technology expanded but also warped our conceptions of space? These are a few of the questions that are approached in the readings.

We find sound is a very important way of understanding space. Biology has given us two ears and sophisticated directional hearing and has cautioned us to listen carefully. Several of the readings deal with the notion of how artists play with our understanding of space, place, and time through the use of recording and playback. Maryanne Amacher finds that the fidelity of today's sonic technologies allow certain locations' sound environments to be transported to others. Fontana brings the sounds of a bridge to the world trade center and a busy train station to an abandoned one. In this way, the artist claims not only is space transported, but also time has been modified as well. Interestingly these could be abstractly compared to Albert Einstein's theories of space time. However in Einstein's conceptions of space and time, it is light which becomes the way our universe is simultaneously defined and measured, creating the matrix of "space time." Can one consider sound to be a significant enough fabric of space to consider its ability to shape time and place, in the same way as light? If this is possible then its recording and playback creates a paradox which Schafer describes as schizophonia, where recorded sounds cause space time displacements which can be intoxicating, transporting, and disembodiment. Certainly I personally have more profound experiences of "presence" in sonic recording and playback than in photography or other form of recreation. But recording and playback is still a mechanized interpretation and recreation of sound and in this sense is a subjective sculptor of space time as opposed to being an absolute matrix. Sound is limited also regardless of natural or artificial source because it is a wave energy which needs a medium to propagate through, i.e. air or water. Light on the other hand is the one form of energy which can propagate through space independently of a medium and hence it becomes the connection and delineation of time, space and awareness itself.

Memory is crucial to our understanding of space and navigation. Yet as the saying goes, "nothing that has been heard can be told in the same way." *Remembering Spaces* chronicles research and findings which tell of the myriad ways in which memory and the mind distort and simplify our conceptions of global, environmental, and personal space. This is of course the paradox and beauty of memory. Borges' memoriam to Fune, is a man of extraordinary powers of perception and memory, who dances betwixt clairvoyance and madness. Memory is both a practice of precision and abstraction. Borges gives us a jewel of zen wisdom with the statement, "The truth is we all live by leaving behind, no doubt we all profoundly know that we are all immortal and that sooner or later everyman will do all things and know everything." As we begin to understand this path, we will find the extraordinary in the ordinary. John Cage used sounds that were considered noise to construct masterful pieces of music. Rather than trying to have new "instruments" pretend they are old, let them define their own foreign possibilities—a way of "leaving behind" conventions to birth a greater vision and experience of life and art.

Members of the Flux factory discovered new spaces to inhabit in the Queens Museum of Art. As they bored thru the walls, they found new ways to connecting spaces and interacting with them. They occupied "vacuums" in conventional spacial consciousness which exist physically but rarely psychically. The excitement of occupying such spaces was born from a sense of discovery and a subversion of authority. Although I must say I feel a sense of artistic tragedy and poverty in the need for subversion and vandalism for the sake of combating boredom

in one's voluntarily chosen practice.

Technology has also changed the way we experience and understand or, in many cases, misunderstand space. A driver on the autobahn traveling at 200 km/h tells you a line is five meters in length, but upon stopping in traffic realizes in surprise the line is actually 40 meters. Although we have harnessed powers and speeds which are unprecedented and extraordinary, we are evolutionarily ill-equipped to understand how powerful they really are. This brings up an interesting and tragic story of Doomed Air France 447. The artist Paul DeMarinis has placed metals used in airplane construction into a tank of salt water which causes minute sounds of electrolytic corrosion that become the voice of the lost airbus which crashed into the ocean in the middle of the night killing all aboard. The outdated reading states that the flight recorders were never found. In fact they were found earlier this year and, against all odds, they tell a chilling story of how technology can disorient and confuse our conceptions of space to the point of catastrophe. A brief telling of the story is the pilots totally lost their sense of spatial orientation and speed (a function of space and time) and caused the plane to stall and literally fall from 38,000 feet to the ocean and crash. The pilots were flying into a thunderstorm and some of the instruments which indicate airspeed iced up and stopped working. They lost an understanding of their relationship to space and because of the new design of the airbus, the pilots were no longer directly aware of each other's flight inputs of the control stick. This technological divorce caused a confusion and in an attempt to climb the plane stalled and fell. There was no malfunction of the machine, simply a tragic human error of misreading the behavior of a machine whose power and habitat is far removed from the places our own biological power and evolutionary consciousness has designed us to understand and inhabit. The story is a chilling lesson of how our conceptions and the instincts which shape them are unaccustomed and unequipped to understand the nature of powers brought forth by industrial revolution.