

*Useless Movement*

Good evening, dear listeners, and welcome to §ympo§ium. This will be a program full of special messages, so many special messages that—you will almost feel like a spy. This is program one, and in all the preparations I've been wondering how should I approach the beginning of this season of §ympo§ia, once a month, live or unlive on your device.

To be honest I would have been happier if I could have skipped program one, directly starting with program two or three. The artist Juan Muñoz gracefully solved this question by presenting his one-time radio programs as though they had been going on forever, using the phrase “As we promised last week” to pretend the beginning was already far behind, or to make it impossible to track down. Besides, I am one of those who believe that starting an introduction is like opening a Pandora's box. Jacques Derrida taught that a proper introduction can only be addressed at the end of the work and, well, it's rather impossible for us to take that perspective now.

The theme we will address today will be—What happens when criticism and music overlap?

So, as we said last week, this will be a program of special messages and, as you have heard, useless movements. We began the program with one of the tracks included in *The Laurence Rassel Show* by Laurence Rassel and Terre Thaemlitz, which will be the featured piece this evening. As you may know, or not, §ympo§ium is a program devoted to recorded theory and scholarship, to the various forms lectures may take if we approach them from the perspective of sound recording. In this framework, the Laurence Rassel show appears to be a highly idiosyncratic object, an exception that we take as a model for the lectures that, once a month, we will be examining here at §ympo§ium. The Laurence Rassel show not only is itself a §ympo§ium, in other words a theoretical radio drama, but it is one where the poetics of the lecture and critical discourse are addressed in a particularly clear way. It occurred to me that lectures in general, displayed as sound material on the radio, reveal some continuity with other modes of transmission: special messages, monologues in plays, depositions, confessions—those among others could be the terms of such redefinition. So don't be surprised if, when tuning into this program about recorded lectures, you encounter objects that you would not necessarily place under that category.

The Laurence Rassel show, which was originally produced for radio although it ended up being released online and for free in 2007, under a creative commons license, is a radio drama composed of multiple sutured fragments, readings or excerpts, sound collages. I see in it an impure theoretical goal that I will try to discuss here. “Useless movement,” the track opening today's §ympo§ium, is included as a bonus track in *The Laurence Rassel Show*. It is a piece of both trance music and trans-music, but it's also a piece of trans-theory, using theory as raw material for music composition. I will skip the minutiae about the original production of the Laurence Rassel show—you can find all the information online—but let me underline that it is a radio drama in which some characters (the guest quoted authors) are interpreted by what you may call actors, and other characters (Laurence Rassel and Terre Thaemlitz) are, sometimes, also enacted by themselves. Now you may wonder why am I making a program about stuff that is available to all out there. But, isn't that the case of most things we listen to these days? And it doesn't make them closer to us. So our intention here is to increase proximity by

means of commentary and what I would call a monoacoustic focus, regardless of the self-explanatoryness of the objects examined.

*[A special message from Joan Smith]*

That was a special message by Joan Smith, performed by Marie-Françoise Stewart. You are listening to symposium celebrating The Laurence Rassel Show by means of critical commentary and sympathetic doubt. As you may have already noticed, if you already knew about this work, the presentation of The Laurence Rassel show we are doing here is slightly shuffled, slightly excerpted, for time reasons but also for the purpose of directly addressing the questions of this program. We will... monoacoustically... focus on the theoretical stuff of The Laurence Rassel Show. To listen to the entire radio drama, including some fascinating pieces such as Laurence's whole confession (on background mode here), the dialog with the lawyer, and others, you can browse through the Ultra-red's archive that contains the Laurence Rassel show in the Publicrea dot org website.

This is a program of accents, as it may have already been noticed. There are no quotation marks or footnotes in sonic material, but there are accents, and also speeds and texture shifts. In this case, many foreign accents including mine. The Laurence Rassel Show tells a story about foreignness and invisibility, appropriation and abolition, gender and its dislocations, among other urgent topics. Its authors define it as an "electroacoustic radio drama about feminist anonymity, transgendered authorship... and murder." I would say the most important thing for me about the Laurence Rassel Show is in fact not the collage-like form, but its ambiguity. The Laurence Rassel show lives in the eastern marshes of theory. At some point, and you will listen to it, Laurence Rassel refuses the theoretical status of this work, arguing not a mystified aestheticism but a preference for amateurism, both in theory and art, setting theory as a goal, a utopia for this aesthetic construction. This position diametrically opposes that of the scholarly text, which appears as formal theory and justifies its existence institutionally. We could not be more sensitive to such claim, and it is true, there is a lot of scholarship in the work, but it is distanced by means of a dramatization. Let's listen to one of the dramatized micro-lectures, or theatrical monologues that make The Laurence Rassel show so brilliant and funny and paradoxical. An excerpt from Peggy Phelan's "Unmarked: The Politics of Performance," interpreted by Tina Horne.

*[A special message from Peggy Phelan]*

The program is made out of sutured statements—I mean the Laurence Rassel show and this program, symposium. It is funny and paradoxical that, in order to address the condition of the invisible, and the desire to erase authorship as a vector of domination, authorship may be even increased; but the outcome of this process is not the same kind of authorship.

Authorship is paradoxically increased through collage, or, can it ever be erased? In that sense, only amnesia is a decent, reliable collaborator. As I said before, the radio medium helps to erase quotation marks. But names come back from nothingness. What you wrote one day as original proves later to be utter plagiarism (that's the Pierre Menard syndrome). What is plagiarism today is original tomorrow. What was ideology yesterday is considered nature nowadays. Authorship is more determined by context and jurisdiction than by the material nature of the work.

So, as we were saying, in order to avoid straightforward authorship Laurence Rassel and Terre Thaemlitz dwell in the informal space of casual speech, casual recording and mixing techniques, and free, irreducible amateurism. The reading of excerpts, or should I say as Laurence Rassel does, quoting, is dramatized in a way that makes the tracks almost epic, to the point that those tracks perhaps invoke an idealized reading experience. The thrill of theory is exteriorized as music.

And to prove this again, we will play a couple more special messages that exemplify what Terre Thaemlitz, or someone in her name, calls "the Author figure's repeated attempts at suicide through modern philosophy since the 1960's":

[A special message from Michel de Certeau]

[A special message from Michele Foucault (sic)]

Those were Michel de Certeau played by Femke Snelting, and Michel Foucault played by Pierre De Jaeger. The translated French text is worth being read aloud:

“The truth is quite the contrary: the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function. (When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an ideological production.) The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.

“In saying this, I seem to call for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author. It would be pure romanticism, however, to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure. Although, since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property, still, given the historical modifications that are taking place, it does not seem necessary that the author-function remain constant in form, complexity, and even in existence. I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still within a system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.”

And now to exemplify the opposite mode of speech, I mean the said notion of “informal theory,” here is another piece from The Laurence Rassel show. A very important and climatic one, a true performance, titled “Fetishism as a means of authoring the invisible” and whispered by Terre Thaemlitz herself.

[Fetishism as a means of authoring the invisible]

That was “Fetishism as a means of authoring the invisible” by Terre Thaemlitz, as part of the Laurence Rassel show. Many things have been said about lectures as performances, but the question does not quite apply to the case of Terre Thaemlitz's somewhat clandestine speech and performance, certainly a special message more than a lecture, an experiment narrated live as it could be done by a war correspondent or a scientist who is herself a chronicler. How beautiful would it be if, instead of an account given to a voice recorder in the presence of two sleeping bodies, it had been a lecture given to sleepers. But that is obviously just my digression, and the piece is absolutely wonderful in its original mode of address. I would even say, as I wrote a couple years ago somewhere else, that this is one of the most brilliant pieces ever recorded for radio, a true contact, tactile and olfactive, with the listener's perceptual limits. Terre Thaemlitz's message represents a climax, a burn in the tapestry that the Laurence Rassel Show is. And it's the very opposite of all those simulated lectures, like this one, the last in the collection, by Virginia Woolf in the voice of Wendy Van Wynsberghe.

[A special message from Virginia Woolf]

So this is §ympo§ium, a program about lectures and would-be lectures and some related categories of recorded speech. We have been listening to and discussing the Laurence Rassel show by Laurence Rassel and Terre Thaemlitz, authors and non-authors of a program about the aftermath of authorship, and the vendetta of the invisible, a set of

sutured messages and semi-transparent impersonations, trans-music and trans-theory. Far beyond a literal examination of authship deprivation that women have historically suffered, this show enacts a form of hybridization, a transgenderism in cultural economy. It is funny and paradoxical, and upfrontly ironic, that the show takes its name from that of someone, Laurence Rassel, who has devoted a big portion of her efforts to working anonymously as an activist, and who by the way finds herself nowadays serving as a museum director in Spain. Obviously, the conflict between author and operator of meaning cannot be solved so simply, if at all.

And we are going to end this commented homage, this duplication of sorts, with a phone discussion between Terre Thaemitz and Laurence Rassel that serves as an epilogue to the Laurence Rassel Show. I encourage you to keep exploring this wonderful work online, via Terre Thaemitz's portal Comatonse Recordings and/or Ultrared's Publicrec dot org. You may consider the following post-interview between Laurence and Terre as a final panel discussion between our two guests of the evening. In case you were wondering—yes, some phone conversations may also qualify as lectures. I will leave you here. Thanks a lot for your listening, and be well.

*[Bonus: Post-production interview with Laurence & Terre]*

Manuel Cirauqui

June 2013