

Vibrant Materials: An Audio Portrait of the Manhattan Bridge

Sound exists as forces and flows of pressure bending and moving through resonant substances. The common explanation of this process generally includes the notion that vibrations can be monitored and measured and transformed into sounds intelligible by the human ear. This project seeks to reorient the human listener's thought for a moment to ponder what it might mean both creatively and politically for these vibrations and necessary resonant materials to exist in themselves.

There has recently been much discussion of the idea of “thingness” or the agency of objects to affect daily life by enacting a vitality or vibrancy that is, in most cases, imperceptible to humans. There exists a rich metaphysical tradition in the west that receives entities—animal, vegetable, mineral and composites thereof not as inert matter but as vibrant materialities.

These notions explored by contemporary theorists Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett reanimate DeLuzian notions understanding relationships both organic and material in an ontology of immanence asserting that these forces and flows are important despite the fact that humans are not attuned to these extant vital forces flowing within, between and through things. According to these theorists, this notion carries implications for the very notions of ‘subjectivity and objectivity’ and creates the opportunity for a body of political thought that might include these ideas.

Manuel DeLanda in *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* evokes Deleuze's rearticulation of Nietzsche's warning against becoming “human all too human” by provoking thought on the idea of “thing power” to create assemblages within human milieu. Predating Deleuze in this discussion is Spinoza's notion of ‘connatus’ stating that substances strive to exist and preserve stubbornly in their own being, along with Bergson's ‘physiology

of perception' which speaks to the subtractive way that people interact with their milieu and Heidegger's declaration in his *Lectures on the Question Concerning Technology* that such things can never be knowable, which was subsequently critiqued by Adorno's notion of 'non-identity' in *Negative Dialectics*. While these theorists explore the idea of 'thingness', there exists no consensus on the role that humans do or should be understood to play in this conceptualization of the world, nor where to draw the line between subject and object.

In the interest of framing such an encounter that values aforementioned theories in classical and contemporary thought, I have drawn heavily from Nigel Thrift's *Nonrepresentational Theory* which encourages a concept of 'bare life' or precognitive thought to be engaged to broach an understanding that is embodied rather than conscious. Through my project I have tried to practically engage the "transhuman" milieu that captures or evokes moments of "performative narrative dissonance", looking at the project not as much from the vantage of not so much these practices/flows, etc. being hidden but attempting rather to fashion different modes of visibility. Elizabeth Grosz would call this creating new modes of address or embodied concepts. Deleuze would call these types of affective concepts "movable bridges".

In the plateau "On the Refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus* demonstrates through the bowerbird and its blue plumage that as fades as the bird becomes older or loses them for other reasons, the male bowerbird to evoke the healthy blue that should be in his plumage, assimilates pieces of blue objects, plastic, metal glass, etc. We can understand here enframing or a poesis that makes use of the environment that is in some sense artistic, but also imbued with survival. In many cases we can see this coming through to fruition as discussion turn from the

In the very least, the juxtaposition of these ideas encourages thought beyond the quotidian realm in which the human is the supreme subject and engages people to think more creatively and critically about his or her inanimate milieu as part of a living assemblage having a certain expressivity, or power to affect and be affected by human activity and even exist outside of its interaction with humanity. This creative challenge is often regarded as a directive to artists, however this task is also exigent of the general public, now engaged in consumptive patterns that increasingly cause political and environmental problems.

This experimental audio portrait of the Manhattan Bridge, a large man-made object that conjoins with thousands of human lives everyday in aggregated communicative experiences, is intended to displace the human as communicative subject and render communicative modes already preset in the non-living world perceivable and audible. This piece investigates sound as a medium expressive of what Jane Bennett calls 'vital materiality' flowing through and across bodies, both human and nonhuman, allowing for the recognition of the active participation of nonhuman forces in events, and how this notion relates to not only artistic modes of perception but also to common public problems concerning space, travel and pollution.

The sound for this piece was recorded sound using a contact microphone assembled from a two separate piezo buzzers soldered to audio cable connecting to a Tascam recorder and attached the microphones to various surfaces of the Manhattan Bridge in an attempt to capture vibrations in the surfaces that result from human commute across the bridge. The footage was edited into one movement using ProTools.

The audio footage includes number of regular recordings through air simultaneously to juxtapose with the piezo recordings and in the editing phase, was layered together to evoke this sense of the world experienced by humans being inhabited, acted upon and also experienced in some sense by the objects in their milieu.

This audio portrait presented will serve as an example of the affective possibilities for our everyday practices and sympathies if the call from things is taken seriously, allowing boundaries between subjects and objects to dissolve, showing the distributive agency and “thing power” by listening to things themselves, using sound capture technologies to render whatever sounds and communicative modes already at work between vibrant materials more audible are more easily perceived.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. Continuum, 1966.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010

Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Dover Publications, 1998.

DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy for a New Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, Continuum, 2006.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Masumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987

Heidegger, Martin. *Lecture on the Question Concerning Technology*. Harper and Row, 1977.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Simondon, Gilbert. “The Genesis of the Individual,” In *Incorporations*, Edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. New York : Zone Books, 1992.

Spinoza, Baruch. Eds. *Ethics*. Edited by Edwin Curley and Stuart Hampshire. Penguin Press, 2005.

