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Political Voices:
Political Engagement Through Text Sound Poetry

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Text Sound Poetry

I created several pieces using manipulated speech recordings, starting in the fall of 2003. After completing some of these pieces, I became aware of Text Sound Poetry as a well-defined genre involving similar passages between language and sound. To find out more about this genre, I listened to Other Mind's re-release of *10 + 2: 12 American Text Sound Pieces*, the re-released *OU* archives and Terre Thaemlitz's album *Interstices*.

Text Sound seems to be especially well suited to political expression. Often, a political work suffers a tension between the political/text content and the musical content. Either the political message or the music often must be sacrificed. However, in Text Sound, the text content is the musical content. Composers like Sten Hanson, Steve Reich and Terre Thaemlitz are able to create pieces where complaints about the Vietnam War, police brutality, and gender discrimination form the substance of the piece. To engage the piece is to engage the political content.

Reich's pieces are less obvious than Hanson and Thaemlitz. The loop process he uses in "Its Gonna Rain" is auditorially interesting, but the meaning of the piece is not immediately clear to a modern listener. Many discussions of his pieces eliminate the political content and focus on the process. Before I did research on this piece I was disturbed by the implications of a white composer taking the words of an African American and obscuring them until the content was lost to the process. It seemed as if he was exploiting the preacher somehow. However, according to Keith Potter in his book, *Four Musical*

Minimalists, Reich was deeply involved in anti-racist organizing and was collaborating on anti-racist street theatre with the San Francisco Mime Troop. Potter also stated that Reich was fascinated with deep timbres of African American voices.

Right now, a white person speaking for black people and saying that he is fascinated by the timbres of their voices would be extremely problematic. (I was surprised to see that the book had a very recent publication date.) But this all took place in the 1960's and it is appropriate to judge his intentions only according to what was considered progressive at the time. However, when one is trying to learn from this to figure out what to do *now*, one has to take into account current understandings of racism, implicit racism, and effective strategies for combating both.

"Come Out" is an extremely effective piece of political music. One of my questions was whether or not "come out" had a possible double meaning at the time the piece was written. It did not. That phrase as a signifier for visible queer identity originated in the 1970's or 80's. Instead, Potter explains that Reich's sample is made into a very effective loop where the words "come out to show them" and then just "come out" are plucked from their original context and by repetition gain their own meaning of protest. Reich transforms the words from a statement of victim hood to a statement of empowerment. The words originate from a group of young African American men who were beaten by the police in Harlem. One of them is describing how he was injured and wanted medical attention but wasn't visibly bleeding, so had to open his wound to allow some of "the bruise blood to come out to show them." Robert Gable points out in his blog that the piece was written as a fundraiser for the victims of the police brutality. (Gable)

One weakness of "Come Out" is a lack of transparency of context. One has to read the program notes to know what the piece is about. Jesse Karlsberg notes in his blog that academic discussion of pieces often ignores their political aspect, "Come Out" included. "Composer and music critic Michael Nyman discusses Reich's *Come Out* for 3 pages in his definitive history of experimental music, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. He does this, however, without once mentioning the political context for the piece's construction or even the source of the speech material." (Karlsberg) This is problematic because in discussion, the political aspect may be erased, making the piece "easily depoliticized, and . . . thus . . . status-quo affirming." (Ibid) I try to provide more context within my pieces to avoid this. Reich, working for a benefit, could assume a knowledgeable audience, whereas I try to make fewer assumptions about familiarity with the topic at hand.

Investigating Reich's work was influential to me. I want to be aware of the issues I encountered in his work and keep on the current left side of progressivism. When someone who has privilege is using the words of someone who does not have privilege, it seems that extra care should be taken to avoid distortion. I have done this thus far by mostly only using the voice of my political enemies rather than my friends. However, the transformative nature of "Come Out" is entirely inspiring. It is one of my favorite pieces of political music. In his seminar in the fall of 2004, Alvin Lucier warned that the danger of using text that you admire is the urge to elevate it somehow. Reich does elevate the text, but not like a gilded manuscript. His elevation is sensitive and entirely appropriate to the material.

Sten Hanson's "The Glorious Desertion" is an excellent piece about American involvement in the Vietnam War. Hanson is European, yet the piece eloquently captures a picture of American politics of draft resistance during the war. It is made up of interviews of draft resisters. Although the war is long since ended, the piece is still engaging and interesting and avoids being dated. What makes it work is that the issues it raises are large and iconic of an era. There is a clip within it of men chanting "Hell no, we won't go." This chant is still within the national consciousness as an emblem of a large, long-lasting, and successful movement.

I believe the key to the longevity of Hanson's pieces is his choice of source material. He uses the voices of people who actually believe in something larger than themselves. Lasting political text based pieces need to find voices that stand for something speaking about prominent issues. This can be hard to predict when one is in the midst of things. I thought prison torture mattered, but it does not, because it is only a part of a bigger picture. If I want to do anti-war pieces, I should follow Hanson's lead and use the words of soldiers or activists.

One of the most successful pieces of text-based political music is Paul DeMarinis' "Cincinnati." In this piece, a computerized voice summarizes facts about the meat industry. It speaks about the killing of animals and the blood of those animals. It starts with the difficulties of slaughterhouse mechanization of animal killing and goes on to the history of different cultures in regards to bleeding a carcass or keeping the blood within it. The content is entirely factual and delivered in the emotionless voice of a computer. Near the beginning, it acknowledges a discomfort. "Blood terrifies." However, it ends with an

emotionless set of observations.

The death cries and the mechanical noises are almost impossible to disentangle. Neither can the eye take in what it sees. On the one side of the stickers are the living, on the other side, the slaughtered . . . in 20 seconds on the average, the hog is supposed to have bled to death. It happens so quickly and is so smooth a part of the production process that emotion is barely stirred. ("Cincinnati")

What makes this piece so wonderful is the difficulty in understanding the computerized voice. The listener has to listen closely and struggle for meaning and then when she deciphers it, she is horrified. The friendly experiencer then dances between willful misunderstanding and grasping for meaning.

The lack of emotional content makes this piece almost sinister. The de-humanized, yet non-mechanized killing of animals is reflected by the flat computer voice. The goal of this piece is not to outrage or to make everyone become a vegetarian, but to cause people to contemplate the animal slaughter in which they indirectly participate. The blood terrifies, but the cold semi-mechanization perhaps is more terrifying.

Adding to the effectiveness of this piece is the track order on the album *Music as a Second Language*. Immediately following "Cincinnati" is another piece "The Power of Suggestion," which uses the same computerized voice. Instead of talking about animal death, the voice goes through a hypnotist script. Placed over relatively fast dissonant melodies, the voice urges the listener to completely relax

and feel all tension drain away. After hearing the same voice describe hanging animals upside down as death takes hold and blood drains away, my immediate response to hearing that voice telling me to relax is to do the opposite. I find all my muscles clenching up as the piece purportedly talks about relaxation but seems to actually be describing death. This may cause listeners to empathetically relate to the experiences of animals in the slaughterhouse. Much science fiction, like *The Matrix*, exploits our discomfort with the meat industry and our fear of being subjected to it as a product and not a consumer. DeMarinis seems to be tapping into this same meme in "The Power of Suggestion."

While this combination of pieces will probably not cause anyone to foreswear cheeseburgers, it does force people to contemplate the sources of their food. Awareness is the first step towards change.

The lesson that I should embrace for my own work is to not always go for obvious emotionality. "Cincinnati" works so well because it does not go for outrage. Its creepiness and thus its effectiveness lie in its minimization of emotion.

Doug Kahn's piece "Ronald Reagan Speaks for Himself" is a tape cut up piece that remixes the voice of Ronald Regan being interviewed Bill Moyers. ([Kahn "Re: Burroughs and Burrows"](#)) DiyMedia.net calls it, and similar pieces, "truthful translations of political speech." (DiyMedia.net) Pieces like this can be problematic in that they can descend into ad hominem attack. Remixing political speech to make politicians say stupid things that they would not have normally said does not further any political agenda, although it does amuse partisans on your side. DiyMedia hosts a piece with Ronald Reagan's

voice by Chris Burke called "American Terrorist" which remixes Reagan's words so that he says, "It is the responsibility of this government to tell falsehoods to the American people." The piece is well done and funny, but it sheds no light on Reagan, what he meant when he spoke and what he means symbolically for America. This genre of cut up pieces is popular and makes its way into popular music, but it does not add new ideas to political discourse. Furthermore, the pieces tend to become dated as the politicians fade from view. This genre is often not as powerful as lasting as "The Glorious Desertion."

"Ronald Reagan Speaks for Himself" stands out as an exception to a usually problematic form. One reason it works is the subject matter. Ronald Reagan maintains political currency, especially since his death. For the last several years, the right has been creating a hagiography around him, hoping some of his imagined past popularity would reflect positively on them. The reality of the controversies surrounding his impeachable offenses as president is crowded out by the obviously false myth that he won the cold war. Reagan remains controversial. Kahn discusses, on the Tate Modern website, the renewal of interest in Reagan and his piece.

With this newfound interest I egosurfed Reagan Speaks and found that it was on the playlist for a number of college and community radio stations around the U.S., as a counter to the psychotic elevation of Reagan to great statesmanhood chorusing at the time in the U.S. mainstream media.

(Kahn "Re: Re: But it does Exist...")

("Egosurf" is a slang word for looking up yourself or your projects in an Internet search engine such as Google.)

However, while Reagan still has currency, the currency of Kahn's piece is a bit murkier. What primarily makes it work is not the importance of Reagan as a cultural figure, but the extreme oddness of the piece. He has Reagan repeat the word "gun shop!" several times, after a pieced together tale of violence. It sounds like "gunshot!"

Shove the man's arm across the window and then break it! The backbone of America. And then break it! Over the window. Uh . . . And then the pressure came on. That hidden longing came out and uh . . . Gunshop! Gunshop! Gunshop! Gunshop! And so forth.

("Ronald Reagan Speaks for Himself")

Kahn has the president go on to talk about cans of poison meat, interspersed with a story about a man who invented some sort of cooling holder for soda cans. "If you open a can of poison meat, hold it in your hand, it gets warm very fast when you're drinking it." (Ibid) The cuts are nonsensical, strange and compelling and they do reveal something about Reagan with his random tales of violence and capitalism. Also adding to the charm of the piece is the audibility of the process of having cut up the piece. Some of the seams are clearly visible. No listener will ever be fooled into thinking this is really an example of what Reagan meant to say, not just because of the insanity of the comments, but also because of the transparency of its having been processed.

William S. Burroughs influenced Kahn, like many cut-up artists. "My sense of Wm Burroughs' cut-ups is that they were parlor entertainments if not, at times, magical devices. The two are not mutually exclusive, and neither parlor nor entertainment should be taken in a derogatory manner." (Kahn "Re: Burroughs and Burrows")

Burroughs has two pieces out in the newly re-released *Ou* archives. "Valentines Day Reading" is Burroughs reading phrases that seem to come from the news. Phrases are read in between short, screechy, alarm-like sounds. No effort is made to change the meaning of the news. It seems as if the purpose is to obscure the meaning rather than reframe it in any way. In his book *The Ticket that Exploded*, Burroughs talked about tape cut up as a way to replace and ultimately destroy discourse.

Nobody has to be there at all – So why ask questions and why answer? – Why give orders and why make speeches? – Why not leave your take with her and dispense with sexual contact? – And then? – Since no one is there to listen, why keep running the tape? -- Why not shut the whole machine off and go home? (P 168)

He enthusiastically supported such an idea, especially how it pertained to political discourse. "Splice yourself in with newscasters, prime ministers, presidents. Why stop there? Why stop anywhere? Everybody splice himself in with everybody else. Communication must be total. Only way to stop it." (P 167-8) Burroughs' idea for total information remixing consists of everyone speaking interspersed with everyone else and superimposed above them. This creates an absence of information and is a means for art to destroy media. This description is eerily similar to the phenomenon of "cross talk." This method of non-communication has become the norm in televised political discourse. It is one of many ways that communication is halted through punditry.

George Bush

Scitopolitics

During my first semester I read about an acoustical phenomenon where when researchers divided up recorded speech so that each consonant and vowel sound was separated, and then played back the recorded speech with all of the parts in correct order, but with each sound reversed, listeners were unable to detect the reversal. I decided that it might be interesting to write a piece that would make people aware of this phenomenon by crossing the threshold of inaudible reversal and audible reversal. For my recorded speech, I decided to use the words of George W. Bush, because everything he says seems so very backwards. He is a master of Orwellian double-speak. I searched CNN.com for aiff files of Bush speaking and only found two usable files. One was of him speaking about the ABM treaty, but my then-wife was coincidentally working on a piece using the same piece of audio and didn't want me to use it. Instead, I used a short speech that George Bush gave on terrorism and destroying American culture. That semester, one of the students in MUSC 220 had used the same audio clip for a different sort of tape project. I had been thinking about the subtext of the speech since hearing that project and about how to make Bush's real message - his desire to destroy pop culture - clear. I started by playing the audio file with no change, and then divided it into grains 0.025 seconds long. I played those grains in order, but each grain was played backwards. I then doubled the grain size and repeated the process several times until

Bush's speech became indecipherable. At the same time, I took much shorter Bush phrases, first from the text and then from other texts with similar themes and ran them through the same process. Because those clips were much shorter, they became indecipherable in much less time. These co-processes made the main process clearer and highlighted the sub-text of Bush's speech. The speech was nominally about terrorism, but on repeated listening, it became clear that it was more about causing American culture to shift rightward, to criticize Hollywood and to push the idea of individual responsibility instead of socialized responsibility. Because of the repeating of the speech, which was gradually breaking down, the friendly experiencer was listening carefully, grasping at meaning. The subtext was brought to the surface in that way.

The second part of the piece uses the same process but in reverse. I picked four phrases related to violence and terror from *Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations* by Jeffner Allen. The ideas expressed were as radical as Bush's but from the opposite ideological spectrum. I ran the algorithm in the opposite direction, because I take the opposite view of the words. Allen also talks about violence, terrorism and victimhood, but unlike Bush, everything she says seems true and real. Her words are ultimately empowering to her reader, giving her readers freedom instead of taking it away. Her viewpoint is equally extremist, but exists in reaction to the sort of control that Bush proposes. Each phrase went to its own channel, one of four used in the piece. The sound starts completely backwards and so it is impossible for the listener to pick out meaning. After a short while, the shortest phrase begins to be understandable. I was surprised how easy it was to focus on one sound among many as soon as words started to be

decipherable.

I imagined the differing lengths of the clips as metaphor for examining an idea and then discarding it to go on to the next one. The shortest clip “male domination” expresses a label, which is useful but not a final destination. The next clip, “we must take seriously the idea of an organized violent uprising of women against men.” may or may not be a good idea, but is certainly impractical. The next clip, “But no. Man hating is not a matter of taste. It depends not upon my personal whim. Man hating is my response to men's violence against women.” is a more reasoned statement than a call to arms. The final clip, a statement of defeating terror through freedom, is diametrically opposed to Bush's call for defeating terror by destroying freedom. The previous statements serve as rebuttals to Bush and supporting arguments for this final conclusion.

I found that the second movement made the piece much more bearable. Listening to George Bush talk about destroying culture for five minutes made me very tense, but the soothing voice of Jessica Feldman reading about women uprising acted as an antidote to Bush's rhetoric. Also, it's very easy for oppositional political pieces to fall into negativity. Allen's words made the piece end on hopeful note. “Terror is negated through the freedom of my body” is the voice of sanity in opposition to Bush. We still know that destroying our liberties is not the answer to fear.

This piece was first performed at the end of the Fall 2003 semester, but I was running it on a different SuperCollider version than it was written for and so it crashed between the two sections, due to a now fixed SuperCollider crash-bug with Buffers. I performed the piece in its entirety for the first time at a house concert in the fall of 2004.

This piece was written with four-channel surround sound. In the first part, the main speech is sent out panned to the middle, but the short, highlighted phrases are sent only to their own speaker. In the second part, every phrase gets its own speaker. Highlighted sounds and the final phrases get their own space this way. Two channel mixes only using panning were not successful.

In the spring of 2005, I began experimenting with spatialization algorithms. I found that it was acceptable to mix the piece down to two channels using virtual locations for each of the four original channels. I wrote a SuperCollider class to compute phase changes, delay and amplitude differences between the virtual locations and the actual, physical speakers. Using this created enough perception of space to compensate for not actually having all four speakers. I did this because I want to be able to play my pieces easily and without extra hardware. If I can run all of my pieces using only a stereo speaker arrangement, I can use just the line out of my laptop and a very basic mixing board. This greatly simplifies setup and increases the number of venues with suitable equipment. It also makes it possible to create a CD recording.

For my thesis concert, I played the longest sound file, the main text of Bush's speech, through a set of small speakers located on the chapel stage. I played the shorter phrases out the built-in speakers. This separated the "musical" content of the piece from the long text based content. For the second movement, each clip was assigned to a speaker.

State of Disunion

I made another piece with George Bush's voice in the spring of 2004. I took his weekly radio address from right before the State of the Union address. (Bush "President's Radio Address.") Approximately half the speech was made of up (largely untrue) statements about Iraq. The second half was (largely untrue) statements about domestic issues. (Our economy has been turning around for so long now, it must be dizzy.) I started by playing the file straight and then slowly added a sine-tone that was phase modulated with the same file. The sine was 480 Hz, a multiple of 60 Hz, the rate at which AC power oscillates in the United States. The second sound creeps up slowly and being an octave of AC power makes it hard to hear at first. The friendly experiencer often confuses the sound for buzz from electric lights or other nearby appliances. Then, near the end of Bush's war lies, I fade out the straight sound file, leaving just the modulated version. At that point, explosive noises come in. I use them mostly because I thought that he kept talking about bombs, so I should include some bomb sounds. Then I play phase modulated just ratios over him. The ratios are 17/19, 19/19, 21/19, 23/19, which is an otonal series high up in a tuning lattice.

The results were loud and of a different character than I expected. There was massive peaking, but SuperCollider uses floating point numbers for audio, not integers, so it didn't clip like digital distortion normally clips, say on DATs or CDs. I tried in vain to find the error, but decided I liked the sounds and left them as they were. A side effect of this is that it was tricky to record the output straight to disk, since 16 bit linear aiff files use integers. Eventually, I discovered a typo in the SynthDef and fixed it, but it didn't sound as good anymore, so I undid the repair. The peaking and distortion gives it its character and

seems ironically appropriate given the subject matter.

I'm not sure what the piece is about really. The explosives are kind of heavy-handed and I'm not sure about them. But I don't know what, if anything, the other non-Bush sounds might mean. When I played this during my fall 2004 composition seminar, Alvin Lucier commented that political pieces run the risk of being heavy-handed. The bomb sounds are definitely unsubtle. However, the piece has been popular with audiences.

I first played it at Open Mic Night at It's Only Natural Restaurant, where it was enthusiastically received. Since then I've played it at 21 Grand in Oakland California. It works well as a piece to bridge tonal content to word content.

Further Bush Ideas

As I wrote my first Bush piece, the timbres of his voice began to fascinate me. His inflections are almost musical. While I disagree with nearly everything he says, he says it in a beautiful manner. His voice has the musical timbres of the south and the drawl of Texas. His speechwriter's careful word choices coupled with his pan-heartland accent make him seem immediately trustworthy.

I kept on with Bush's voice projects, including working on a tape piece with him saying "terrorist" over and over again, from different speaking engagements. The inflections are amazing and I'd like to do something with them, and especially with the phrase "in fact what the terrorists have done has caused us to take an assessment of what's important" from my first Bush piece. Steve Reich's piece *Different Trains* has violins playing the inflections of the vocal field recordings. Robert

Ashley's operas also make extensive use of inflection, relying on inflection rather than using pitch much of the time. However, it would be best to find a different voice for these ideas. Clinton also had a beautiful voice, but few people would currently care if I started manipulating him saying "I did not have an affair with that woman." or anything else he said.

Politics and Punditry

I began my foray into Text Sound pieces by using the voice of President George W. Bush. Professor Kuivila warned against using the voices of politicians because of the danger of a short shelf life. As the election approached, I began to see the wisdom in this caution. Clearly, I thought, Bush would be removed from office (alas!). I began to look for a source of sound material that was going to stay current longer, and preferably also from the right wing.

David Brock, author of *Blinded by the Right* began monitoring right wing media for distortions. His book details how there exists a right wing echo chamber, which he participated in during the Clinton administration. Anti-Clinton people would invent scandals, where someone would imagine a story about Clinton, and the right wing media would repeat the lie. There was virtually no fact checking to verify the imagined Clinton misdeeds. One media outlet would report it. Another would report that the first outlet had reported it. Another would notice that reporting. Finally, the buzz created by the right wing would be picked up by the mainstream and by the endless partisan special prosecutor investigations. The result of this, as we all know, is that Clinton, who was investigated initially for a land deal that went bad, ended up being impeached for having a consensual affair. If Larry Flynt hadn't stepped in and exposed the then speaker of the House, Bob Livingston's, recent affair, Clinton would likely have been removed from office. ([Bowman](#)) Larry Flynt saved our democracy (at least until 2000).

Obviously, something had to be done about this situation, where rumor and distortions were reported as fact. David Brock wrote a confessional memoir and then enthusiastically switched sides. Americans love their converts and so the left has supported Brock, despite his confession of lying in virtually every article he had written until then.

His recent efforts are all well documented and verified. In an effort to expose right wing spin and echo as lies before it becomes part of mainstream political culture, he began to post outrageous comments by pundits on his website *MediaMatters.org*. (Kuntz "Who We Are") In addition to posting the text of offensive comments, he also provides documentary audio and video clips.

This documentary evidence became my major source of source material. I reasoned that pundits may rise and fall in popularity, but they often last for years. Rush Limbaugh, for example, has had a radio show for years and has thousands of rabid followers. According to Wikipedia, "As of 2004, Rush Limbaugh is the most listened to radio talk-show host in the United States, and has an audience exceeding 20 million listeners weekly." ("Rush Limbaugh") His voice is iconic. However, I found his voice initially difficult to work with. Limbaugh is hard to pull apart. He is not sound bitey. He says nothing immediately reprehensible. It takes a few moments to realize that he has uttered something despicable. Ann Coulter's outrageous, short sound bites were much easier to manipulate. Limbaugh requires minutes to grok. Coulter requires mere seconds.

Pundits have a longer currency, but lack some of the authenticity of elected officials. Coulter said that we should "Invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity",

where “they” are the people of the Middle East. (“This is War”) She touches on the national mood but - one hopes - she does not represent a mass movement. She represents a political elite, and not even an elected elite. Her words may not lastingly resonate unless, God forbid, she wins a prominent public office. These pundits do not stand for anything larger than themselves. Their words reflect self-glorification first and everything else second. Michael Savage's pro-torture remarks were filled with interjections complaining that other media outlets (aside from him, of course) were “communists.” He paused for self-aggrandizing comments. “You like that?! Go complain to somebody! See if I care.” (Savage Nation May 10 – 11, 2004) Rush Limbaugh uses silly voices more often than not. Metaphorically, it seems that he stands only for himself. Ann Coulter seems dazzled by her own cleverness and so seems to never bother to construct a coherent argument. Punditry seems cynical, as if pundits believe in their own greatness first and their message second. Their words are not crafted to convert, but rather to preach to their own choirs and to obfuscate.

The people who listen to pundits such as Limbaugh are, indeed, the choir. A recent study by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that, “Rush Limbaugh's radio show attracts a disproportionately conservative audience: 77% of Limbaugh's regular listeners describe themselves as conservative.” (*News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse*) Similarly, the most popular TV news commentator draws an equally biased audience, “On television, the O'Reilly Factor draws a similar audience: 72% of O'Reilly's regular viewers are self-described conservatives.” (Ibid.) As Media Matters has extensively documented,

the “facts” reported by these two individuals are often incorrect. Limbaugh and O’Reilly mislead their own base.

Many people, such as Al Franken, accuse right wing pundits of lying. However, something more insidious may be at work. Professor Harry Frankfurt notes in his essay *On Bullshit* that liars presume to know the truth but choose to misrepresent it. By contrast, bullshitters have “a lack of connection to a concern with truth.” (P 33) He constructs a binary opposition, not between truth and lies, which he sees as having a concern for the truth in common, but between liars and bullshitters.

The liar is inescapably concerned with truth-values. In order to invent a lie at all, he must think he knows what is true. And in order to invent an effective falsehood he must design his falsehood under the guidance of that truth.

On the other hand, a person who undertakes to bullshit his way through has much more freedom. His focus is panoramic rather than particular. He does not limit himself to inserting a certain falsehood at a specific point, and thus he is not constrained by the truths surrounding that point or intersecting it. He is prepared, so far as required, to fake the context as well. (P 51-2)

Frankfurt does not provide a formula for clearly identifying bullshit, seeming instead to rely on an implied “I know it when I see it” approach. He does identify sources of bullshit. “The realms of advertising and of public relations and the nowadays closely related realm of politics, are replete with instances of bullshit so unmitigated that they can serve among the most indisputable and classic paradigm of the concept.” (P 22) When he was interviewed on *The Daily Show*, he was asked if political “spin” constituted bullshit and he

replied that it was “a form of bullshit.” (Frankfurt interview)

The job of pundits is to create spin, so it seems fair to label them as bullshitters. The anti-Clinton fairy tales reported by Brock were so divorced from reality such that they could correctly be called bullshit. (Clinton murdered Vince Foster, is one such claim. The “evidence” was that he murdered hundreds of people in Arkansas and Hillary Clinton’s affair with Vince Foster. Lies built upon rumor, built upon imagination.)

In another example, some of Rush Limbaugh’s distortions surrounding the Iraq prison abuse scandal clearly rise to the level of bullshit. Frankfurt writes:

Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about. Thus the production of bullshit is stimulated whenever a person’s obligations or opportunities to speak about some topic exceed his knowledge of the facts that are relevant to that topic. This discrepancy is common in public life, where people are frequently impelled . . . to speak extensively on matters of which they are to some degree ignorant. (P 63)

Therefore, any circumstance where someone claims authority on a topic that he or she has not adequately researched would constitute bullshit. Limbaugh, by virtue of his position as a radio commentator, implicitly claims authority on matters he addresses. He often explicitly claims authority as well. On one of the many occasions he addressed the torture scandal, he claimed authority while making an assertion that was not factually correct, saying,

Even this latest picture of a dog and a nude Iraqi . . . the picture caption “Dog attacks Iraqi.” No, the dog isn’t

attacking anyone, the dog's on a leash. The dog is scaring an Iraqi prisoner. . . . The dog didn't attack anybody. The dog's not attacking anybody. The dog's on a leash. Both of them are. I've seen the pictures. ...

(Limbaugh May 10, 2004)

He claims authority with his statement, "I've seen the pictures." However, his assertion that the dogs did not attack is incorrect and he was forced to withdraw it later in the program.

Apparently, ladies and gentleman, I need to offer a modification ... apparently uh, well, there's another picture later where . . . he's writhing on the floor with a pool of blood. Apparently, the dog did bite his leg, but there's no picture of that. I have just been, uh, informed of this. (Ibid)

If he had really seen all the pictures, he would have known that a subsequent picture in the same series showed that the dogs did indeed attack. He claimed authority without actually doing adequate research. Because the refuting picture was in the same set of photos, he could not claim that the prisoner was actually unhurt and bluff (or bullshit) his way through. His ignorance of this indicates that he was bluffing his way through the entire segment. When he was informed that he would not be able to get away with his bluff, he was forced to retract it. This bluffing is clearly bullshit.

I would go further to claim that it is not an isolated incident. In Rush Limbaugh's case, the sheer number of hours he is on the air every day would almost make it impossible for him to avoid bullshit. Having a call-in radio show for five hours a day would be virtually impossible to adequately prepare for unless the conversation were limited to a very specific topic. Even then, it would be a Herculean task to come up

with so many hours of insightful and factually correct commentary. Rush Limbaugh's pattern of bullshit, especially surrounding the prison abuse scandal, is addressed in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

In another example, in the movie *Outfoxed*, Al Franken recounted a conversation he had with his lawyer about suing Bill O'Reilly for libel. His lawyer advised him that O'Reilly lied so "pathologically" about everything that it would actually be more difficult to prove a slander suit because O'Reilly had created a lower standard of truth for himself that would protect him in a court case. (Franken interview transcript, P 57) This certainly implies a lack of concern for the truth. Frankfurt warns of one danger of habitual bullshitting, "Through excessive indulgence . . . a person's normal habit of attending to the way things are may become attenuated or lost." (Frankfurt, P 60)

Those who trust Limbaugh and O'Reilly must necessarily distrust media outlets that report conflicting truths. This creates a lack of confidence in the media. Sometimes there exists a lack of confidence in reality itself. Ron Suskind of the New York Times reported in October 2004 on a conversation he had with an unnamed Bush aide,

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the **reality-based community**," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." . . . "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued.

("Without a Doubt" emphasis added)

Reality itself is imperiled by bullshit. Frankfurter notes that "'antirealist' doctrines undermine the confidence in the value of disinterested efforts to determine what is true and . . . false and even in the intelligibility of the notion of objective inquiry." (*On Bullshit* P 65) In

other words, the right wing spin machine, backed by the White House, is destroying the very notion of news gathering and reporting. Frankfurt discusses the consequences of this state. "One response to this loss of confidence has been a retreat from the discipline required by dedication to the idea of *correctness* to a quite different sort of discipline, which is imposed by pursuit of an alternative ideal of *sincerity*." (Ibid. Emphasis in original.) To members of the reality-based community, the substitution of sincerity for reason is alarming. Bill Clinton famously remarked that Democrats win when people think. Bullshit in the form of right wing political discourse seeks to counter this by ridding the world of rational thought. This cannot be good public policy.

Republicans currently give the media very low credibility ratings. Less than 30% of Republicans believe most or all from any major news outlet, including Fox News, Bill O'Reilly's channel. ([News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse P V](#)) Bullshit has corrupted the perceived value of all media outlets among the target audiences of bullshit. Media and reality are to be distrusted.

As a moralist and a proponent of reality, I thought that people would be appalled at Limbaugh defending prison torture. However, my piece relating to this issue is not an effective political piece because people are not appalled. They don't care. His bullshit cast doubt on the veracity of the accusations, enough so that his listeners could deny that torture occurred. The truth of the matter was not worth investigating. Prison torture was not enough to cost Bush an election. Columnist Jon Carol wrote on March 15th, 2005, "It seems pretty much established that we, as a nation, don't mind torture all that much. Abu Ghraib was, of course, a scandal, but the reaction from the

masses was underwhelming.” (Jon Carroll) It seems like Americans must reason that it is only Arabs and terrorists and bad guys that get tortured or mistreated. When Michael Savage calls Iraqis “sub humans,” he speaks for America.

Making leftist experimental music is inherently futile. The politically dominant far right does not tend to like experimental music and will not listen to it. If they did listen to it, they would not be persuaded by my content. Those who consume punditry embrace bullshit and don't see a problem with it. Right-wingers clearly, as evidenced by Gonzalez's appointment, don't see anything wrong with defending prison torture. I, like the pundits themselves, end up very sincerely preaching to the choir.

However, my choir may be unaware of this discourse. Punditry is a fixture of television news. However, journalist Laurie Garrett, formerly of New York Newsday, alarmedly notes that people under 30 are not consuming official news sources.

First of all, all across the news industry there's a recognition that people under 30 are not watching. They're not reading. They don't subscribe to newspapers. They're not watching the evening news, and in many cases, it's hard to pin down exactly how people under 30 in America are getting information. It's a kind of information cocoon in which you're osmotically absorbing from thousands and thousands of places from the Internet, from your friends, from text messaging, from God knows where.

(Garrett)

A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in the summer of 2004 backs up this assertion. The study found a significant age gap in network TV news viewing.

As has been the case for some time, network news viewers are an aging group. A majority (56%) of those age 65 and older say they regularly watch nightly network news; less than a third as many Americans under age 30 (18%) regularly watch these news programs. And it is not just the youngest viewers who are tuning out the network news. Only about a quarter of those age 30-49 (26%) are regular viewers.

(News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse P I)

They also found that newspaper readership is low for young people, "Among those under age 30, just 23% report having read a newspaper yesterday." (Ibid.)

I suspect that Garrett's "god knows where" is either *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, music, the blogosphere, or other independent media outlets. Television news is considered suspect and with good reason. On March 8, 2005, the University of Madison, Wisconsin published a study that showed that post 9-11 TV watching tended to push liberals in a rightward direction.

The survey showed that among liberals who watched little television, about 20 percent favored more government police powers. But about 41 percent of liberals who were heavy viewers of TV news supported such measures - much closer to the 50 to 60 percent of

conservatives who supported greater police powers,
regardless of how much TV news they watched.
(Chaptman)

Many leftists are aware that popular and conservative television media is biased and distorted and so to preserve their sanity, refuse to engage it. There is a growing credibility gap with the media. Less than 40% of Democrats believe all or most of any major news outlet, except for CNN, which only has 45% credibility. ([News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse Overview](#)) This is still higher than Republican views of credibility. It may be that when the right disbelieves media, that bullshit causes them to disbelieve all attempts to report truth. I think it's likely that the left's slightly higher media credulity comes from bullshit avoidance. They may have distaste for bullshit, but still believe in reality and the possibility of truth and truthful reporting, even as the media programs them to support war.

I do not watch TV. I follow media through Media Matters and through blogs such as Newshounds ("We watch Fox so you don't have to"), the Wonkette and Atrios. TV's constant stream of biased, corporate-produced images is overwhelming to me. However, in order to counter government and corporate propaganda masquerading as news, it is critical that the left engage right-wing media as active participants and not as passive consumers. Brock's fact checking efforts represent a new era of fighting the right.

My fascination with punditry is as an outsider. My pieces are like tourist photos. I do not know if the locals would consider them trite or compelling. It seems that many or most of my peers are also outsiders.

To fight the echo chamber, we must be aware of how the far right is changing discourse. I write pieces with the idea that they will help raise this awareness. I am not alone in this endeavor. The movie *Outfoxed* is one of many documentaries from the left that came out last year. Its mission is to expose the bias of Fox News to a leftist audience who does not watch Fox.

I hope that awareness persuades leftists to action or at least to outrage. At the least, one hopes that all of the Alien Others constantly attacked by the right wing would begin to feel solidarity for each other. Arabs and queers are often used almost interchangeably. *Imus in the Morning* described an Iraqi resistance fighter as “an enemy combatant who had sworn fidelity to some bearded fatwa fairy.” ([Imus in the Morning](#)) Queers stand in for almost any social “problem.” Bill Cunningham said while discussing classroom discipline on *Hannity & Colmes*, “In the good old days, back when AIDS was an appetite suppressant and when gay meant you were happy, back in those days there was discipline in public schools. But not today.” (Cunningham) Ah yes, back when people knew their place and social norms could be enforced with lynching, in that mythical golden age, children were well-behaved.

Anthony Braxton refers to this idea of people knowing their place as “Antebellum logics.” Ideas such as these are a threat to queers, to people of color, to women, to atheists and to anyone who wants to avoid a police state. When Bush complains about pop culture and Limbaugh defends prison torture and Michael Savage “calls certain countries ‘Turd World Nations’” (Deggans), this is a threat to my future ability to survive in this country. I feel compelled to engage these threats.

Ann Coulter

"I'm so pleased with my gender. We're not that bright."

- Ann Coulter 23 September 2004 on *Hannity and Colmes*

Ann Coulter is the most famous of the blonde, mini-skirted post-feminist neo conservative pundits that began to emerge in the 1990s. David Brock reflects on his friendship with Coulter, saying:

Ann and I reflected the bumper-sticker conservatism of the younger set . . . Ann and I never had a serious conversation about politics or anything else . . . [We] vented our anger and cruelty by hurling all manner of epithets at liberals and the disadvantaged among us. We both eschewed subtlety. (Brock 197)

Coulter started out as a lawyer (she worked on the Paula Jones case), but switched to punditry, where she could draw a paycheck by unsubtly hurling bumper-sticker epithets.

Her comment at the top of this chapter was in reference to Bush gaining points with female voters. She undercuts her own authority with the remark. Why should anyone take her seriously if she is not that bright? However, her media persona is more about style than substance. Like other post-feminists, she is supposed to be attractive and have attitude. Her role is not to be "bright," as much as to be sexy and entertaining. She is all style and no substance, as substance would conflict with her style.

Her book *Slander* starts with a complaint that political discourse "resembles professional wrestling." (Coulter quoted by Franken in *Lies*

P 9) However, Al Franken notes in his book, *Lies and the Lying Lairs Who Tell Them*, “[In] the entire 206 pages [of *Slander*], she never actually makes a case for any conservative issue The entire book is filled with distortions, factual errors, and vicious invective . . . bolstered by [shoddy] research . . .” (P 9) Franken explains, “What Coulter writes is political pornography. She aims directly at her readers’ basest instincts.” (P 19) Indeed, she freely admits to being a polemicist.
(Keefer)

Her television appearances are like her columns and books on speed. The immediacy of the format means gives her even less time for forethought. She takes aim with pithy soundbites, each one like a little knee-jerk bumper sticker.

Because she communicates in soundbites, she does not need to worry about undercutting her authority or even directly contradicting herself. The goal seems to be the pull quote, not a coherent argument. For example, during her August 4, 2004 appearance on *Hannity and Colmes*, she attacked the very notion of polls when they showed low points for Bush, but then with barely a pause, attacked Kerry for polling low.

Looking at polls is phenomenally stupid. And I don't think that is how Americans vote. So I don't know why, you're just rambling off numbers Kerry didn't get any bump from [the Democratic National Convention]. I mean, he's supposed to be getting like a 17-point bump. He got nothing. That's because people saw him and reacted the way people are wont to do.

(Coulter August 4, 2004)

Her positions are self-contradictory, indefensible and astounding, but when she's asked to defend them, she does, again in little sound bites

(sometimes inventing "facts" as she goes). She's impossible to argue with. It seems like any TV show she was on would dissolve into meaningless name-calling or cross talk.

Ann Coulter gives the impression of communicating ideas without actually doing so. Her books, comments, punditry and columns essentially say nothing but Republicans are right and Democrats are wrong, over and over again with no backing or real evidence. She is incredibly talented at weaving *nothing* into the appearance of *something*.

Coulter Shock

I downloaded a long clip, over a minute, of Ann Coulter on *Hannity and Colmes*, arguing that it was "factually correct" that Clinton "was a scumbag." What was immediately fascinating was the "cross talk" on the sample, where multiple pundits were speaking at the same time. It seems like some pundit shows are nothing but cross talk. Cross talk is information overload. It is impossible to pay attention to two or three people talking at the same time. In the effort for everyone to be heard, nobody is heard. Cross talking pundits give the impression of communicating information while actually communicating nothing at all. I tried overlapping the sample, creating artificial cross talk into a dense texture. I like this idea, but haven't yet used it in a piece.

Instead, I wrote a program that looked for pauses in her phrases and created long "grains" based on her phrasing. The program downloads the buffer in chunks from the audio server to the language client. It looks for adjacent samples whose absolute values are less than some number n . A long run of low sample values indicates a

quiet point in the buffer and thus a pause. If the number of adjacent quiet samples is greater than some number m , the program remembers the pause location by saving it in an array. After it has found all the pauses in a particular buffer, it creates a collection of instances of my object BufferTool. Every instance of BufferTool is a "grain." They know how to reference the buffer on the server, which SynthDef to use to play back the grain and what the starting and ending frames are for the grain. These BufferTools have all the data they need in order to be played. Therefore, they can be shuffled in any order, and shuffled in with BufferTools from separate Buffers without causing any difficulty.

In my Coulter piece, I created grains by analyzing Coulter's speech and then playing out the grains in random order. I tested this using my original crosstalk laden sample. It was amazing how little the sample changed. The pretense of meaning was obscured, but the pretense was so thin to start out with that it was as if nothing had been lost. When I played the original clip (without video) for some of my classmates, they found the unprocessed version nearly as incomprehensible as the re-ordered version. Then, I tried creating artificial cross talk by sometimes slightly overlapping phrases. It was exactly as if I had punditry on a television in the background and wasn't paying attention to it.

I downloaded as many other files of Coulter as I could. I discovered that her televised voice only has a few tones. She is either sarcastic and snippy, sarcastic and smirking, shrill, or defensive. I could put together phrases from any of her *Hannity and Colmes* appearances and, because the micing was always the same, it would sound like it all came from the same appearance. The little artificially

constructed speeches produced by my process almost made sense. Her lack of timbral variation was as interesting and useful as Bush's rich tones. Which is not to say that she does not have timbral variation, just that it is much more subtle and she does not use much emotional range.

I created an 11-minute piece. The first 5 minutes start with her unaltered quote calling Clinton a scumbag, which is then followed with re-ordered phrases from her many media appearances. I got the audio clips from mediamatters.org, guaranteeing that I had her most offensive comments from any of her appearances. In the first week of October, her new book came out, thus generating a plethora of source material.

The second part of the piece takes a snapshot of the last pass of word reordering. It then broke that snapshot in grains all of equal size. The number of grains was equal to 4 times the number of clips in the re-ordering section. The play back algorithm plays back the grains in a moving window, like a cloud algorithm. On the second pass, the grains are four times smaller and the window is five times bigger. This goes on in a loop of decreasing grains and increasing window for about six minutes.

The first part of this piece is inspired by popular music speech remixes similar to *Ronald Reagan Speaks for Himself* by Doug Kahn. These remixes can be a problematic way to approach discourse. 91Angels points out,

[The] challenge seems to be to reveal underlying [inconsistencies] and contradictions in the source material, as opposed to just twisting someone's words around or trying to demonize your subject ad hominem . . . Anyone

can edit words into their mouths and make them say silly things or take them completely out of context that proves nothing and is only good for some cheap laughs.

(91Angels)

I have tried to avoid this trap by having my program make all decisions about phrase order. Also, my point is not “Look, I can make Coulter say something pointless and stupid,” but rather, “listen to how little this changes if you randomize it.” The listener can draw her own conclusions on whether this communicates anything about the value of television punditry.

The second part of the piece reminds me of the movies and TV shows about *Max Headroom*. The movie concerns a television journalist who died but then was replaced by a computer-generated talking head that could do nothing but stutter catch phrases. In the movie, the talking head is deemed an inadequate replacement for journalism. The computer stuttering sound used by the fictional program was extremely popular among children. My friends and I would try to imitate it. This effect became somewhat overused in the 1980s because of *Max Headroom*, but I liked it anyway as a degenerative process. In the second part of the piece any plausibility of meaning and content is destroyed. So the piece begins with a clip which purports to communicate, is followed by a few minutes of remixed clips which sound like they may purport to communicate, but do not, followed then finally by increasingly small and scrambled grains which contain the timbres and pitches of speech, but none of the word content.

I first played in September of 2004 at Open Mic Night at It's Only Natural. Unfortunately, this time the people present were not "friendly"

experiencers. They quickly became annoyed, possibly by the lack of pitch material. They were almost the exact same people as were in the audience for my piece with Bush and digital peaking, however they were hostile to this one. Several people got up and left during it. One person afterwards explained to me about how when he was in music school, he'd learn to craft pieces that *went somewhere* and had been cautioned against distorting recorded voice.

The next performance was in Oakland, CA at the club 21 Grand. For that second performance, I used greater diversity of source material. Coulter's book came out in the meantime, giving her many press appearances and thus more material for me to choose from. Instead of making the piece longer, more samples were added in at a faster rate to cause the content to change more quickly. I also added in a short clip of Sean Hannity, a Fox News pundit, lying about Kerry to increase the non-Coulter voices and make it sound more like a pundit discussion. Since almost all the samples come from *Hannity and Colmes*, his voice was already in the piece.

This time, the friendly experiencers were entirely people from my mailing list and the other performers playing that evening. They had entirely different expectations than did the open mic attendees at ION. Also, it may have been helpful to play George Bush's Voice first, thus creating a bridge between tonal content and tweaked word content. Fortunately, those listeners liked the piece.

I played the same version of the piece at a House Concert at India House for a mostly grad student audience. Jascha Narveson heard it and invited me to submit it to the Red Festival in Toronto where it was part of a "sound bar" where friendly experiencers listened to tape pieces through headphones. I submitted almost the same

version as the Oakland performance, except that some amplitude inconsistencies were altered with selective normalizations.

During my thesis concert, in the Wesleyan Chapel, I played this piece through two small speakers on the stage rather than through the architectural speakers. The smaller speakers made it sound more like people on stage talking and helped prevent my Text Sound pieces from becoming overwhelming.

This piece was designed to change over time and it did for several months. I wanted the source sounds to change as new material became available. In this way, I hoped to extend the shelf life of the piece and be able to keep it current as events warrant. I began to tire of Coulter, however, and have quit adding new material and end up abandoning a proposed third section of the piece.

Further Coulter Ideas

Coulter's style of speaking tends to lead to cross talk, as she attempts to shout down her foes with her insane sound bites about liberals and Clinton. Most of the Coulter-containing samples I downloaded from Media Matters were from Fox News, especially *Hannity and Colmes*. This was useful because they seem to mic everyone the same way every time. They seem to set levels to reflect their ideology. Upon repeated listening, I began to notice that Hannity, the conservative, has the loudest levels. The conservative guest, in these cases Coulter, has the second loudest micing. Next is Colmes, the show's "liberal." His voice is not powerful. His arguments are not powerful. His micing is low. If he were better at representing a center-right or left position, he would likely be fired. (The movie *Outfoxed* documents the firing of

liberals who are too good at presenting their position.) Al Franken found that in one representative show, Hannity spoke 2,086 words and Colmes a mere 1,261. (*Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them* P 84) "Sean Hannity is the alpha male to Alan Colmes's zeta male." (ibid), Franken noted. But Colmes is not the lowliest player on the show. The lowest level of mic'ing usually goes to the liberal guest, usually someone of no significance or occasionally someone who is actually not liberal at all.

At some point, Coulter must have realized that she was turned up louder than everyone else. Her voice is very powerful and she can be loud, so she had the power to dominate the entire show. I downloaded a clip of her intentionally speaking over everyone else, saying "And I'm not going to let you talk . . . They're not going to cut my mic!" (Coulter November 17, 2004) (In later appearances, her level was turned down.) This seemed like a good sample to explore cross talk, as it mostly contained that. However, during the time I was working on *Coulter Shock*, my fascination with her was turning to hate. The cross talk sample was her at her worst. I can feel my blood pressure rise when I listen to it. The incentive to work on this piece fades with my conviction that she is about to slide into irrelevancy. As soon as I write her off, she appears on the cover of *Time Magazine*. My motivation, however, remains low.

Rush Limbaugh

"The life expectancy of men is drawing closer to that of women. Women still live longer than men because their lives are easier. This is -- (laughing, grunting) this is according to government statistics released yesterday."

- Rush Limbaugh, March 1, 2005, *The Rush Limbaugh Show*

Rush Limbaugh laughed and grunted like a pig when he uttered that quote, possibly with the idea of ironically emulating a male chauvinist pig. He thus acknowledged that what he said was deliberately offensive and highlighted his lack of remorse. In fact, he has claimed to be a chauvinist, "We're not sexists, we're chauvinists -- we're male chauvinist pigs, and we're happy to be because we think that's what men were destined to be. We think that's what women want." (Limbaugh Wikiquote) Limbaugh, like many other conservative commentators, seems to enjoy making statements that are offensive to disempowered groups. He presents himself as a hero for daring to stand up to whatever "powerful" group he has attempted to offend.

For example, on November 22, 2004, he linked violence in professional basketball to hip-hop culture, an unsubtle way of saying that the culture (and violence) is the fault of African Americans. Fully cognizant of the implications of his remark, he applauded his own "courage,"

So if anybody will be honest with you about it in the NBA, and a very few will have the courage to, because saying what I just said is going to be tagged as racist, but I, my friends, am fearless when it comes to this because the truth will out, and that's what's happening here, and part and parcel of this gang culture, this hip-hop culture . . .

(Limbaugh November 22, 2004)

In Limbaugh's world, white men who make disparaging comments about women and minorities are bravely speaking truth to power. Many of Limbaugh's followers believe that white men now face obstacles in hiring and college admissions, due to unfair advantages given women and minorities. A simple glance at statistics will quickly show that this is not the case, however his audience seems to enjoy the same feelings of victim-hood that they openly mock in others.

The implications of white male anger are beyond the scope of this paper. However it is worth noting that most white males, while they enjoy some privilege, are not running the country. They may feel unfairly blamed for institutionalized problems that they feel powerless to affect. Furthermore, according to Susan Faludi in *Stiffed*, baby boomer white males were raised with a strong sense of entitlement, which was an unfilled promise. This may contribute to a sense of victim-hood and anger. This anger finds its voice in the antebellum rantings of Mr. Limbaugh.

The antebellum audience is not insignificant. Limbaugh is the most popular radio talk-show host in America. ("Rush Limbaugh") Rush Limbaugh, with his frequent repeating of GOP talking points and racist and sexist comments, fills some of the same roles as Ann Coulter. However, as a white man, he is allowed to be intelligent, and since he

talks for hours every day, he does not have the same need for brevity or soundbites.

His specialization is not bumper-sticker type statements, although he does have his share of pithy slogans and catch phrases, like “feminazi.” He more often engages in distortion and mischaracterization, for example, on March 14, 2005, claiming that a particular New York Times article “[admitted] that the weapons [of Mass Destruction] were [in Iraq] all along.” (Limbaugh March 14, 2005) In fact, the article specifically stated that these were not the contested weapons of mass destruction, calling them

the heart of Iraq's **dormant** program on unconventional weapons. After the invasion, occupation forces found no unconventional arms, and C.I.A. inspectors concluded that the effort had been largely abandoned after the Persian Gulf war in 1991.

(Glanz emphasis added)

Limbaugh was certainly aware of this, the 10th paragraph of the article, located near the top. He chose to omit it, creating a false justification for the war and further confusing and misinforming his listeners.

Limbaugh has extensively justified the war against Iraq and the behavior of US forces in Iraq. When the prison scandal broke, he moved quickly to justify and excuse torture. He ignored facts in making his case and, as we saw in a previous chapter, engaged in bullshit on at least one occasion. Determining whether his other distortions constitute bullshit is an exercise left to the reader.

On May 4, 2004, he claimed that torture was “no different” than college hazing and was merely harmless fun.

This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation and we're going to ruin people's lives over it and we're

going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I'm talking about people having a good time, these people, you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of need to blow some steam off?

(Limbaugh May 3-4, 2004)

On May 6, 2004, he went further and praised prison torture.

And we hear that the most humiliating thing you can do is make one Arab male disrobe in front of another. Sounds to me like it's pretty thoughtful. Sounds to me in the context of war this is pretty good intimidation -- and especially if you put a woman in front of them and then spread those pictures around the Arab world. And we're sitting here, "Oh my God, they're gonna hate us! Oh no! What are they gonna think of us?" I think maybe the other perspective needs to be at least considered. . . . Maybe the people who ordered this are pretty smart. Maybe the people who executed this pulled off a brilliant maneuver. Nobody got hurt. Nobody got physically injured. But boy there was a lot of humiliation of people who are trying to kill us -- in ways they hold dear. Sounds pretty effective to me if you look at it in the right context.

(Limbaugh May 5-6, 2004)

Limbaugh claims that "nobody got hurt," but he was almost certainly aware that people did get hurt, just as he was certainly aware that the *Times* article about WMD did not state that the missing weapons had been found.

He argued that the presumed guilt of prisoners made whatever occurred acceptable, saying on May 10, 2004, "And how many of you wanted to really say, 'I don't see the big deal here. This is war. These are people who tried to kill Americans.'" (Limbaugh May 10, 2004) However, the Pentagon estimated that most people held in Iraqi prisons were innocent. Regardless of innocence or guilt, the Geneva Convention makes it illegal to torture prisoners. However, while denying specifically that torture occurred, Limbaugh called into question the need for the Geneva Convention, echoing the now-Attorney General Gonzalez's claim that the provisions of the convention were quaint. Again on May 10, 2004, Limbaugh mimicked the barking of dogs used to terrify and attack prisoners and mocked those who worry about the Geneva Convention.

Even this latest picture of a dog and a nude Iraqi -- you seen that one? A couple of Americans are holding -- it looks like German Shepherd, some kind of vicious big dogs, the dogs are barking, bow wow arf arf arf, this big dog -- you know and the Iraqi prisoner is cowering there in fear, he's all nude. And the picture caption "Dog attacks Iraqi." No, the dog isn't attacking anyone, the dog's on a leash. The dog is scaring an Iraqi prisoner. [gasp] "No! We're scaring them, too? Is that allowed in the Geneva Convention?! We're scaring them with dogs?" Yes, my friends we are. The dog didn't attack anybody. The dog's not attacking anybody. The dog's on a leash. Both of them are. I've seen the pictures. ...

(Ibid)

The dog in the picture did not merely "scare" the prisoner. A subsequent photo showed the bleeding, wounded prisoner.

Limbaugh, apparently informed of this other photo during the course of his show, offered an insincere non-apology that included him using silly voices.

Apparently, ladies and gentleman, I need to offer a modification. Apparently, the pictures that are, the picture going around of the uh, the nude Iraqi prisoner cowering in fear of a couple of dogs. The caption to that picture that I've seen going around, uh, intimates that the dog was on the verge of attacking this guy, and he was very scared and so forth. In the picture that I saw the dogs were leashed and the correct caption would be "Nude Iraqi prisoner scared of dog but not attack [sic]." Apparently -- there's not a picture of it -- but apparently uh, well, there's another picture later where the nude Iraqi prisoner no longer cowering, um, in the corner against his cell, he's writhing on the floor with a pool of blood. Apparently, the dog did bite his leg, but there's no picture of that. I have just been, uh, informed of this. So I wanted to, uh, pass that on to make sure that the facts are out there. There's no picture of it, but that's apparently what uh, what happened. We were told there are going to be a lot of pictures coming in, and that they will be worse than what we've seen and this sort of thing. So, uh, sorry for the error. ...

(Ibid)

Limbaugh is not polished, but he has been current for many years and is not likely to go away soon. 14% of Republicans regularly listened to Limbaugh in 2004. ([News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse](#) "Overview") He seems to be a

public figure with enough history and likely future to make him worth my time to engage.

I downloaded some audio files from Media Matters. His comments were what I was seeking, but I wasn't sure what to do with them. I tried looping them in quick succession, so that the same file would start to play and then another copy of it would start to play only a few milliseconds later and then another one a few milliseconds after that, until there was a dense texture. This made a nice sound, something like a washing machine. I wanted to call it "Spin Cycle." This technique seemed similar to Steve Reich's audio loops in pieces such as "It's Gonna Rain." However, the dense texture obscured Limbaugh's words. I feel that the content of Limbaugh's speech is fundamental to exploring his meaning and the seductive lies of the right wing. However, all meaning was quickly lost by my looping and the text was totally obscured.

Rush to Excuse

My Ann Coulter piece had a proposed third section that I did not complete. This section was going to find the pitches of all the short grains of vocal sound that made up the last part of the piece. I used the program I wrote for that instead with a clip (mentioned above) of Limbaugh excusing prison torture and imitating the barking of dogs used to attack prisoners. (Limbaugh May 10, 2004)

My computation of pitch material is not scientific. The program downloads pieces of the buffer from the audio server to the language client. Then it looks for a sample value greater than some number n . Then it looks for sample value below $n * -1$. It counts up the number of

zero crossings found this way and uses that divided by 2 as the pitch. The result is certainly related to the pitch, even though it is not entirely accurate. It is also guaranteed to return a pitch result even with a very noisy grain. It can pre-compute pitches much faster than real-time.

I had an idea that I would play equally sized short grains of text in a loop while slowly computing their pitch material. As the pitch of a grain became known, a pitched sound would replace the original audio content. Then, after all the pitches were known, the program would then progressively “forget” pitch content until the grains returned to their original text state. Meanwhile, like in the second half of my Coulter piece, I would gradually reshuffle the order of the grains. My experiments with these methods were unsatisfying.

Then, while I was working on it, Alvin Lucier played Paul DeMarinis' work “Odd Evening” for his composition seminar class. I told the class that DeMarinis had already written the piece I was trying to write and had gotten better than I was going to. Alvin told me to write the piece anyway, so I carried on.

I noticed that shuffling the grains made their meaning disappear too quickly, so I mixed them with longer phrases, which were automatically discovered, just as in *Coulter Shock*. I decided to change the grain length on each pass through the loop. I think this is a good compromise between the musical interest of hearing the pitch of spoken voice and political interest of hearing content. Also, like with Bush's speech, the repetition of phrases makes their meaning more evident.

The speech starts with an introduction of the just the pitches of the last 20 grains of the clip. Then it plays all the grains of the clip, in order, with both the pitch and the text material. It then scrambles the

grains and plays them back mixed up with some longer phrases from the start of the clip. Then it doubles the size of the grains and again plays them back in random order with pitch and voice, intermixed with longer phrases that come from a bit further into the clip. It repeats this process until the grains are long enough so that words like "fear" can be clearly heard. The piece ends with Rush's mocking question, "Is that allowed in the Geneva Conventions?"

When I played this piece for my thesis concert, I separated the pitch material from the speech material. I sent the pitch to the architectural speakers and the speech material to two small speakers on stage. This gave greater emphasis to the pitches than the words. The words, however, were not overly attenuated as much as made more bearable. I played more than an hour of political Text Sound and did not want to force my listeners to hear punditry resonating through the chapel from the main speakers. The smaller speakers made the voice a bit smaller and easier to handle. It also gave greater authority to the pitch material; making the art, metaphorically, rise above Limbaugh.

I have submitted this piece to numerous festivals, but it was rejected. Surprisingly, Limbaugh's comments failed to generate much controversy just as systematic torture of prisoners failed to gather much interest outside of the Pacifica Network and the left wing blogosphere. I worried the piece would slip into irrelevance before anyone ever heard it. I posted a realization of it, my Coulter piece and my Bush State of the Union piece to my website under a Creative Commons license that makes it possible for people to download, share, non-commercially use and remix the piece as long as they include attribution. The commercial value of these pieces to me is near

negligible, especially as the controversies fade into the forgotten past. Also, I have concerns over possible copyright issues. I would rather have people hear them than not hear them. Unfortunately, I have not had time to adequately promote my downloads. A log search shows that it has been downloaded by one person unknown to me in the United States and one in Britain. As far as I know, it has never before been performed in public outside of my concert. In the future, I want to launch a podcast of my music, which I hope will garner more listeners. (A podcast is a system where users can subscribe to my musical output and automatically receive new pieces when I make them available.)

Michael Savage and Imus

Savage Beasts

To the right of Rush Limbaugh on the torture issue, there was Michael Savage, who advocated increasing prison torture and sticking lit dynamite in the anuses of Arab detainees. (Savage May 10-11, 2004)

The problem with Michael Savage is that he does not appear to mean to be taken seriously. He is like Howard Stern. His use of "irony" provides a shield where he can say completely offensive and racist things and then later claim he didn't mean them. Ha ha, only serious. His voice is also somewhat unpleasant and uninteresting. People clearly listen to him for his insane content rather than his dulcet tones. I was going to ignore him, but then I found a similarly racist clip from a morning show on NBS called *Imus in the Morning*.

Imus was showing pictures of Palestinians mourning the death of Yassir Arafat. One of the voice-overs from the Imus show was calling the Palestinians "animals" and was advocating dropping "the bomb" on them and killing everyone. The other co-hosts laughed along with this idea. A week later, they played a clip of someone pretending to be General Patton, speaking about a real event in which an embedded reporter had just filmed footage of a US Marine shooting an injured, unarmed Iraqi insurgent. "Patton" used the term "raghead," and the phrase "bearded fatwa fairy." (Imus in the Morning)

Imus' racism was thus clearly linked to his homophobia. In the first half of the program, one of the male voices said something about the "fat pig wife of [Arafat] living in Paris." Thus he added Francophobia and

sexism to the mix. Another commentator, noting the emotion of the Palestinians said, "It's like the worst Woodstock." Hippies are liberals are feminists are Palestinians are ragheads are gay are women are Iraqis are French. Alien others are thus interchangeable. Every group is standing in for every other group. And while they laughed, one of the commentators kept repeating "animals" and "kill them all."

There was great synergy between Imus and Michael Savage's calls to kill all the prisoners in Abu Ghraib, whom he called "subhuman." Savage's comments were interspersed with bizarre attacks on media organizations for being communist, apparently because they published photos of prisoner abuse. As if Al Jazeera would have ignored the pictures if the "communist" New York Times hadn't run them. He called for more prisoner abuse and then dared listeners to report him to the FCC for it. Then he claimed that it was the American People who were really going to suffer. Because of having a poor image abroad? Because we could no longer torture prisoners? It wasn't clear. "We the people" still don't seem to be suffering as much as tortured prisoners. And certainly not as much as prisoners would if, as Savage recommended, they had dynamite stuffed in their orifices and were dropped out of airplanes.

Savage and Imus are both entertainment. They both seemed to be going for a shocking laugh. Savage seemed pleased with himself, but still, like many other right wing pundits, portrays himself as a victim. Hence, Savage dared people to report him.

He seemed to be addressing several different issues in his comments, many of them along the popular right-wing logic that the media lost the Vietnam War, by demoralizing the American people, by telling them what was going on. (If only they had lied, we would have

colonized all of Vietnam!) These were neither here nor there, so I cut them along with the FCC dares. I returned to Imus and made one track that just contained the laughing and "animals!". Then I made another track that just contained racism and calls for violence, eliminating "fat pig wife." I skipped "Patton" entirely. All these issues are connected, clearly, in the words of the pundits, but I just focused on calls for genocide and violence. I looped the laughing track and played violent phrases from Imus and Savage on top. Thus the Imus men laugh hysterically at themselves and at Savage. The entertainment value of genocide, violence and torture is thus highlighted. 91Angels comments on this approach,

Cutting away the fluff and feathers and presenting what they really say in it's ugliness and baseness, everyone able to see what is at the end of their fork, engages the listener so they have to make a judgment (one that you hope will be in favor of what you are trying to communicate, of course) instead of just being preached to.

(91Angels)

However, as I worked on the piece, I became discouraged. NBC was forced to apologize for the content of the Imus show ("MSNBC apologized for racist commentary on *Imus*"), but the piece only reminded me of the left's failure to turn torture into a mainstream issue. I decided that offensive statements about the desirability of torture were not enough to support the piece, as clearly, not enough people would care. Also, "here's a guy saying something offensive" seemed too weak to carry a piece.

I remembered a piece about laughter made by Kingston Wong, an undergraduate who took MUSC 220 in the fall of 2003. His piece started out cheerfully, with friendly laughter, but turned dark and ended with mocking, menacing laughter. Our culture generally views laughter as friendly, beneficial and desirable. Clubs have even formed where member gather and laugh, believing it to have health benefits (<http://www.laughteryoga.org/>). Wong's piece challenged this assumption about laughter by articulating its dark side.

The laughter from Imus initially seems as innocent as all laughter seems. However the words "animals" and a disgusted "look at this!" left in the laugh track showed it's true, cruel nature. I decided to make the laughter the focus of the piece. I create an increasingly heavy overlap of laughter, using my spatialization algorithm, so that the overlapping laughter does not interfere with itself or with non-spatialized racist comments played on top of it. I used my phrase-finding algorithm again in this piece, to break up Imus and Savage into their sound bites.

For my thesis concert, I played the laughter through the architectural speakers of the church and the racist phrases through a set of smaller speakers on stage. This made the laughter seem much bigger and seem to take up more space than the longer phrases. The laughter, because it used the spatialization algorithm, also seemed to have several points of origin, whereas the longer phrases were flat: only panned between right and left.

This piece is only a few minutes long. I recorded a realization that came in at 2:22. However, when I play that recording, it seems to go interminably. I would have sworn it was at least seven or ten

minutes. This piece had serious crash bugs until the spring break of 2005 and so was performed for the first time at my thesis concert.

Lock Up Your Children

Despite the visibility of the same sex marriage movement, queers are not usually the focus of right wing pundits' ire. Homophobia is often used as an aside. Alien others are compared to homosexuals to emphasize the otherness of the target group and the degeneracy they must therefore represent. Gayness is a symbol and gay people themselves are usually invisible. Therefore, because it was never a focus, I collected samples of homophobia, but did not engage it directly as an issue until late in my time at Wesleyan. My own status as an alien other informed my work, but was not directly represented.

During the spring of 2005, a furor erupted over a children's TV series called *Postcards from Buster*. In one episode, a cartoon rabbit meets real life kids who have two moms. Nothing is ever said about this fact and the women are not identified as lesbians. The focus of the episode is on sugar production in Vermont. The show was so innocuous, that the left treated the situation as a joke. The *Wonkette*, with typical irony, described the episode as disappointing in its lack of objectionable content. (Cox) A *Slate* columnist jokingly questioned, "Is 'maple sugaring' actually code for some sort of sexual practice between women?" (Stevens) Most left wing commentaries seemed to ignore the entire event. Wesleyan's own undergraduate queer community seemed to be entirely unaware of the controversy. A message to the campus' queer mailing list, "endless acronym." urged people to watch the episode when it aired locally, but never mentioned the controversy.

Much ado, however, was made of this issue by some right wing media figures like Bill O'Reilly, who frequently who has cautioned his viewers on multiple occasions that the recognition of same sex marriage will lead to the legalization of people marrying goats (The Radio Factor with Bill O'Reilly April 3, 2005) and thus bring about the destruction of our society as we know it. (The Radio Factor with Bill O'Reilly March 31, 2005) Most of the commentators seemed to be special homophobic guests, like spokespeople for Focus on the Family and not TV fixtures like O'Reilly.

O'Reilly was careful to explain that he wasn't homophobic, but would equally block out all similar, heterosexual forms of degeneracy and perversion.

It's not only about homosexuality . . . I wouldn't want Buster hopping into a bigamy situation in Utah. I wouldn't want him hopping into an S&M thing in the East Village here . . . let's keep Buster out of the sexual realm in all areas. Wouldn't that be the best thing to do?

(The O'Reilly Factor)

Dissecting the heteronormative nature of that remark is an exercise left to the reader. These comments, however, clearly are homophobic while he rather ridiculously claims that they are not.

O'Reilly's comments made me yearn for the honesty of an open, honest-to-God homophobe. The obvious choice was Fred Phelps. This preacher became famous for showing up with picketers to funerals of AIDS victims. (Lauerman) The signs he held said things like "God Hates Fags," "Thank God for AIDS" and sometimes would feature the name of the deceased and proclaim that he was now in hell. ("Westboro Baptist Church FAQ") I remember that when I was in high school in 1994,

he showed up to picket the funeral of Randy Shilts, a San Francisco journalist and author, and was greeted by numerous counter protesters armed with eggs. In 1998, he picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepard, a hate crime victim. Phelps was an Internet early adopter and has had a web page for the last several years at godhatesfags.com. ("Intelligence Report: Fred Phelps Timeline") He posts sermons there in mp3 format, all about one hour long. The tone of his sermons matches the tone of his protesting. Nevertheless, the words "lesbian" and "gay" have crept into his vocabulary, in addition to his preferred terms, "fags," "dykes," and "sodomites."

Phelps is entirely occupied with the issue of queer civil rights and when he talks about political issues in other areas, he tends to frame it as it pertains to the evil sodomite agenda. He tends to denounce anyone that does not spend as much time occupied with hating sodomites as much as he does as pro-gay. Therefore, he pickets Catholic churches, Billy Graham and other fundamentalists that most queers would perceive as homophobic. Phelps would affirm O'Reilly's claim of tolerance and attack him for it. O'Reilly pales in comparison.

Phelps's hour longer sermon was too long and too meandering to process automatically. It also was extremely distorted. He recorded it much too hot, which made the spaces between phrases fairly loud. I selected emblematic homophobic phrases from one sermon and created several shorter audio files containing those phrases. I used automatic processing on my O'Reilly sample, which came from Media Matters with other *Buster*- related content of "Republican pollster Kellyanne Conway [asserting] that it's not an issue of 'right versus left, but right versus wrong' and that people 'don't want their kids looking at a cartoon with a bunch of lesbian mothers.'" (Conway) I took the

phrases pre-loaded from Phelps and the ones automatically discovered in O'Reilly and used the pitch finding algorithm that I developed for my Rush Limbaugh piece. I also used the same marimba sound. When that sound expands to the time scale of a spoken phrase, it becomes much more gamelan or gong-like.

I was concerned that re-using my Limbaugh code would make the pieces sound too similar. I went to Professor Kuivila for feedback. He told me that the pieces were adequately distinct and suggested that I take the Phelps piece further. Instead of merely showing similarity between right and far right discourse, Ron suggested that I add in mainstream commentary to show how all discourse contains homophobia, as we all have some degree of internalized homophobia. I found content from PBS's *News Hour* commenting on the *Buster* controversy and incorporated it.

I then added in other commentary clips discussing *Buster* and other homophobic audio files I had been collecting, including the president excluding same sex marriage, an initially puzzling comment that poor school discipline was the fault of queers (this comment is discussed in a previous chapter) and a Fox News correspondent badgering Disney's president about "Gay Days" in the theme park. (Varney) All of these clips had in common an idea of incompatibility between queer relationships and 'normal' family life. Queers are unfit for marriage and, perhaps more importantly, we are dangerous to children. Children at Disneyland are not protected from us. Children in New Jersey cannot be educated because their governor is gay. (Cunningham) Children across the nation are irreparably harmed by *Buster* commenting that one of the kids on the show "has a lot of moms." (Stevens) The danger doesn't seem to be just that the kids will

turn gay, but they will become every kind of alien other. Violent, sexual, dangerous, perhaps animal, not quite civilized monsters, who exist outside of social norms.

I finished this piece only days before my concert. My original plan was to realize all of my pieces in stereo, so that I could use the chapel's installed speakers, thus saving myself setup time and creating pieces that could be played virtually anywhere. I plugged my laptop into the chapel's sound system and was met with Rev Fred Phelps screaming about fire and brimstone and sodomites burning in hell. The chapel setting gave him authority. Church is his own turf. His damnation seemed almost reasonable. I could not compete with him through the architectural speakers. Instead, I routed all the voices through two small speakers on the stage. The gong sounds went through the architectural speakers alone. They are introduced slowly as the piece progresses and linger after the voices end, getting the last word. The greater authority of the musical sounds and their persistence fills an allegory of music triumphing over politics.

Just Intonation and Meditation

While I was working on my political works, I became concerned that my music was too negative. I was pointing out error, but I was not offering counter-proposals. I used pitch, especially just intoned pieces, to give friendly experiencers breaks between Text Sound pieces. Proponents of just music feel that it is the music best suited to meditation. Kyle Gann writes, "Most cultures use music for meditation, and ours may be the only culture that doesn't. With our tuning, we can't." (Gann) While his claim that we don't have a tradition of meditative music is clearly false, his comments show the connection that practitioners of just intonation feel between their music and meditation. I hoped the meditative qualities of my tuning pieces would help serve as an antidote to any angst incurred by listening to political Text Sound. During my concert, I routed all of my just pieces through the architectural speakers, to give them greater authority than voices coming through the smaller speakers on stage.

Many of my tuning pieces use a set of algorithms taught to me by Ellen Fullman, whom I studied with in California during school breaks. These are expressed most easily mathematically. Just tuning uses whole number ratios. The fraction values are between 1 and 2. To keep fractions in this range, they can either be multiplied by 2 or divided by 2. Remember that a doubling or halving of a frequency changes the octave, but not the note. 220 and 440 are both A.

If we call the numerator x and the denominator y , both those numbers may be 2 or an odd number greater than 2. Just tuning systems are typically described by the largest prime number that they

use. My tunings are usually 21 limit tuning (21 is not prime, however, it is my largest odd number), so in my pieces x and y can be 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, . . . 21. Tunings that are next to each other in a tuning table form a chord. A chord may be otonal or utonal. In an otonal chord all the ratios have the same denominator, however the numerators are adjacent values of x . For example: $3/2, 5/4, 7/4$. In a utonal chord, all the ratios have the same numerator, but the denominator changes. For example: $11/12, 11/10, 11/7$. When a proposed chord involves a number greater than the limit, the chord wraps around back to 2. For example: $19/16, 21/16, 2/2$ is a valid otonal chord.

21 is an unusually high number to use as a limit. Often tunings have a 5 or a 7 limit. The high limit allows combinations of large relatively prime numbers that have a greater amount of beating. That is, it sounds less in tune. This makes my just pieces microtonal and gives them a certain harmonic logic without necessarily making them overly relaxing.

Meditations for Women

Meditations for Women

I am a channel for the powers of healing and of change.

I unite my will with all womyn who are making new the
world.

I am trust in my sisters: my spirit responds to their love.

I am compassion for confusion, especially my own.

I am a summer stream in the dry lands, miraculous and full.

My willows are the only trees for miles.

My eyes grow sharper and stronger every day. I eat what
my body needs. I let my body be, all the way out to
her edges.

I am centered and calm, I let life ripen and fall, my will is
one with the goddess.

I see both outward and inward. My prophecy is clear and
true.

I accept all gifts of the goddess calmly, without anxiety,
without wanting more, or less, or forever.

--Jean Sirius, 1981

I decided to close my concert with an explicitly feminist, meditative and empowering text. I recorded my friend Jean reading her work, "Meditations for Women." I used the same algorithm that I used in the second part of my Ann Coulter piece to shuffle short grains of Sirius' voice. However, I ran the algorithm in reverse, starting with short grains and a large window, moving to longer grains in a small window, so that her voice moved from indecipherability into understandability instead of the other way around.

I used the pitch finding algorithm from my Rush Limbaugh piece to find the overall pitch of the entire recording. I played through the first pass of the Coulter algorithm and then, as I started the second pass, played the pitch plus the first nine undertones, all shifted to be in the same octave. As the Coulter algorithm ran, I periodically played the chord of the fundamental pitch plus undertones. Every time I played the chord, I dropped the farthest out undertone. Finally, as the Coulter algorithm finished, I played just the fundamental by itself. I

then played through the entire recording with no changes, but with an echo of the pitch of whatever grain was just uttered, delayed by a few moments.

Algorithm re-use tied the piece in with the other pieces, which I think created a unity and increased the antidote properties of this piece.

This piece was played for the first time at my thesis concert.

Bell Tolls

This piece moves through a 21-limit tuning table, according to the tuning algorithms described above. The chords may “pivot” on any tuning. When they pivot, they switch orientation so that the numerators all match instead of the denominators or vice versa. That is, it switches from utonality to otonality or vice versa, keeping one of the ratios constant during the pivot. For example, it may go from $3/2$, $5/4$, $7/4$ to $7/4$, $7/6$, $7/5$.

There are circumstances also where a tuning may be inverted, so that the numerator and denominator switch places. Using combinations of these algorithms, it is possible to walk around the tuning table in a manner that has a harmonic logic.

Bell Tolls plays triads with a SynthDef that resembles the sound of wind chimes. It uses my spatialization algorithm so that each “chime” sounds like it is coming from a different location. The texture builds as it walks through the table. Shortly after the peak, it plays several bell samples and the texture thins down again to individual chimes and then the piece ends.

I wrote the piece in the spring of 2004 with the intent of creating an “angry” sound. It fails in this, sounding, I think, sad instead.

This piece has been played at It's Only Natural open mic night and at 21 Grand in Oakland, California.

Morpheus' Snare

(This piece was titled *Tunings* for my concert.) This piece plays FM modulated undertones of $19/17$, $19/19$, $19/21$ and $19/23$. The numerators and denominators are relative primes to each other (aside from $19/19$) and are large numbers as just intonation goes. The tones sound less stable and “in tune” than smaller numbers like $3/2$ and $5/4$. Additionally, the frequency modulation creates complicated tones.

In this piece, I have detuned the left and the right channels, playing a different carrier frequency on the left than on the right. The detuning is not based on ratios or any kind of tuning theory but on a set number of Hz. As the piece starts, the detuning falls randomly in between 2 Hz and 20Hz. As it progresses, the range narrows until the left and the right always differ by 10Hz. Alpha brain waves are generally around 10Hz. There are rumors that listening to pitches detuned between the left and right ear at 10Hz will make the listener sleepy and cause them to enter an alpha state. There are other claims made about this phenomenon as a meditation aid (“Theory Behind BrainWave Generator”), although they are sometimes denounced as bogus. (Robert Carroll)

I make no claims as to whether psychoacoustic effects triggered by listening to this piece actually exist or do not exist, however the new title comes from the Greek god of dreams.

This piece was played for the first time in its final form at my thesis concert.

Beep

This piece moves through undertones. It starts with $32/21$ and then adds in $32/19$ and then $32/17$ to create a triad. Then $32/21$ drops out and $16/15$ enters. As the farthest out note finishes, a closer one comes in so that the piece migrates from $32/21$ to $2/2$, always playing a triad until it runs out of tones.

These triads are AM modulated by low frequency pulse waves that start at 2 Hz. As the piece progresses, faster pulse waves are added to modify new pitches. The pulses introduced are the base pulse times 2, then 3, then 4, then 5 and finally 6. They do not reach the audio range, although they flirt with the idea. The hard cutoffs of the pulse create interference patterns of clicking. The tuning element is more structural, as the more important focus of the piece is the rhythm and the ticking.

This piece was played for the first time at my thesis concert.

Conclusion

My politics and my music have strongly informed and influenced each other during my foray into Text Sound. I have found the ability to work with words directly to be freeing. However, it is also limiting. The words I use come from Americans, discussing American politics. The US political process is important to the world at large, due to our economic heft and tendency towards warfare. However, there is a danger of arrogance and over-estimating the cultural capital this might carry abroad. This is a concern as I go abroad next year.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels end *The Communist Manifesto* with a call for workers of the world to unite. (Marx) International solidarity remains a valuable goal for progressives. However, by using the words of the American political milieu, I have made my music inaccessible to non-English speakers. Information accessibility requires multilingualism or non-word sources. I believe that Esperanto is a key to solving these problems. However, currently English is spoken by more people, and politicians seldom deliver speeches in Esperanto, thus reducing the amount of source material available.

In order to be a more internationally oriented musician, I can find non-verbal ways to articulate progressive ideals, or I can make my works multi-lingual, perhaps by mixing together politicians of similar stripes from many countries. It is also possible to create different language versions of an idea or to use subtitles. These multi-lingual approaches seem especially suited to installation environments where perhaps the friendly experiencers could choose the language in which they would engage the piece. Installations may also provide a way to

model a political idea or a human interaction in an experiential and non-verbal manner.

I feel that there is an inherently political aspect to just intoned pieces, especially ones with low tuning limits. Giving people a space to calm down is restorative and counters whatever fear their governments may be sowing. In some sense, all music is political. Susan McClary makes this clear in her book *Feminine Endings* by analyzing indicators gender and alien otherness within "Absolute Music." (McClary) Defining a term too broadly, however, takes away its meaning. I look forward to negotiating a non-English-specific understanding to political music during my coming time abroad.

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