

WBPRo8, Hey Hey Glossolalia / True Mirror (after Napalm Death, ‘You Suffer,’ 1988, 1.316 sec., N.Bullen / J.Broadrick), produced by Mark Beasley, consists of a reading of the 11-page Whitney Biennial 2008 press release compressed to 1.316 seconds. *You Suffer* is a song by the British Grindcore band Napalm Death. The song has earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the shortest recorded song ever. It is precisely 1.316 seconds long and consists entirely of the lyrics ‘You suffer—but why?’

RESISTING LANGUAGE

(The Silenced Voice)

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1. INTO THE BLACK HOLE

In the angular cloister of an attic garret located in an unknowable quarter of a city, a horsehair bow renders an indescribable, incomprehensible music from beyond the spheres. The architect of this sound—the titular protagonist of the short story *The Music of Erich Zann*—is used as a conduit by the author (American horror fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft) for the articulation of the fear which threatens to engulf and obliterate when human beings are faced with the loss and destruction of meaning which the dissolution of language represents.

This fear—a phantasm which shadows much of Lovecraft’s writing—is represented in its purest essence through the loss of the voice. This loss is symbolic of the gaping chasm which exists behind language, of the sense that beyond this structure of communication facilitated by language is a monstrous nothingness—the ‘chaotic Babel of sound’ expressed by the unnamed narrator—which must be feared (because it represents a chaos of non-meaning).

The author simultaneously links this expression of fear at the loss of language to a perception of the function of sound which is paradoxically contradictory. On one hand, the very presence of sound is explicitly perceived in terms of threat: the strange, beautiful music drawn from Zann’s instrument is negatively associated to a need driven by fear (the need to create a final bulwark between sanity (meaning) and madness (chaos) after language has failed), and consequently expresses itself in otherworldly sonorities which are implicitly malevolent (their presence as talisman implies the presence of other more venomous entities).

Paradoxically, sound also serves another function here (one at odds with the position of the creator of the narrative): it represents a form of magical practice. This magical practice seeks to utilise sound as a form of talisman against the perceived threat which vanished language poses. Musical composition as talismanic practice, sound as barrier and magic circle—a form of voodoun by which Zann is ‘trying to make a noise; to ward something off or drone something out’.

Throughout, the primacy of language as the communicative medium is explicitly foregrounded in the story, particularly by the attitude of the writer towards other forms of communication: Zann is a mute whose utterances—‘the awful inarticulate cry which only a mute can utter’—raise fear in the unnamed narrator—in him, language has indeed failed, to be replaced by the lesser mechanism of written text as the only means of communication beyond music.

This nexus of sound as malevolent oppositional force, the dissolution of the voice into abstracted sound (and the yawning chasm of non-meaning), and sound as talismanic practice is present in the form of the ‘anti-music’ created by Napalm Death, a form of popular music composition which seems to reject and dissolve the voice.

2. PARIAH IN THE LARYNX

The ‘anti-music’ created by the English music group Napalm Death in the mid 1980’s—and announced through debut album *Scum* (1986)—developed from the conflation of a number of sub-genres of ‘underground’ music (predominantly Hardcore Punk and Thrash Metal). It ultimately resolved itself into the creation of a new sub-genre: Grindcore. In formal terms, Grindcore has a predominant focus on ‘extremity’ of expression: drum rhythms (the ‘Blastbeat’) blur at hyper-speed velocity in a procession towards imminent dissolution and ascension into the infinite, guitars vibrate in retuned and distorted looping figures through minimalist song structures, and the voice is reduced from the angelic chorale of classical composition to a seething—seemingly unintelligible—sound source.

This approach to composition rejected the angular detours and bristling edges of Post Punk, replacing them with an express train rush towards the stasis of oblivion: in the same manner that John Hilliard’s *Camera Recording Its Own Condition* (1971) moves from the clarity of light to abject darkness, the music entered into a black hole. Composition no longer retained point / counterpoint as a model: rather than compositional tropes presenting a forward movement towards resolution, the music pushed towards the compositional space of composers such as La Monte Young where the exploration of sound vibration is privileged over narrative sequence, resulting in a laminar stream of sound as if the debris of the tower of Babel was reconstituted as a single lane blacktop flowing like lava towards an unreachable horizon.

The voice (the conveyancing mechanism of language in aural terms) becomes almost unrecognisable in this music, moving beyond the status of the voice as site of communication and meaning to become an object attempting to erase subject. This voice seeks a mode of communication which operates precisely through its own loss of expressive capability: it simultaneously alienates itself from expression and expresses alienation, becoming an expression of language which is against

language in the manner of *Glossolalia* (the practice of speaking in tongues). In this process, the garbling of the larynx becomes an aural blast denuded of meaning, reducing the function of the vocal chain to that of pure sound (pure utterance).

Inevitably, this kind of voice inspires reaction from the culture within which it acts. In a textual culture, the voice occupies the position of primary communicator. It is the facilitator for creating meaning, operating as a form of social adhesive by creating cohesion through a communication structure which conjoins individuals in a shared whole. Cultures which validate visual concepts through a mesh of phoneme and syntax (a mesh which assigns language a value as a repository of meaning) implicitly fear the breakdown of this system of communication, particularly at its most primal level—the voice. At the point of breakdown, meaning diminishes to transparency: this condition informs a response which assigns the voice without recognition—without understanding, seemingly without meaning—the status of pariah.

The pariah voice—characterised by a lack (or overt rejection and loss) of explicit meaning—acts as a mark of a failure on the part of language to provide symbolization (meaning) at which point language recoils on itself: the listener gags on the wordless voice—on the speaking without meaning, the meaning without words—and this gag-reflex is made manifest in typically pure responses to ‘disgust’—laughter or outrage (conditioned reflexes which remained common responses during the early period of the development of the Grindcore voice).

This response is further resolved through a sense of concern engendered by the social body’s recognition of a potential loss of social cohesion. At its furthest extent, this concern is focused upon the sanity of the individual without (or against) language: when expression moves beyond the recognised boundaries and sanctioned mode(s) of discourse, the wordless voice becomes a form of representation of delirium, of loss of control, of loss of humanity (the ravings of the ‘insane’). In a movement from Apollo to Dionysius, the primitive returns—unfettered, ultimately untameable—reaching its ultimate expression in the chain of horror through an actual lack of the voice—a wordless delirium.

This unfettered cosmic silence—this silent guest—is the condition which underpins the process of ‘making strange’ (*ostranenie*) experienced by the voice in Napalm Death’s work, and which can operate as both a liberating agent (a talisman after the manner of the music of Erich Zann) and a gaoler (leading deeper into the black hole of nihilism opened up by the Dadaist disjunction).

3. CONDITIONS FOR REBELLION

The status accorded to language (and by proxy to the voice) has ensured that the voice continues to retain a privileged position within culture, within the arts in general and specifically within approaches to composition in popular music.

The voice is privileged as the vessel of communicative meaning within this music (from the emotionally-charged content of Folk song, the Chanson and Opera to the angry declarations of Rock and Roll, Heavy Metal and Punk), and it may consequently be seen as an inevitability that the status of the voice as a focal site for meaning would demarcate it as a target for attack.

This attack—which coalesces with the general movement towards abstraction in the arts throughout the 20th Century—has been directed towards the status of the voice as carrier of meaning, and sought to disrupt this exchange of meaning through a radical disjuncture in the mode of delivery (that is, through a mutation of the formal qualities of the voice). Here, a radical alteration of form is attempted which is itself driven by the demands of content: as participants in a fluid exchange of meaning, it is natural that formal elements inscribe themselves upon the delivery of content just as content may determine formal elements.

This interplay between form and content developed within the most ‘hardcore’ genres of Punk (and Thrash) music as an interest in—and inclination towards—notions of ‘extremity’ in form. Occurring organically on a global scale amongst a small, disparate but ultimately influential collection of musical groups (including United Mutation, GISM, Asylum and Siege), it manifest itself in the development of a more guttural vocal style which overtly emphasised the expression of the voice through the body, centring on the diaphragm and stomach (the traditional seat of divination among the ‘belly prophets’ of the Delphic oracle and the Buddhist adepts, and the centre of the labyrinth in the writings of Georges Bataille).

Unlike the focus on hard sounds (the percussive ‘k’) in the voice-based works of Dada, Futurism and Concrete Poets, this abraded voice (the violent expulsion of an animal roar extending from deep within the body cavity) is subject to an attrition of angular utterance, producing a more smoothed and laminar mode which extends vocal delivery into a realm of materiality, of sound, where temporality simultaneously extends (through the blurring of the voice into a laminar stream of sound) and retracts (through the reduction of lyrical content and clipped vocal delivery).

Just as the physicality of sound-waves affects the body (from covert experimentation into aggressive sound-based weaponry to the one million ton pulsation of the Dub sound system), so too may the expression of a voice may be influenced and moulded by the surrounding musical activity within which it operates. The guttural vocal style developed in tandem with an extension of velocity (expressed through an increasing BPM (Beats per minute) in the rhythmic tempo of compositions) which produced a compaction and reduction of temporal elements (a continent in a moment, a universe in a second, the Futurist racing car hurling defiance at the stars in an exploration of kinetic energy).

This urge towards heightened velocity expresses the essential kineticism of music (which is—itself—vibration inscribed by movement translated through an instrument) in rhythmic terms through the increase of beat tempo: however, the immediate result of this conflation is a further mutation in the voice. As duration is reduced, the voice must contract to accommodate the reduced space. Where lyrical elements had been written in order to scan the metre of songs with a slower tempo, it was necessary to increase the physical delivery of the lyrical content in order to scan within the metre. This resulted in the delivery of lyrical content in short, sharp bursts, a blurring of vocal as vowels and consonants were shoehorned into a tighter temporal space.

This compacting of temporal space unexpectedly dovetailed with an attack on text itself which found its deepest expression in the Punk subculture through the chopped and slashed zerox design of vinyl record sleeves and fan magazines (fanzines). However, this methodology had its roots in the art school origins of Punk displaying trace residues of the precedents set by Dada, the Constructivists, and Futurism (which were themselves an extension of earlier experiments with lexical and typographic organisation such as Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Des* (1897) which was originally written on musical notation paper). The Dadaists had recognised the codified nature of typography itself and saw the potential for disruption of that code (due to its status in the public realm as language): Punk typography embraced the linguistic blurring and disjunction provided by the abrupt and abrasive ruptures of Dada’s example (along with the thuggish brutalism of the ‘ransom note’ cut from newspaper lettering), less concerned with the assault on the very properties of language and image as representation than with the potential for disruptive effect evidenced by a concerted attack on conventional form.

This attack on text itself provides a vanguard act which influenced the later desire to pare down lyrical content to gnomic statements in Grindcore. A realm of reduction was created where the formal qualities of the lyric could be distilled (in the manner of Ezra Pound’s exhortation to ‘Use either no ornament or good ornament’) to direct statements characterised by a simplicity of expression and cyclic restatement. These spare and pared down statements find a correlative in the use of sloganeering within political activity. Representing the distillation of key concepts into haiku-esque proclamations (a shorthand for the key issues of the day), the slogan acts as a differentiator, a means of stating an oppositional stance, and—as such—provided an ideal vehicle for the later generations of Punk-influenced musicians (such as Napalm Death) who increasingly embraced a position informed by extremist politics (particularly left-wing Anarchism). Grindcore utilised the broad sweep of slogans (for example, NOISE NOT MUSIC and CAMPAIGN FOR MUSICAL

DESTRUCTION coined by the Dutch group Larm) as an ideological scaffolding which simultaneously facilitated the subtler process of the reduction of extraneous text in the lyric. Ironically, this process mimics the innate tendency in popular music to move towards a purity of expression (typically in relation to love and death) characterised by the refinement and distillation of lyrical content.

While the compaction of temporal space and the gnomic quality of the lyrical form acted as forcing agents to re-orientate focus onto the lyric (the textual content), so that the spoken word was superseded by the written word (just as a similar disappearance of the object in conceptual art led to an increased reliance on the written proposition in order to uphold the artwork), the lyric was simultaneously under attack by the dissolving form of the voice. Lyrical content—expressions of intense anger, of rage, and of frustration—intertwined with this focus on materiality/physicality in order to form a conduit for the expulsion of emotional resonances from the internal to the external. This outward rush of emotion has a tendency towards the overpowering, the devouring: it signals a return of the primitive in its most condemned form as it becomes increasingly unfettered from structures of overt linguistic meaning (in a distant echo of the ‘wordless’ poems of the Lettrists) in a blur of muscular tension and aggressive phonation. The formal structure of this conduit was defined (in part) by the physical delivery of the words: harsh, abrupt, angry, and almost nihilistic. Its endnote expression is a form of disappearance, manifesting itself through a destruction of the inscribed text by vocal utterance (through the body via the diaphragm and larynx). In the place of the enunciation of text (of meaning) remains a vocal ululation reminiscent of a wordless lament—of the plaintive twilight cries of the Blues music of the Mississippi Delta, or the degenerative monologue collapsing in real time present in certain pieces by the ‘Industrial’ group Throbbing Gristle.

Formal considerations/structure further impacted on the physical sound and delivery mechanism of the voice through Napalm Death’s use of ‘downtuning’ (the re-tuning of instruments to a lower pitch than the ‘Concert Pitch’ traditionally utilised in the orthodox practice of music in the West), an approach inspired by their Midlands precursors Black Sabbath. Napalm Death’s re-positioning of instrument tuning (to 3 octaves below ‘Concert Pitch’) can be seen as a rejection of the constriction of a system of musical orthodoxy which seeks to fix meaning in the same manner as organised systems such as language may fix meaning: it constitutes a re-positioning of the ‘starting blocks’ (rather than overt rejection of fixative systems as is the case in the work of the English improvising musician Keith Rowe). In terms of sonic events, it created a deeper and bass-orientated sound characterised by unusual effects including the buzzing vibration of instrument

strings and a tendency towards discord expressed through overtones and slipping tunage.

The voice simultaneously dropped in pitch, becoming more guttural in a primal manifestation emanating from the lower reaches of the pit of the stomach and the diaphragm, a blurring strain of sound from the stomach. The sheer physical weight of sound acts upon the body, making it strange: the stomach and brain cavity become sounding chambers. This materiality is representative of the focus placed by Napalm Death on the site of the source of sound—musical vibration—manifested through an increased emphasis on physicality: the terminal velocity of the ‘blastbeat’ drum style, the monomaniacal power of the directional qualities of the structures employed, the sheer presence of volume, and the guttural quality of the voice. This ‘Grindcore’ voice becomes a time-stretched scream masquerading as an expression of extreme velocity (christened the ‘Deathgrunt’) and simultaneously an abstracted expression of the materiality of the physical body. In this mode of expression, meaning is seen to reside in a Shamanic synthesis of form and content.

4. THE ATTACK ON LANGUAGE

These assaults upon the communicative core at the heart of text are situated within a wider incremental movement within the arts (concomitant with the Twentieth century) towards a radical shift in representation, a shift which takes as its focus the erosion of the art object (to the point of disappearance) and in doing so makes explicit the innate tendency of art forms to aspire towards abstraction and their own erasure.

Language played a key role in this reductive shift, in tandem with its silent partner—the dissolving voice. The growing perception of language as an ossified mode of discourse which developed within the arts during Modernism encouraged the evolution of a rebellion located on the page and inside the larynx, a rebellion whose ruptures made manifest the rupture in meaning and communication which such an act entailed. This movement shifted emphasis from text as carrier of meaning to text as image. Dada (and Futurist) collage exemplified this tendency (extending the experimentation with typographical presentation in the poetic explorations of Mallarmé and Apollinaire): these collage works redirect the focus of language away from its communicative purpose (the conveyance of meaning) into the realm of image and shape. The practice of language as ordering system and conveyor of communicative meaning is thus undermined, leaving it adrift in an open field of the visual.

Simultaneously, the larynx reeled as the declamatory clangour of the ‘verse ohne worte’ of the Dada poets and the ‘zang tumb tuuumb’ intonations of Marinetti and the Futurists further abraded and reduced the communicative

nuances of language. This nihilistic abrasion reduced the poetic transcription to a parade of syllables and sound events, reaching its apotheosis in the refusal by Jacques Vache to actively produce. These forms of vocalisation anticipate the aspiration towards the condition of Glossolalia in the ‘Automatic Writing’ of the Surrealists and Artaud’s asylum cries at Rodez (although it must be noted that these approaches stem from and aim towards somewhat different goals), and lead on to the patricidal birth of the Lettrists in a pugilist battle between modes of discourse (between the theatrical text of Tristan Tzara and their ‘wordless’ poetry) and the eventual foregrounding of the materiality of language itself in the work of the Concrete Poetry sound poets. This interlacing network of approaches to the materiality of language elicits responsive echoes from successive attempts at radically transforming the purpose of the voice including those emanating from Grindcore.

This process of attacking the voice (and language itself) aspires towards a terminal state and moves with inexorable momentum towards a black hole, a vanishing point. Just as the dense rectangular blocks of black ink in Man Ray’s *Poem Optique* replace (and obliterate) the intelligibility of the text (that is—language, and thus meaning) to create a negative space in terms of language, the voice in Grindcore reneges on—and breaks—a promise: the nature of the text and its utterance promise meaning but they deliver instead an emptiness, a black hole that opens up when language vanishes. There is an underlying desire for termination in this homicidal urge to stem the flow of verbal meaning, a desire which—in its fervour to access a possibility of transcendence from language—aspires towards the condition of silence. The music of Napalm Death creates a tumescent silence where it seems that nothing can be said (for—in a sense—there has been no dialogue).

One can sense in this desire the busy silence of the Post Modern condition and its refutation of any conception of the absolute. In this context, the legacy of Jacques Vache is his refusal to speak, to preserve silence to—and beyond—the point of death. In the same way, the mute response of Erich Zann is—by implication—a refusal to speak, a personal response which refuses to speak of that which has driven thought and meaning to the outer limits, to the vanishing point of a horizon without end or meaning.

This sustained attack was incisive in its choice of target. The status which language has retained within Western culture demonstrates its import: since the primal ‘Word’ of religious texts (Maurice Blanchot’s comment that ‘The book begins with the Bible, in which the logos is inscribed as law’ is instructive), language has continued to retain a central (and privileged) position due to its functions, in particular its organisational function as means of conveying and defining meaning. However, beyond its surface function as a means of

communication (benign or otherwise), language may—and does—take on other tasks.

The work of Wittgenstein and Lacan illuminated how the foundation of language is located within the social context, within the social form of life. The ‘social pact’ (the construction of language within the social realm) continues to define the practice of language as a stabilising agent within a social network, an agent which facilitates communication within the social realm between separate individuals and the group, and consequently facilitates the effective functioning of the surrounding society.

As an extension of this stabilising influence, language operates as a tool for the construction of social reality. It is given the role of a Manichean fixative operating as agent for the consolidation of an entire configuration of living (including thinking—for language is the silent judge at each moment of thought). Language measures and discriminates, and in doing so it also separates and oppresses: it can be used to impose social identity upon the individual body both in terms of content (the importance of naming—from naming ceremonies in indigenous cultures and the renaming actions of conquerors to the renaming which cyclically occurs in marketing, in business and politics) and in terms of form (the voice may be seen as the last true signifier of position within the English class system).

Observed in this manner, language takes on a darker hue. Derrida noted that ‘presence’ (the act of thinking or reading) is defined within linguistic parameters and—in this sense—defines the channels of communication for all individuals: despite the prevalence of visual communication signals such as body language, language only allows understanding of these movements through itself—that is, through the ordering medium of language. For example, the protagonist in Lovecraft’s story is far from inarticulate (using written text and music as communication mediums): however, in the nexus of meaning within the narrative, these modes of communication (new forms of language, new ways of expression) fall far short of the purity of expression expressed by aural language—by the voice. Indeed, Zann’s lack of voice is presented as a site of unease and fear: no reason is given for Zann’s mute silence, but the implication remains that a consummate submission to the music (which operates at the level of vibration—that is, the physical) entails a loss of both the voice and—by implication—sanity (in correspondence with the designation of the mind as the seat of language and meaning). Through this selective and hierarchical process, language assumes a dominant position from which it can impose restrictions upon thought.

Lacan’s recognition that the ‘practice of language’ dominates social interaction acknowledged that the learning of a language is essentially the learning of—and acquiescence to—a set of rules and laws for the use and combination of words.

The model itself shapes (and thus controls) speech in a similar way to that in which ideological models shape and control—by the imposition of limits. Therefore to use language is to impose a limit in a similar manner to that in which ideology imposes limits on the wider scale: from this position, the very act of language-use is akin to a capitulation to a domineering—and oppressive—presence.

This perception of the construction of language as a control mechanism (where the learning of a system or model is inherent in the learning of a language, that is, the learning of its structures and constituent elements) is extended by the philosopher John Zerzan who posits that language operates in another manner analogous to that of ideology in that it creates barriers between the individual and existence through symbolisation. To Zerzan, the development and use of symbols mediates the experience of the ‘now’, and consequently undermines spontaneous and direct connections: to him, the movement of ideology is always directed from active to passive, from unity to separation (reflected in Zerzan’s view in the decay of the verb form in the modern English language).

It is evident that a loss of language within this construction would become a totemic symbol of the absence of the social. Furthermore, a deliberate erosion of language (of meaning) would be viewed as an overt rejection of the social (and—by proxy—the social order). This is the undercurrent of meaning present in the story of Erich Zann: a cosmic horror of the loss of language (that is, at the loss of the element which governs social interaction, fixes social identity and facilitates social stability through communication).

It is this horror which the Symbolist poets embraced in their acknowledgement that defiance of a society must also include a defiance of its structures of language. Symbolism utilised a radical rending of language (even to the point of the creation of new languages as undertaken by Von Hofmannstahl) as a means of acknowledging and achieving this end, simultaneously developing an exploration of and focus upon the aural properties of language as sound event. This early illumination (the recognition of language as a site of conflict) has—in tacit collaboration with the theoretical position developed through Artaud, Lacan and Kristeva that language acts to impose limits on understanding—coloured much of the ‘transgressive art’ of the twentieth century (and beyond).

If language is indeed a key element in a complex structure intended to exert control, it would seem inevitable that any position of opposition to this structure must engage with language. It must interrogate and address language itself—a requirement recognised in Roland Barthes’ writings on the limits of using language by which to condemn society and re-presented in the sleeve-notes of a vinyl record release by the English ‘Post Punk’ group Scritti Politti who used an excerpt from an (imaginary) theoretical text called *Scritto’s Republic* to note that: ‘To leave speech

and language uninterrupted is to submit to the cultural order by which sexuality, thought, etc is regulated’.

5. SILENCING THE VOICE

Language is—by its nature—a social construct: its natural field of activity is the social and it is upon the social that it has the most consequence.

It is within this social field that an opening of possibility occurs—the possibility of resistance by a concentrated attack within the realm of the social itself: that is, through an attack on linguistic meaning.

Opposition to the restrictive practice of language centres around a notion of a return to that which Levi Strauss termed the ‘totalisation’ of experience in the moment—that is, to the natural cycles from which language detaches all individuals through a procedure of objectification through symbolisation. Such attempts at the forging of a re-connection with what Lacan termed the ‘real’ through—and beyond—the medium of language are formulated upon the affirmation of interconnection and contact between individuals and the group as a whole. They seek to operate by the disruption of a language structure perceived as a distancing mechanism and in its place advocate approaches which aspire towards an idea of ‘pure’ language which operates at a level of ‘wordless thought’.

It may be noted that the supposition underpinning this ideal of ‘pure’ language is religious, in the sense that the corresponding idea of ‘impure’ language is intimately attached to the content of the Christian myths (specifically the fall from grace and expulsion from Eden, and the later fragmentation of language at Babel). The utopian vision references the theological desire for a return to ‘Adamic language’—that is, a language which remains uncorrupted (and thus within the realm of the virtuous)—enunciated in Jacob Boehme’s ‘sensualische sprache’ (sensual speech) spoken by the redeemed after the second coming of the Christian deity.

This rhetoric and imagery of corruption, underscored by apprehensions of loss and transformation, opens the practice of language to metaphorical presentation as disease and contagion which finds an analogue in the metaphor of language as disease in the writings of Georges Bataille (where communication is demarcated as best understood in terms of contagion with the individual human as a conduit for the communicative process) and a similar use of metaphor in the work of William Burroughs where language is represented as infection (where the word operates autonomously as a form of virus which disseminates itself like a meme through grafting itself onto other pieces of language).

In this paradigm, contact with the ‘real’ is implicitly couched in terms which reference the physical (the body) and prioritise an approach which can be seen as an expression and validation of materiality. It is within this zone of materiality that

the attack on linguistic meaning can be facilitated—and the Grindcore voice is an auditory expression of this point of convergence. The Grindcore voice initially disrupts the chain of the language structure through its own unintelligibility (its lack of desire to seek the conveyance of meaning). If language is a social construct intended to facilitate social interaction, to step away from it and to refuse to take part in the game (the game being language) may be seen as a retreat from engagement, a politic of refusal by refusing to be understood (as in the case of Elisabeth Vogler in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) whose silence is implicitly acknowledged as a form of protest). It is this urge which Susan Sontag described when she noted 'the advocacy of silence expresses a mythic project of total liberation.'

In doing this, it utilises physicality as a central element: both in terms of the physical production of the sound event and the response of the listener to that event. The voice sloughs the detritus of language through an affirmation of the physical roots of sound, and consequently moves closer to a reclamation of a notion of 'primitive' communication. This 'pure' form of communication is situated in opposition to the constraints imposed by the practice of language: it is the 'sensual speech' of Boehme, the 'naive speech of the heart' advocated by the English 'Post Punk' band The Pop Group, an aspiration towards the condition of 'wordless thought' suggested by John Zerzan (and illustrated by his examples of chess playing and musical composition).

This emphasis on physicality allows a parallel to be drawn between the physical use of language by William Burroughs (the cutting up of text or the use of tape recorders) and the physical expression of the Grindcore voice (the emanation of sounds from the chamber of the stomach). Burroughs perception of language (the Word) as a fixative for the definition and determination of social interaction through the enforcement of conventional patterns (of perceiving, thinking, and speaking) led him to develop Brian Gysin's 'Cut-Up' technique into a tool for revolt. In his application, the 'Cut-Up' operates as a means of disrupting the flow of control through exposure of its mechanics: the creation of a multitude of channels for reception fragments the patterns available for decoding within the framework imposed by language (patterns based upon hierarchical structures of linear sequence and binary opposites) and thus opens up the possibility of a more liberated interaction.

In Burroughs' experiments with tape recorders, the voice is fragmented ('Cut-Up') into phonemic gestures which tend towards the total eradication of 'language as meaning' in order to create a potential space for dissent. This physical use and handling of sound creates a radical disjuncture between the 'real' and the 'constructed', as do many others works of dissent from the Twentieth Century: Martha Rosler's Vietnam War collages (which bring death into the ideal

design home) and Chris Marker’s film *Letter from Siberia* (1961)—where the same images are re-played with 3 contrasting soundtracks (making explicit how a position can be adopted and reinforced as ‘real’ through the use of text and language)—are similar representations of this re-programming operation.

In a similar manner, the mutation of the voice in Grindcore creates a form of ‘cut-up’ through the presentation of a ‘gap’ between presentation (language) and intelligibility (meaning). The Grindcore voice draws attention to the nature of its own construction—that is, to its own ‘falseness’: stripped of representational language, it directs the listeners attention onto the actual construction of the voice, and in doing so highlights the fact that the voice (and its attendant meaning) is indeed a construct, a construct which requires a listener who gives an utterance meaning and definition. The breakdown of the transmission of linguistic meaning which this entails creates a ‘gap’ in actual meaning: it is through the ‘gap’ in meaning that one may have the opportunity to see the ‘reality’ of the situation and—in Burroughs’ view—then be able to restructure that meaning. The voice merging with the sound field and losing its own characteristics becomes a means of rejection and of uprising, just as the sound rises upwards from inside the body towards the reed of the larynx.

The as-yet unspoken aspect of these modes of defiance is a tendency towards strategies which place them within the provenance of magical thinking, particularly those strategies which seek to move outside the logical trajectory of causality (cause and effect) in order to act upon—rather than inside—reality. Burroughs’s position that language can be neutered through reconfiguration (which used the voice as a representative of the process: ‘the part entails the whole’) and Grindcore’s attempts to control manifestations of external reality through language can be seen to occur within this domain—the domain of ritual and fetish. In these manifestations of magical thinking, a combination of ritual, incantation and fetishist thought coalesce to create a talismanic charm against the negative effects of language.

Ritual (the practical application of myth) is employed as an agent of change—as a means of generating new forms of reality and forging new structures within which to operate—and a key trope of this ritualistic approach is the use of verbal expression. Here, the voice can become a magical object, a talisman: used in a ritualistic manner, the voice becomes a form of sigil created during a performative act, a sigil which operates as a fetish object (a small item from the subject used as a substitute for the whole of the subject: ‘the Part entails the whole’). In this act of spell casting, the voice becomes the substitute object for external reality and it is through the rupturing of this voice that the action can be performed upon external reality.

This act—recalling the ritualised performance of the shaman—utilises verbal discourse (through incantation) to generate a nexus of meaning and power through the application of sound and self-expression. The intention of this act is to act upon external reality to the benefit of the performer, after Mallarmé’s use of the voice as incantation (as a form of sacred magic) to create external reality through internal consciousness—an approach which privileged the sound of words over their explicit communicative meaning—and the use of speech as ritual liturgy in Artaud’s conception of the theatre. It is within the performative context that this act exists, a context which is explicitly physical and which privileges both the body itself and the physical effect of sound upon the body as is evident in the Grindcore voice where the conjuring of the voice from within the sounding chamber of the body cavity foregrounds physicality as a means of creating a disjunction with language (as did the physical handling of magnetic audio tape in Burroughs tape experiments).

In Lovecraft’s text, the final mode of discourse for Erich Zann is talismanic. His discourse (the music) is intended to act upon reality through sound, through incantation: the cascading notes become the orotund peal of a bell tone which reverberates in waves to form a magic circle. The sound vibrations become a hermetic seal. In the same manner, the making strange (*ostranenie*) of the Grindcore voice acts as a magical seal which has a twofold purpose: firstly, it creates a zone of protection (a magic circle) through the alienating affect of its refusal to be understood and, secondly, it acts upon the outside world (reality) through its rupturing effects upon language: in effect, the proponents of the Grindcore voice desired—in the manner of a cabal of magicians—to prevail by force of will.

6. END NOTE

A retrospective overview of this effort may ascertain that it was—however laudable—doomed to failure from its inception. The impulse towards a fragmentation of language through the voice itself was pervaded with internal flaws, flaws principally located in the initial foundation of the effort in the positivism of Modernism and in the use of forms of magical thinking as agents of change. The terminus of these flaws created an inversion of the initial impetus towards engagement which existed in the drive to disintegrate the voice in Grindcore and ultimately engendered a withdrawal into detached alienation.

The Grindcore voice became a representative of an effort to use the voice itself as a means of diminishing and erasing the restrictions of a society through an erasure of the means by which such restrictions are imposed—that is, through language. It aspired towards a reinstitution of a state of ‘pure’ language which existed in the pre-technological era before the widespread development of

symbols: this ‘pure’ language represented a ‘utopian’ state. This impulse is—in essence—a re-presentation of the ideals which underpinned Modernism’s development from the middle of the 19th century: concepts of truth, the supremacy of reason, the perfectibility of man and the creation of a utopian society (after Sir Thomas More) through a remodelling of the world. It is a dream that begins from absolute positions and seeks resolution in the absolute.

However, the desire for a return to an existence within a utopian pre-technological society is open to a devastating critique. Located within the primitivist milieu of Romanticism, it posits an idealised state of existence which cannot be confirmed to have ever existed (as it exists within a pre-historical timeframe which is not open to confirmation). In the absence of this confirmation, this idealised state of existence only occurs within the realm of conjecture and cannot be said to be present a reasonable foundation for progression (which Levi-Strauss acknowledged in his own critique of the concept). The Postmodernist analysis would discount the doctrine of Modernism in general—highlighting that there are not and cannot be any absolutes (and thus no idealised positions)—and this notion in particular for its dependence on ideas of hegemony and unity: at its core, it remains a child of the anthropocentrism which developed from the Enlightenment onwards and posits an artificial imposition of order through a Logocentric structure.

The question remains: is it possible to imagine communication without language (in some form)? We are aware of a multitude of forms of non-verbal communication—but how effective can they be? Do they provide us with what we require? Or do we always have to have recourse to language?

This question is the core of a paradoxical use by the Grindcore voice of the very thing which it seeks to erase—that is, language. It continued to utilise language (and the voice itself) as a scaffold: while the status of the voice as carrier of meaning within a hierarchy was rejected, the gesture itself remained incomplete. Even the impetus towards silence remains within the scope of language, for silence forms an element in a dialogue and is thus a form of speech, of language (as Wittgenstein observed).

The second key flaw in this position may be located in the use of magical thinking. The focus on the voice as incantatory tool located its use within a form of magical thinking which sought to act upon external reality through the use of fetishist concepts. This focus has—in common with all acts of magic—a foundation in a belief that the individual can act upon the conditions of the external universe and use will to alter those conditions drawing a parallel with the Modernist perception that the individual can act upon the wider mass.

However, belief in this ability of the individual will to enact change in external reality demands an act of faith and cannot be proven under logical analysis.

It provides an articulation of the key problematic issue inherent in all forms of magical thinking: one may wish to reduce the chaos of existence to segmented and compartmentalised sections, but this does not constitute a representative image of reality.

The cumulative result of this process is an unexpected disengagement. Despite initially developing from an urge to engage, this engagement progressively atrophies into detachment, losing its own sense of purpose and retreating into an internal (and private) world in disengagement from external reality. The retreat from overt expression of meaning became a solipsistic turning inwards towards the self-negating ouroboros of nihilistic self-reflection (further enhanced by the predisposition of the Grindcore milieu to detachment due to its development within the hermetically sealed chamber of ‘underground’ music subcultures): the hyper-expression of the political slogan becomes the gnomic aphorism of the personal as the action remains trapped in what Raoul Vaneigem described as the ‘self-liquidation’ phase of the decline of the arts. Just as Erich Zann fought an ultimately futile battle to lock out external reality, Grindcore only succeeded in postponing the inevitable (which was its own absorption and deboning by the surrounding culture).

Culture consumes and is—by its nature—enveloping. It engages with and embraces all new events through the action the Situationists termed recuperation: through this action, it assimilates and absorbs, an inverse Eucharist which subjects any challenge to its hegemony to a pacification process, to an absorption. The potential engagement which the Grindcore voice represented was denuded through the immediate response of the cultural corpus, the opening space created by the engulfing silence of the voice rapidly filled in a process inaugurated through the enervating effect of humour and terminating in legitimisation within the constraints and boundaries imposed by the culture itself, a creative eruption validated by designation as genre—that is, a valid entry in an inventory of potential means of expression within a defined cultural lexicon—and thus legitimised (to the point of becoming the subject of academic research).

Ossified into an entry in a list of definitions (genre categories) primarily focused on definition through form, the eruption of creativity stalls in the mire of generic tropes. Classification is a form of pacification: it strips and diminishes its object in order to negate its effect and to further detach the initial impulse to action from its source. Well-meaning—but naïve—experimentation returns to the cul-de-sac of stylistic prescription, and—finally—to product: NOISE NOT MUSIC becoming essential marketing for the creation of differentiation. As Susan Sontag notes ‘The history of art is a sequence of successful transgressions’. Despite all this, it is in these actions—in the desire to experiment, to explore, to probe—that there remains a future of possibility.

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NOTE

In January 2006 curator and artist Mark Beasley invited Nicholas Bullen founding member of the band Napalm Death, (the band credited with creating the Grindcore genre which blended elements of Extreme Metal and Punk music) to present a lecture about Napalm's development of the 'death growl'. The death growl, also known as growled vocals, harsh vocals, death vocals, pig vocals, throating, death grunts, unclean vocals, Cookie Monster vocals, or simply growling, is a vocalization style usually employed by vocalists of the death metal music genre. The resultant essay commissioned for the publication *Hey Hey Glossolia: exhibiting the voice* edited by Mark Beasley and co-produced with Dexter Sinister will be published by Creative Time in May 2008. Nicholas Bullen will be speaking and performing at *Hey Hey Glossolia: The Voice (after Mercedes McCambridge)* on May 22 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture, see www.creativetime.org for further details.