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Mapping the Studio (Fat Chance Matmos): The artist's workspace in sound and visual arts.

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I. Sound as art: why bother with sociology?

‘Sociology and art do not make good bedfellows’, said sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993a: 139), who nonetheless spent most of his early career on the subject. Adding to this already troubled couple the variable of sound might seem as inappropriate as suggesting a *ménage à trois* to a partner who is just about to leave you. Based on tools and arguments already tested in the sociology of religion (Durkheim), critical sociology’s general aim towards art is to ‘externalise’ the beliefs on which this field of practices functions – what Bourdieu called art’s tacit *illusio* – by revealing the social mechanisms behind art’s seemingly autonomous system. In the case of sound art, for example, this would involve a ‘reduction’ of what makes it meaningful for its participants and publics to the underlying logics of structures of economic, cultural or symbolic capital (*habitus*), field position, class distinction, and other such analytical tools. There is, however, another way of engaging sociologically with the phenomenon of sound art – sound *in* art, or sound *as* art. According to this perspective, which has been variously referred to as pragmatic, comprehensive sociology, or a theory of mediation, the act of tinkering with digital sound technologies in a studio, or appreciating a sound work in an art gallery is understood not as the point of arrival of a predetermined social trajectory, but instead, as the point of departure for new ‘forms of attachment’ (Gomart and Hennion 1999), for the construction of unpredictable networks of human and material agencies, generating creative practices as well as meaningful discourses about these practices.

One of the main epistemological shifts that this approach has brought about concerns the need for a ‘pertinent’ research object, the construction of which, according to Heinich, ‘is too often guided by problems that only make sense to scholars, when they use empirical evidences as just another test for their theoretical model’ (Heinich 1998: 83, my translation). In that respect, the questions that motivated this research are neither abstract-theoretical, nor intrinsically sociological; if anything, they are best described as ‘cultural’. The increasing presence of sound pieces within buildings traditionally devoted to visual artworks¹ has generated a number of debates both from visual and sound art communities. For example, during an online panel discussion organised by the Tate Modern and addressing this very issue, art historian and sound artist Douglas Kahn mentioned the event of:

¹ To name only some of the most recent and most referenced manifestations: *Sound as Media* (Tokyo, 2000), *Sonic Boom* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2000), *Sonic Process* (Barcelona, London, Paris, 2002-2003) and *Sons & Lumières* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2005).

a major sound art show in Sydney that self-destructed because the institution didn't know how to handle a number of sound works in close proximity to one another, due mainly to a curator in a land grab for glory who alienated the community of sound artists who could have lent their collective wisdom on the matter².

This brief anecdote points towards the existence of specifically sonic, or 'auditory cultures' (see Bull and Back 2003), i.e., a set of phenomenal, technological, social, aesthetic and discursive mediations that informs – or, more accurately, that *forms* – a certain kind of cultural practices in contradistinction with another. Hence the kind of issues, as illustrated by Kahn, that arise when the collectives that shape visual art institutions and the whole experience of art – I am thinking here of museum curators and other specialised professions, as well as the rigid organisation of space and of the works introduced within that space – has to deal with a relatively 'alien' sonic culture; a culture that not only privileges a different mode of sensual perception, but one that exists through a particular network of mediations.

A sociology interested in the mediations of art would start to address this idea of a 'clash', or at least of a necessary process of negotiation, between visual and sonic cultures with this initial question: what has changed in either of those cultural networks that would help us evaluating the status of sound as a legitimate medium in a visual art context? Here, it is important to acknowledge the work done by art historians and critics (Khan 1999; LaBelle 2006; Toop 2004) in order to construct an artistic continuum, relatively separated from orthodox art histories, connecting a wide range of artistic sound practices throughout the 20th century (or even before) – from Futurism's emphasis on noise as an avant-garde strategy, to innovative works using optical soundtrack technology, or later, with the birth of the 'sound object' via *musique concrète's* studio experiments. So, the question as to 'why sound art now?' only becomes meaningful when the focus shifts from sound-based artworks per se to the wider cultural phenomenon of sound art – as collectives of practices and knowledge, as part of today's aesthetic vocabulary, as a legitimate theme for exhibitions, conferences, books, articles, etc.

Some have explained the cultural potency of sound art in terms of the ontological properties of its medium. Sound, after all, is air vibrating. Amongst others, David Toop has suggested that the relevance of sound as art 'seems to grow as the material world fades to the immaterial, fluid condition of music' (2000: 107). The problem with this emphasis on immateriality is that it paints only part of the picture – that of the seemingly unmediated performativity of sound. Yet, in music as in any art, 'originality and authenticity presuppose, as sine qua non, the existence of an intense technical reproduction' (Hennion and Latour 2003: 94). Walk through a retrospective of Christian Marclay's visual output, and you will see the amount of material intermediaries that have progressively entered the fabric of music's production and diffusion³: score sheets, instruments, tape recorders, loudspeakers, vinyl records, cassettes, CD's, album covers, promotional posters, etc. Or, think about John Cage's *4'33''*, arguably the purest form music could ever achieve – then add to it the score written by the composer, the piano lid that marks the beginning and the end of the piece, the rows of seats, or the CD spinning noisily in the stereo. Neither pure performance nor pure object, music is an 'immaterial and material, fluid quasi-object... It favours associations or assemblages between musicians and instruments, composers and scores, listeners and sound systems – that is, between subjects and objects' (Born 2005: 7).

Whereas the ontological interpretation leaves the materiality of sound practices behind, another perspective puts technology at the centre of art's fate. New media theorist Lev

² 'Sound at Tate', online panel discussion, January-March 2005:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/contact/forums/onlineevents/thread.jsp?forum=43&thread=2471&tstart=0&trange=15>
(last accessed: 15 October 2006).

³ With regards Marclay's oeuvre so far, one could be entitled to wonder if there is *any* music-related object that he has not yet turned into an artwork (see Ferguson *et al.* 2003).

Manovich, amongst others, considers the survival of traditional aesthetic categories as meaningless in the face of modern technological developments. According to him,

The assumption that artistic practice can be neatly organized into a small set of distinct mediums has continued to structure the organization of museums, art schools, funding agencies and other cultural institutions – even though this assumption no longer reflected the actual functioning of culture (2001).

Indeed, it seems fair to say that early attempts at setting clear aesthetic boundaries, such as Gotthold Lessing's separation between 'temporal' and 'spatial' arts (*Laocoön*, 1766), have been rendered irrelevant by decades of technological innovation and its successive incorporation in artistic creation: video art, mixed-media installations, Internet art, multi-sensorial performances, etc. Thus, according to this view, the recent pervasiveness of digital technologies has greatly contributed to the conditions of a 'post-media' aesthetics. Now that they all share the same digital form within the same computer database, all forms of cultural expression, whether visual or auditory, in theory, are 'translatable' into one another (Kittler 1999: 1-2). As a result, a cross-disciplinary category such as sound art merely mirrors in the art world the workings of deeper technological determinisms.

Apart from its negligence for the variety of ways in which a single technology can be used and appropriated, this perspective also fails to grasp what Manovich can only consider as an abnormality, that is, the relative stability of the art world compared with the tempo of technological change. Despite what some media theorists may think, technology alone simply cannot account for the integration of a new art form in the institutional art world. The example of photography's long struggle for artistic recognition is a case in point. The photographic medium underwent a series of torsions and negotiations before being accepted as legitimate by the art market, by galleries, museums and other art spaces. Georgina Born's ethnographic study of the IRCAM studios in Paris (1995) highlighted a similar tension between innovations on the one hand, and what she calls the institution's tendency for 'aesthetic stasis' on the other. To overcome the limits of ontological or technological-determinist ways of thinking about sound art, sociology must therefore treat 'symmetrically' what constitutes the specificity of the art world – its own internal logic, its values and discourses –, along with wider external processes, such as social, economic and technological factors. The following sections will focus on the creative environments of both visual and sound artists as significant locations from which to articulate this tension between artistic practices and the discourse of art.

II. The studio and art's value regimes:

Characterisations of the artist's studio have been a matter of disputes between the various disciplines attached to the study of art. Whereas sociologists tended to focus on the inherently collaborative nature of artistic production (see Becker 1982), art historians only recently started to depart from a rigid conception of the studio as individual space and turn instead to the network of social and material interactions within it. More than simply an opposition of analytical viewpoints, this tension between individuality and specificity on the one hand, and collaboration, or social agencies on the other, is constitutive of the entire functioning of the art world. Hence, any analysis of the art studio, the gallery, the exhibition, or any other part of art's chain of mediations requires paying attention simultaneously to what Heinich (1998: 11-21) has termed the 'singular' and the 'communal value regimes' of art. By limiting the frame of explanation to the former, sociologists would run the risk of neglecting exactly what sets the art world apart from other domains of social life, that is, the fact that it tends to attribute more symbolic value to individual creativity than collaborative process. In the last few years, however, art history and sociology found more common ground on this matter, notably

through the influence of researches loosely grouped under the label of ‘actor-network theory’⁴. Just like the sociologists who wanted to explore the social fabric of scientific facts were ‘naturally’ inclined to follow scientists in their daily activities (see Latour and Woolgar 1986), scholars interested in the social aspects of art production have been tempted to explore the equally cloistered ‘black box’ of studio environment. Although some art historians have judged the laboratory/studio comparison as ‘strained and tedious’ (Hughes 1990: 34) when pursued beyond the metaphorical level, others have successfully demonstrated the usefulness of the studio-laboratory analogy in both the recording and the visual artist’s studio environments.

Following in the footsteps of laboratory studies, Hennion has described the music studio as a social and material ‘microcosm’ where experiments are conducted on a basis of trial and error:

The studio is impermeable to systems; it dissolves obligatory association; it undoes rationalizations. Inversely, all connections are permitted, whether or not they are specified in the user’s manual. The studio is an apparatus for capturing raw material by extracting it from the structured networks along which it circulates in ‘normal life’ (1989: 410).

If this way of describing the studio is still largely relevant, the technologies that entered the sound studio in the last decades nonetheless imposes a reassessment of the entire network of humans and non-humans gathered in the production and diffusion of sound works. Development of multi-track recording, possibilities of compatibility and real-time composition allowed by industrial standards (MIDI), wider availability of digital samplers and sound processors, more powerful and portable computers, without saying anything of internet-based communication and its decentralised modes of collaboration⁵ – the list of new actors encountered in the contemporary recording studio could go on forever. Besides making the function of the studio as ‘compositional tool’ (Eno 1983) clearer than it already was⁶, digital technologies have also participated to a large extent to the ‘remediation’ of the studio space – from the ‘obligatory passage point’ that it once was for a majority of artists, to a more compact, mobile, and thus also a more effectively *mobilised* assemblage. Fewer sound works are produced exclusively in large and costly studios as the presence of laptop devices in both performance and recording environment has compressed the two stages into one. Under these conditions, contemporary digital artists tend to integrate the work of previous mediations, and increasingly occupy the position of the ‘producer-creator’ (During 2003: 45).

The privileged vantage point from which to understand the phenomenon of sound art thus appears to be the home studio’s ‘digital octopus’, to update one of Hennion’s metaphors. However, in order to translate the shift observed in the home studio space – or, at a smaller scale level, within the circuitry of the creator’s laptop – to the opening up of art institutional mediations (museums, galleries, public art institutions, funding bodies, etc.), it is important to address another side of the studio. We need to add to this studio-network the studio as discursive trope in the history of visual arts. Most of the values associated with the visual art world’s ‘regime of singularity’ developed from changes in the repartition of functions between the artist’s studio and the spaces of reception (see Rodriguez 2002). The progression from the more open, multi-function *atelier* of the craftsman to the more specialised and isolated painter’s studio played a crucial role in defining the modern notions of individual

⁴ See Latour (2005: 10-11) for a condensed explanation as to the general criteria in the literature of ‘actor-network theory’ (ANT).

⁵ Here, I should dispel the possible confusion between the concept of ‘studio-network’ and the existence of so-called ‘networked studios’ (see Théberge 2004). Put simply, the former already *was* a network in itself, whereas the emergence of the latter depends on internet-related technologies.

⁶ As Sterne has demonstrated through his cultural history of recorded sound (2003: 215-286, 2005), there has never been a clear-cut distinction between the practice of studio recording and that of playing a musical instrument. Sound recording has always been a ‘studio art’: active ‘mediation’ rather than faithful channel of transmission.

creativity, originality and authorship. As a result of this strong historical and discursive connection between studio space and the values of a now autonomous field of art came what Jones (1996) termed the ‘romantic myth’ of the studio; a powerful narrative trope that still informs the conditions under which artists and art objects are mediated through the art world. From the Renaissance onwards, artists themselves have actively contributed to the diffusion and popularisation of the idea of the studio as an unmediated space of individual creativity. When depicting their working environment in the motif of studio paintings, artists also took care in complying with this romantic trope (Alpers 2005: 14). Of course, the increase of a so-called ‘post-studio’ aesthetics in the last decades also illustrate the fact that visual artists tried to challenge, in their practices as well as their writings, the values associated with their status (see Buren 1979). Yet, as Jones further argues,

Even if we locate the isolated studio as a willed trope within early modern artistic production, and distinguish it from some other kind of historical condition, we must acknowledge that current uses of the term “studio” are burdened by this sense of isolation, and by further efforts...to inscribe studio within the frame of individual genius’ (1996: 4).

By recalling this narrative of the studio in the context of sound art, and confronting studio-network with studio-trope, it now becomes possible to reformulate the tensions mentioned above between technological shifts and institutional, discursive stability. Sound artists, ‘sculpting’ or ‘painting’ with sounds – even fashioning their own tools⁷ – in the confinement of their creative environment can be perceived as less part of a collective process, and more as an individual creator. Put simply, the sound artist’s creative environment now corresponds more than ever to the constituting symbol of art’s singularity regime: the isolated painter’s studio. It is not only because digital technology has made sound and visual data correspond at the level of codes that sound artists can travel between museum and music venues, recording studio and gallery space, etc. The phenomenon of sound art brings to light points of convergence between sonic and visual cultures. But seen from the studio, it looks less as a general blurring of boundaries affecting both visual and sound practices, and more as the potential extension to sound practices of the traditional system of values of the institutional art world – individual creativity, isolated artist, fixed work, etc.

In the final section, I will be using a pragmatic-sociological framework in order to interpret two recent installations artworks that have taken the artist’s studio as their subject. The following question will guide my reading of both examples of the studio-as-motif: to what extent do they choose to represent, either, the process of distributed, ‘relayed creativity’ (see Born 2005) that is an integral part of contemporary digital and sonic cultures, or the art-historical myth of the solitary artist that continues to inform the visual art institution and its value regime?

III. The studio “exhibited”: Nauman and Matmos’s laboratories

The ‘black box’ of scientific, or art laboratories can be explored using different methodologies. However, the most effective way to make sense of what is happening in both those notoriously hermetic environments would be to actually open them up and, as Latour repeatedly advised, ‘follow the actors themselves, or rather that which makes them act’, (2005: 237). What, for example, could be found out scrutinising in that way, the process of staging an art installation? And what would it reveal of the fabric of art that the sociologist

⁷ For example, in the case of digital musicians such as David Shea and Markus Popp, who both designed their own composition softwares (see Van Assche 2002: 12), or again, with the light-sensitive sound systems developed by Stephen Vitiello for his site-specific installations (see Lovejoy 2004: 203).

couldn't find out otherwise? Doing just that, Yaneva (2003) recorded what she terms an 'affluence' of actors – curator, artist, and other workers, small objects and huge structures, rigid procedures and small talks; an ever-shifting network which eventually produces the work that visitors will encounter as a stable art object. Needless to say, the characteristics of 'art-in-action' accounted for through this method of investigation varies sensibly from that of traditional discourses of and on art: '[i]nstead of being situated in a single artistic mind, in the imagination of a genius, the artistic process is... seen as distributed within the visible collective' (Yaneva 2003: 118).

Although the significance as well as the results of ethnographic analyses of 'art in the making' should be acknowledged⁸, there is another way of addressing the studio in visual and sound-based arts. And that is through the intervention of the studio as it is re-presented in the exhibition space, as an artwork in itself. I am not here talking of the recent postmodern trickery that consists in 'reconstructing' à l'identique the studio environment in which great masters have once worked⁹. Alongside this popular curatorial trend, contemporary artists have also recently reactivated the old Renaissance theme of the studio-as-subject of art – albeit, arguably, in the more self-reflective, ironic and intertextual fashion characteristic of the art world today. I chose the two following examples of the 'exhibited studio' for their similarities – such as their shared themes and, of course, the importance they give to sound elements – as much as for their contrasting representations of the studio. But most importantly, both installations will enable me to navigate simultaneously between three levels of analysis of the studio: (a) as a network of mediators where people and things are linked in the act of creating an artwork, (b) as a discursive trope standing for authorship and individual creativity, and (c) as an aesthetic motif traditionally reinforcing the myth of the isolated artistic.

1. Bruce Nauman's *Mapping the Studio*

Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage) is a multi-screen, audio-visual installation produced in 2001 by video art pioneer Bruce Nauman. Running for almost six hours, selected from forty hours worth of material, it is composed exclusively from views of the artist's studio, shot at night using the infrared function of a digital video camera, and accompanied by elements from its ambient soundscape: the studio's ventilation system, Nauman's cat meowing, distant dog barking and train sounds, etc. Beyond the pun on John Cage's favoured mode of composition¹⁰, this peculiar soundtrack in itself testifies to Cage's influence on the way Nauman has come to think about sound. Although self-contained, *Mapping* is also part of a series of pieces derived from the initial work, and including a version using different colour filters and rotations of the images¹¹, as well as the condensed *Office Edit* versions. Here is how Nauman, in typically unassuming fashion, described the catalyst for this piece: 'I was sitting around the studio being frustrated because I didn't have any new ideas and I decided that you just have to work with what you've got' (in Kraynak 2005: 398). Whatever the reliability of that statement, it is important to replace this project within the artist's oeuvre and its recurrent themes.

At the beginning of his career, Nauman had started to record himself, using either film or video while conducting odd, ritual-like activities in his studio. One of these documented performances, *Stamping in the Studio* (1968), showed Nauman doing exactly this,

⁸ I intend to conduct a similar type of study in the field of sound art at a later stage of my research. Any artist willing to participate is cordially invited to get in contact with me.

⁹ Bacon and Brancusi are only two of the examples of this trend discussed and evaluated in Wood (2005).

¹⁰ As Nauman explained, the subtitle for *Mapping the Studio* finds its origin in a previous exhibition of Cage's scores, organised by Anthony d'Offray: 'Cage was an important influence for me, especially his writings. So I sent...a telegraph that said "FAT CHANCE JOHN CAGE". D'Offray thought it as a refusal to participate, I thought it was the work...' (cited in Kraynak 2004: 400).

¹¹ *Mapping the Studio II with colour shift, flip, flop & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage)*, co-owned by the Tate and the Centre Pompidou, is probably the most often exhibited incarnation of this series.

disappearing and reappearing in the frame while the sound of his steps was shifting in tempo and loudness. In this collection¹² of recorded performances, we can already perceive one of the dominant themes explored all through Nauman's career, i.e., the artist's private activity versus the public's perception of what an artist does, or should be doing. Hence this constant tension in his oeuvre, between 'the amount of information given to focus the public on the piece and Nauman's fear of exposing himself too much' (Van Bruggen 1988: 19). The artist's first proper sound installation, *Get out of my Mind, Get Out of this Room* (1968) is another good illustration of how he has exploited the public-private dichotomy by combining sonic interventions and a metaphorical use of space. More than just another loosely-related piece, *Mapping* instead comes to light as the latest – and arguably the most achieved – in Nauman's long-time use of the studio motif as 'a double self-portrait' (Auping 2004: 16) and a prolonging of his interest in sound and voice as semiotic registers capable of disrupting visual representations and challenging the viewer's attention. In that respect, Nauman's oeuvre, as seen from the viewpoint of *Mapping the Studio*, illustrates perfectly what, following Husserl, art anthropologist Gell (1998: 232-251) called the play of 'retentions' and 'protentions' that distribute the meaning of a single artwork across time, that is, across previous and future works.

But it is not only with regards to Nauman's career that *Mapping the Studio* should be understood as a 'distributed' work; it is also through the 'affluence' of other human and material mediations involved in the process of 'making' the piece. The example of the recent staging of *Mapping the Studio II* at the Tate Modern, extensively documented for educational purposes on the gallery's website, makes this idea even more tangible. The passage from *Mapping I* to a more colourful and complex version involved firstly a degree of digital image processing: 'Dennis Diamond at Video D...did the colour shifting and the flip, flop...and all the editing with Bruce and that was just an AVID process¹³'. Equally crucial to the installation, the sparse yet disturbing soundtrack took a lot of adjustments in order to enter its new environment. About this stage in the artistic process, one of the people working on this project said:

'Bruce and I went through the flip book where there are indications of certain sounds happening and, knowing the piece and knowing which sounds are going to be really loud...finding those places and just setting the levels so that that's the loudest you're going to hear'.

It appears from these two moments that the setting of digital installations of this kind involve a number of stages of production that displaces the artist and his work-in-progress from the confines of his or her studio, and within an heterogeneous network of people, objects, tools and places. One could say that the studio itself has become decentralised, as the workplace travels with the artwork towards its more or less temporary destination in a museal space.

But is this collective of actors – artist, workers, AVID technology, exhibition room, etc. – represented within the artwork itself? In other words: is it the really the same studio that Nauman has chosen to 'map' and offer to the visitor's contemplation? Playing on our expectations to see the genius at work, Nauman appropriates a visual language familiarised by CCTV culture, which, as Kahn has noted, tends to produce a vast quantity of 'nothingness' (2004: 87). Surely, this technique of inversion of dominant visual codes has always been part of the cultural function of installation art (see Morse 1990). Yet, in *Mapping*, we are still left staring at a strangely familiar representation of the studio; a space in many ways closer to the romantic myth of the individual painter than maybe even Nauman himself intended. Abstract Expressionist painters, according to Jones (1996), represented an extreme case of the modern continuation of the studio myth, unmediated space for a pure, 'uncreated creator' (Bourdieu

¹² Other film and video artworks produced by Nauman during the period from 1967 to 1969: *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio*, *Bouncing in the Corner*, *No. 1 & 2*.

¹³ The interview with Michael Short from which the two quotes are extracted is available online at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/nauman/> (last accessed 15 October 2006).

1993a: 139-148). And, certainly, in the workspace as represented by *Mapping*, there is more than a little echo of the description given by Philip Guston – apparently inspired by John Cage – of an ‘emptying studio’:

When you start working, everybody is in your studio – the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas – all are there. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you’re lucky, even you leave’ (cited in Jones, 1996: 11).

By choosing not to turn his camera on himself or on other mediations that made up this work as it is experienced, Nauman somehow reactivates a view of studio that the art world has never completely abandoned. For what could best illustrate the individual artist’s authority over his or her work than an empty studio, purified from all external influence?

2. Matmos’s *Work Work Work*

The second case study is the result of a residency offered by the San Francisco Yerba Buena Center for the Arts to the duo of electronica musicians/sound artists Matmos in 2003. In response, the band literally established residence in the gallery space, where they relocated most of their home studio equipment, along with some apartment furniture. They then spent the next seventeen days (ninety-seven hours in total) performing and improvising during the Center’s opening hours, using a wide range of instruments and machines. Every day, the group had organised collaborations with local sound artists. For Matmos – a band usually associated with a so-called ‘glitch’ aesthetics (see Cascone 2004; Rodgers 2003) in digital electronic music, alongside friends and occasional collaborators Matthew Herbert, Keith Fullerton Whitman (aka Hrvatski) or Vicky Bennett (of People Like Us) –, this restaging of their studio was a first occasion for, as they said, ‘dipping our toe in the art world’¹⁴. Influenced in equal measure by popular music genres such as punk, disco and techno, and by the early sound artists gathered around *musique concrète* pioneer Pierre Schaeffer¹⁵, the music created by Matmos illustrates a ‘fascination for the implications of object a thing in relation to object as sound source’ (Toop 2004: 225). Although *stricto sensu* ‘instrumental’, their compositions rely primarily on their recording and sampling from the noise made by a variety of objects or ‘object-oriented’ activities – from balloon-stretching to plastic surgery operations, depending on their guiding theme –, then progressively building a sound environment that will accommodate all these sound sources.

As with Nauman’s *Mapping*, this performance of the studio-as-subject enables the sound artists to explore themes of privacy and isolation in the creative workplace, as opposed to the public perception of their work process. The fact that Matmos members Martin Schmidt and Drew Daniel are partners in both romantic and the professional uses of the word only adds to the appeal of the installation’s compression of ‘home’ studio, domestic space, and exhibition space. Deliberately or not, the project’s title – *Work Work Work* – corresponds, one extra ‘work’ notwithstanding, to the name of a video installation created by Nauman in 1994. But more convergences between the two pieces are revealed when focusing on the visual display in the room of the Buena Center. The presence, next to their equipment, of a piano with the lid opened, covered by a coyote pelt¹⁶ clearly consists in a joint homage to the two artists – John Cage and Joseph Beuys respectively – who have played a major part in the history of

¹⁴ See Interview of Matmos online: http://www.petitemort.org/issue03/26_matmos/index.shtml#i (last accessed 15 October 2006).

¹⁵ The two members of Matmos said they came to produce electronic music after listening together to Pierre Henry’s *concrète* masterwork, *Variations Pour Une Porte et Un Soupir* (1965).

¹⁶ In May 1974, the father of Action Art travelled to New York, only to remain willingly isolated in a small room with a coyote for three days. The title of this performance – *I Like America and America Likes Me* – was of course ironic.

performance-based art. The active involvement of the public in the creative process is another aspect of *Work Work Work* that evokes Cagean principles. At any moment during the performance, anyone could enter the studio space, ‘cross the proscenium and wander about on stage, contemplating the actors’ make up and props’ (Morse 1990: 158). By using techniques such as interviewing the first visitor every morning, then using his or her recorded voice as the basis for a new composition, Matmos’ intention was to bring ‘people in the process and show them how it’s made...And I think it’s a good thing because too much of the electronic music people have a tendency to act as if they’re splitting a fucking atom or something¹⁷’.

Following Matmos, or the sounds they carry, through their creative process would take us far beyond the material and imagined space of the traditional recording studio. In that respect, the performance does not constitute a finished work that can be isolated from previous or future creations. Instead, it is a truly distributed object, and so is their studio. At the moment of entering the gallery, the band’s laptops already contained a hard disk full of individual noises and beats, unfinished sketches as well as fully formed tracks from their then latest album, *The Civil War*. Reading the liner notes for that record¹⁸, we notice the range of sound objects, people, events and locations that the band has managed to ‘capture’ by transporting their studio-network across space and later bringing them together inside their own studio space. Still trying to track the band’s sounds after the performance, some of the pieces that were improvised there resurfaced – no doubt, after a long process of editing and mixing – on different websites as freely available downloads, then again, more recently, as an album distributed through Matmos’ small record label. Other sounds might have been used on their next proper album, and others are probably still hidden in a computer database, waiting to be re-used, re-mixed or simply trashed.

The studio that Matmos “exhibits” differs from Nauman’s in that it demonstrates a total equivalence with the artists’ actual creative process. In the former work, people and objects, human and technological actors, equally populate the studio-network and the studio-motif in a long and convoluted collaborative chain. Whereas nothing of the social agency that has transported *Mapping the Studio II* to the Tate found a place within the multi-screen installation. Moving from Nauman to Matmos, one level of the studio has been abandoned, and that is the mythical studio-as-discourse, from which visual artists have historically claimed total authorship over their production, and where artworks are fully finished, before being exposed to the public. However, in the sound artist’s studio, or ‘post-studio’, we encounter an object ‘rendered provisional, its finitude or openness a matter of pragmatics... The conceptual dualism of authenticity or artificiality is obsolete; there is no original and no copy, only rapidly proliferating, variant versions’ (Born 2005: 28).

Conclusion

In the conclusion to his recent ‘media archeology’ of audio-visual technologies, Siegfried Zielinski suggests an analogy between the working conditions of contemporary media artists and those of pre-modern alchemists. ‘Artistic praxis in the media worlds’, the author claims, ‘is a matter of extravagant expenditure. Its privileged locations are not palaces but open laboratories’ (2006: 276). In other words, the palaces of visual art culture may not be fully adequate, in their current structure, for what artists working with newer mediums are actually trying to achieve. The way people make art, sonic or otherwise, may well have changed due to technological evolutions such as more powerful and portable computers, or more available softwares for creating and processing images and sounds digitally. Yet, this particular shift in

¹⁷ See URL address above for reference.

¹⁸ Buried somewhere in the mix of a track, the booklet informs us, is the result of Matmos and asking the students of a seminar they gave at Harvard University to make noise with whatever object they could lay their hands on: bananas, leather coat, knuckles, pencils, book thrown on the floor, etc.

itself does not say anything about the openness of the visual palaces to the experiments conducted in sound art's laboratories.

I chose to focus on the studio, defined here as a creative environment that holds together people, objects and discourses (studio-network) as much as it is held together by them (studio-trope). I found it to be the locus from where previously diverging value regimes between visual and sound cultures – unmediated work vs. work of mediation, singularity vs. community, isolated artist vs. collective – could be seen as converging, or at least, to seem more negotiable than before. As the above reading of two installations has tried to illustrate, combining the methods and arguments of art history and pragmatic sociology, the advent of digital arts and the consequent expansion of collaborative processes beyond a fixed studio space have not necessarily put an end to visual art culture's traditional regime of values. Isolated workspace, individual creativity and unmediated authorship still form part of a symbolic chain that structures the discourse of legitimacy within art institution – hence its stability. The artistic phenomenon known (but for how long?) as sound art is a mixture of practices, technologies and discourses. But it is also a network of mediations that has reached beyond its previous territories, to the places where it had for long been forbidden. Some artists have expressed unease at the sight of sound being integrated so readily within the spaces of museums and galleries. Others, like Matmos, have seized this opportunity by turning the gallery into yet another place where they could engage in collaborative activities, extend the network of their studio, and reveal the 'relayed' nature of their creative process.

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