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Allison Hunter

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Allison Hunter is a visual artist whose work includes video, sound design, Web art, photography, and hybrid objects. She has been in residency in Canada, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Hunter teaches Cyber Art and Computer Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her contribution to ebr is *Unfolding Laramée*, an essay on an installation by artist Eve Andree Laramée, *A Permutational Unfolding*.

A REVIEW OF:

Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*

Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1999.

Douglas Kahn's *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* amplifies a rattled and diseased 20th century body. The meat and bones that have traversed two World Wars - the nervous system, the electro-shock of modern care - all finally cry out in stuttering screams and beastly poetry. According to Kahn, modernism fully imbued the body with language through techniques of inscription, vibration, and amplification. But that only leaves us with the even more resolute objecthood of the body, which was explored by artists during the decades following the 1960's. Kahn argues that a thorough understanding of sound's influence upon the visual, literary, and musical arts is missing from their separate - and usually separated - histories. To help us understand that influence, Kahn traces the development of recording technology, the shifting cultural relationship to noise, and the use of aural tropes within the arts.

The "in your face" book jacket cover portends a postmodern focus from Kahn. Acid green and electric blue cyber colors enhance the photograph of the screaming bald pixilated head on the cover. This cover is strikingly different than that of Kahn's previous book, *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (MIT, 1992), which he co-edited with Gregory Whitehead. *Wireless Imagination*'s understated jacket would easily be overlooked with its red and black text on a white background. *Noise Water Meat* is more *Zone*-like in its packaging, as if MIT Press perhaps sensed the timeliness of Kahn's subject at a moment when sound is becoming more recognized within the arts, as is clear in recent high-profile museum exhibitions (*BitStreams* , *010101* , *Crossfade* , etc.). It is all the more unexpected, then, when Kahn's close reading of an interesting but limited cast of characters in the history of sound art from the early 1900's to the early 1960's stops with the Italian Futurists, John Cage, Fluxus artists, William Burroughs, Michael McClure, and Antonin Artaud - just when the contemporary resonance of his study might be most felt.

In the first section, "Noise," Kahn introduces us to the avant-garde Italian Futurists who, against conventional notions - that music was periodic, harmonious, and created from a certain set of instruments, and noise was the unstable cancerous cell of sounds - brought the "war sounds" of World War I to the musical palette. The Italian Futurists used explosives from modern battle combined with recording technology to create a new sensibility for loud and different sounds that had once been dismissed as noise.

Kahn also includes a short but fascinating look at Russian Experimental filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov. Vertov was among those who began to record sound on-location instead of within the sound studio. Like the Impressionist painters who left their studios to paint en plein air, Vertov left the movie set to record sounds in their original context. In Vertov's words, he captured the sounds of "life caught unawares" (143). Since recording studios commonly recreated "live" sound, they had no need for portable recording equipment. Vertov, determined to record from the tops of trains and the interiors of coalmines, invented his own "portable" equipment which resulted in 2,700 pounds of gear.

Kahn then moves us swiftly from the early part of the century in Europe to the US in the 1930's, tracing the plasticity of sound through the career of John Cage. In 1952, Cage performed his famous silent piece, 4'33,"in which he shifted "the production of music from the site of utterance to that of audition" (158). 4'33 " requires a solo performer to sit at the piano and mark off the time in three movements (30", 2'23", 1'40"), without playing the instrument. The duration of these movements was chosen by chance operation. Under the guise of a traditional composition (musical score, performer, instrument, audience) Cage exposed the similarity between silence and music - both can be measured in time. This musicalization of silence brought with it what Cage called unintentional sound. As the silent piece was performed, the audience's attention turned away from the piano/performer to the sounds of the room including coughing, chair scraping,