

Christof Migone

[published in *XCP: A Journal In Cross-Cultural Poetics*, Issue 6, 2000, <http://bfm.org/~xcp/>]

## *Ricochets*

or

How the Bullet Skips to the Tune of the Phonograph

### AIM FOR THE HEAD

What follows a gunshot, however momentary, is a silence. The gunshot traverses the real, it pierces through time. The silence, which follows the amplitude peak of the shot, is the trough where life reacquaints itself with death. It is the moment, however fleeting, between the gun and the gunned. It is that travel time which is unerasable. You may put the needle on the gunshot and play the record backwards, scratch the surface of the shot back and forth, but you can never undo the hole. The bullet propels itself out the barrel, finds its target and holes it. "It's Not the Bullet that Kills You (It's the Hole)."<sup>1</sup> A bullet always holes more than a wound, it holes a sound, a psyche, a time. You cannot reverse its thorough *thruness*.

The gunshot and the silence in the colonial encounter. What ensues from this shock? How does it affect the epistemology of the self, and of the real? Savage and savagery. The raw and the rare. "There is nothing so strange, in a strange land, as the stranger who comes to visit it."<sup>2</sup> Instances of the impact of the encounter abound, this text will abound in impacts generating ricochets. The ricochets which I will track are not always off the same shot, not always 'heard,' often splintered. Traceable only in truncated trajectories. Some single shots resulting in multiple perforations, others missing the target altogether. A few blanks.

### SHOOT THE PIG

Put the needle on the record. *First Contact*. Load it up. Crank the phonograph. Cock the gun. Aim the Horn. Turn up the volume. Hear the pig squeal. An easy shot. Pointblank. The pig is sacrificed as show of force. In the film *First Contact* the drama is doubly staged, in 1930 to enforce, in 1982 to illustrate, reflect, criticize, to distance 'us' from 'them.' Michel Leiris addresses this distance in his essay "Civilization" for *Documents*: "This is perhaps the only difference between

---

<sup>1</sup> Title to a 1975 performance by Laurie Anderson, in *Stories from the Nerve Bible, 1972-1992 Retrospective*, 1994, 260.

<sup>2</sup> Introductory caption to the film "Cannibal Tours", dir. Dennis O'Rourke, 1987.

our times and those of the cavemen: today we hire dozens of scapegoats whose task is to perform for us everything we are too cowardly to perform for ourselves. This, I suppose, is the precise reason that murderers are so popular: a beautiful crime is no doubt terrible, but at the same time it is unconsciously satisfying to everyone, and the murderer becomes a kind of sorcerer who has ritually performed the most horrific of sacrifices."<sup>3</sup> Was colonialism rooted in a similar desire? Was the colonizer the murderous sorcerer?

The lesson in *First Contact* was to affirm who's the Master, "only the masters can speak,"<sup>4</sup> Masta Mick. One of the surviving Leahy brothers testifies that the message was: "You leave our stuff alone, and we'll leave your stuff alone. We're just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along, that's all we came to look for."<sup>5</sup> But evidently not all they came to look at. What of the look of the camera? Is it just a memento, or does it just play a mimetic role? It shoots 24 frames a second; at that rate it's hard to keep up with the ricochets. Is truth here occurring at 24 frames a second, as Godard said? Whether it be frames or revolutions, 78 revolutions per minute, or 45 revolutions, or 33, if you're the target it becomes an impossible game of duckandcoverandhideandseek. The shot, from the gun, from the camera, penetrates, then exits, or splinters and you become a body-sieve (Deleuze's *corps-passoire*). It is no longer a question of orifices, it's a question of drainage. Proust's saturated pores.<sup>6</sup> You are made of leaks.

The sound of the phonograph seems to function differently, as a palliative, a gift. Yet it disrupts the soundscape with the same force as the shot, it is a weapon, it's a sound effect, it cans life into a mimetic cycle, an effect with the power to become an affect. Fitzcarraldo winds up Caruso to quiet the incessant drum sounds from the "invisibles." Here we can't help but remember the US Army versus Noriega in 1989, the Canadian Army versus the Mohawks at the Kanasetake blockade in 1990, or the ongoing audio terrorism in the low level flights by NATO planes over Nitassinan (in Labrador).<sup>7</sup> Yet, as opposed to those armies, Fitzcarraldo had a higher purpose, he fervently believed that the beauty of the voice would be transcendent. Caruso on the front lines, a blitzkrieg of Gesamtkunstwerk, opera as universal language. "Please Pardon Our Noise. It is the

---

<sup>3</sup> Michel Leiris, "Civilization" in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, 1995, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, 1989, 151. "To speak is above all to possess the power to speak. Or again, the exercise of power ensures the domination of speech: only the masters can speak. As for the subjects: they are bound to the silence of respect, reverence, or terror."

<sup>5</sup> from "First Contact", dir. Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*, 1968, 180.

<sup>7</sup> for the latter see Kim Sawchuk, "Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan" *Public 4/5: Sound*, 1990, 103-119.

Sound of Freedom.”<sup>8</sup> Aesthetics here are proselytized. Caruso subsides the insistence of the drums. Are they swayed by Caruso’s glottis? The disembodied voice of the phonograph is causing a spinning circularity of fascination. Principally, as we shall see via Michael Taussig later on, it is the circularity of white man’s fascination with Other’s fascination with white man’s magic. Fitzcarraldo is the invasion’s cultural attaché and Caruso his weapon, the soundtrack of the conqueror. “The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers. He is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native *out loud* that there he alone is the master.”<sup>9</sup> The soundtrack of the conqueror out to conquer the soundscape of the other.

#### USE THE SILENCER

We are entering Paul Virilio’s “Museum of Accidents”<sup>10</sup> in which cute couplings vie for the best exhibition prize. Past the vessel/shipwrecks, train/derailments, automobile/car crashes, electricity/electrocutions at the end of the corridor we find ethnography/... . Perhaps an elliptical silence is the only possible response on the other side of that slash. Perhaps silence is the ultimate catastrophe.

We can’t be silent anymore. “Silence is complicity.”<sup>11</sup> As a counter, Kim Sawchuk advocates noise in response to another noise: the NATO low level flights. Silence is political. Expression is defined in terms of volume. We have to be heard at full throttle, we cannot whisper, there are no secrets. “There are silences and silences. This is the kind I don’t like.” Here Fitzcarraldo’s trusted captain expresses his preference for a threat he knows (the drums) rather than one he doesn’t (silence). He also distinguishes between kinds of silences, one is an ominous threat, the other is merely quiet. I would posit that the call to answer noise with noise, the call to be louder is not the only response that can have political efficacy. But the empowering possibilities of silence are difficult to reconcile in the context of the encounter, where it slips all too easily into a silencing. A silence without agency. Silence as the sound fear makes when at the end of the barrel, the suspension of time after the shot, “the monstrous atrophy of the voice, the incredible mutism.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Text on a billboard image near a U.S. Air Force Base. Uncredited photo, *Sound by Artists*, eds. Lander, Dan & Micah Lexier, 1990, 227. The photograph accompanies the essay “Listening and Soundmaking” by Hildegard Westerkamp.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. Constance Farrington, 1966, 43. Emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Virilio, “The Museum of Accidents”, in *Public 2: The Lunatic Of One Idea*, 1989, 81-85.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Sawchuk, “Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan” *Public 4/5: Sound*, 1990, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Presentation” in *Refusal of the Shadow*, 1996, 88.

First contact, first gunshots: the soundscape of the collective body at first falls silent, then it is no longer in sync, it stutters. The shot has perforated the soundtrack, scribbled it full of holes. "SILENCES are holes in the sound wall/SOUNDS are bubbles on the surface of silence. Sound like silence is both opening and filling/concave and convex/life and death. Sound like silence may freeze or free the image."<sup>13</sup> In *First Contact*, the sound of the shot is not real, it has been added, yet it is in sync. Up to that point the early footage was silenced, distanced —by the narration, by the documentary form. Is the shot real nonetheless? It was staged in 1930, and restaged, montaged in 1982. The effect is real, it was a precursor of the curse that had befallen them. In other words, it was but another confirmation that these 'returning ancestors' smelled like shit.

#### CONTAMINATE THE CONTAMINANT

In cases where heat is the temperature of the encounter, the Westerner from temperate climes can be heat stricken. Werner Herzog's delirium is exemplary: "I don't see [the jungle] so much as erotic, but just as full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base, there's nothing erotic here, just fornication and asphyxiation, choking, fighting for survival, growing, and just rotting away."<sup>14</sup> Herzog, in his best Bataille persona, is the contaminator contaminated. He's suffering from the "heat of the senses" Micheal Taussig speaks of, in "those torrid zones where the mimetic flourishes."<sup>15</sup> Under the hot lights of the tropics one's pores widen, they ooze and sweat. "The body as a system of little holes in perpetual danger of becoming enlarged."<sup>16</sup> The heat renders the body open, open to the contagion of the mimetic. Gilles Deleuze's body-sieve is fully contagious: "Freud had remarked that the schizophrenic was prone to view the skin as one pierced by an infinity of little holes. Therefore, there's no surface, the interior and exterior, the container and the contained cannot be delineated and sink themselves into a universal depth or revolve in the circle of a present that's ever-shrinking as it fills up. In this fracture, the word's wholeness loses its meaning. All events occur as hallucinations."<sup>17</sup> The meaninglessness of the real is on a collision course with the realness of the shot and of the encounter. But it is not a contradictory collision, for it is an event that is rendered ever more real by its power to be ever more lacking in meaning.

---

<sup>13</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Holes in the Sound Wall" in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 1991, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Werner Herzog in *Burden of Dreams*, 1982, Les Blank's documentary film on the making of *Fitzcarraldo*.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 1993, 220.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 1990, 342n5.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 1969, 106-7. My translation, another version can be found in *The Logic of Sense*, 1990, 87.

## THE EDITABLE EDIBLE RECORD

Robert Flaherty's 1922 documentary *Nanook of the North* opens with this caption: "It is generally regarded as the work from which all subsequent forms to bring real life to the screen have stemmed." The staging of the real, the "mimesis of mimesis" in this film is exposed by Taussig, but there's a singular moment in the film which he fails to point out. Taussig discusses the scene where Nanook is befuddled by the mimetic powers of the phonograph, where Nanook believes the record to be edible and tries to take a bite of it. In the first half of the scene an 'Eskimo' woman is sitting behind Nanook, the record is playing but she seems to be unfazed by this and is content just sitting there with her child in her back pouch. In *First Contact* a similar incongruity occurs at the moment of the shot, for some panic and run away, others stay put and seem as puzzled by those running away as the shot itself. The 'Eskimo' woman's laissez faire attitude diverges from the script of the real life to be brought to screen. As the scene continues she is edited out, she disappears. The hallucinatory in this context is manifold, it is all which falls in excess from that edit. The cutting room floor is where the real is located, *it* is the location of the film. It's about the *Idea of the North*, and not *the north*.<sup>18</sup>

## CANNIBALS OF PICTURES

In *Cannibal Tours*, the Sepik River is featured as a movie set, a facade. It exists only for the picture of the smile. Clearly an instance where "modernity stimulated primitivism with wiping out the primitive."<sup>19</sup> The *ism* is an encapsulation, it is a precipitate, it is all that's left. They sometimes smile, but they'd rather kill you. "One of them is looking at you now," the man sees the tourist by looking peripherally to his left, he can barely contain his disdain. Yet, is his anger solely directed at the tourist? Or is it that he feel surrounded? The documentary camera in front of him and the tourist behind him. He restrains himself, but he'd rather kill. It is what I hope he's thinking, but is that the myth? My fetishization of the savage as savage? Cannibals of pictures, pictures of cannibals. The carnivalesque display where one's desire merges with one's fears, where the other is *freaked*:

[I]f the spell works, if we are lucky or stoned or drunk or blessedly simple, we see what we are supposed to see: not some poor unfortunate approximately embodying the myth after which his affliction is named, but the myth itself—the animal hybrid skulking at the edge of the jungle, the Giant taller than the Ogre whom Jack cheated of his harp and hen, the Midget smaller than a mustard seed. If, however, the spell does not work or is broken, we awake to the stench of old canvas and the squish of filthy sawdust under our feet. And looking up, we see the

---

<sup>18</sup> "The Idea of the North" (1967) is one of the three radio documentaries in Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy*, CBC 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Taussig, 231.

hostility and boredom in the eyes of those we thought were there to be looked at, not to look back. It is at this point that we hear behind the camouflage of words and music the silence of the Freaks.”<sup>20</sup>

Once we hear this silence it's deafening.

#### MIMETIC EXCESSES

The hope is not for a retreat or reversal, an impossible proposition. It's the hope which echoed with Taussig's last section in his *Particular History of the Senses* where he calls for a break in the closed circle of mimesis and alterity. First of all, he spends the better of the book driving home this doubling:<sup>21</sup> “who is telling us the story of the story”(14), “mimicry of mimicry”(77), “white man's fascination with their fascination”(198), “mimesis of mimesis”(200), “the elusive enemy of his enemies”(204), “a display of the display”(206), “this obsession demands, showing showing”(207), “display the display”(207), “white man's fascination with Other's fascination with white man's magic”(207), “miming of miming”(213), “an after-image of an after-image”(238), “What's being mimicked is mimickry itself”(241), “the very same moment of filmic magic mimicking mimicking”(243), “to wonder at the fascination with their fascination”(246), “Frazer's charming charms seduced me too”(251). My head is spinning, but the idea of mimetic excess is attractive. Particularized by Taussig, mimetic excess is the endless doubling, the self as subjunctive rather than object or subject, the freedom to live reality as really made-up.<sup>22</sup>

The effectiveness of this call, however, is severely hampered by the fact that when mimesis is represented as a discourse of power performed with a gun at the ready, no amount of aura is going to protect your ass.

#### THE CANNED LAUGHTER OF GODS

The shot has been heard, the silence which follows it as well. How does one react after the initial shock? What is the range of possible reactions? The shot, as we have seen, has the singular property of being simultaneously simulative (counterfeit) and deadly (somatic). The corresponding aftershocks are similarly palindromic, where forwards is the real and backwards

---

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Fielder, “The Silence of the Freaks and the Message of the Side Show” in *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, 1978, 283.

<sup>21</sup> Taussig, in the following section pagination provided within the text.

<sup>22</sup> Taussig, 255.

is its counterfeit. Or vice versa, linearity being endlessly reversible once inscribed. Is this inscription an original moment? A reference point? The sui generis of the rupture? The rupture, however, is not a nonsequitur, it is but the eruption of an existing fault. The mimetic, of course, precedes mechanical reproduction, it is synonymous with representation.

Near the conclusion of *First Contact*, a screening is arranged for the Papua New Guineans of 1982 to view the Papua New Guineans of 1930. Laughter fills the screening hall. Why this laugh? There's something comforting about laughter, but it can also be the manifest of a great trauma. Does this laugh come from a sense of otherness upon seeing a representation of their sameness? In other words, by the time they saw themselves on film, they were no longer themselves. "So we can say to each other: that's how we used to be." They have been unrealized. Taussig also hears a laugh, is it the same one?

#### This Sudden Laugh From Nowhere

Why this laugh? Surely this is what I call Aristotle's pleasure, the (not so) simple fact that observing mimesis is pleasurable. And just as surely there is an element of colonialist mastery in this laughter; the very word 'cute' is as suggestive as my having belabored to show throughout this book how difficult it is to pry mimesis loose from pervasive intimations of primitiveness. But there is also the possibility that this sudden laugh from nowhere registers a tremor in cultural identity, and not only in identity but in the security of Being itself. This is like Bataille's laugh; a sensuous explosion of smooth muscle composing Being in the same instant as it extinguishes it. This is Benjamin's flash, as when he writes that there is something peculiar about similarity: "Its perception is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but really cannot be held fast, unlike other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and as transitorily as a constellation of stars."<sup>23</sup>

This laughter from nowhere is introduced by Taussig in attempt to understand the delight Western viewers (including the author) have upon seeing the Cuna mola which incorporates RCA Victor's "Talking Dog" in its design. Is this laughter from the same nowhere as that of the Papua New Guineans? There seems to be a gulf separating the two. The stars in Papua New Guinea are not arranged to be read as constellations, they are deranged, out of sync. "Overwhelming misery, fornication, growth, lack of order, even the stars here look like a mess."<sup>24</sup> Herzog's despairing depiction of the jungle is the delirium of the self facing the world—Deleuze's *on délire le monde* (the world is our delirium).<sup>25</sup> Deleuze stated this in opposition to the notion that the Oedipal drama/delirium is the primary theme which drives our actions. I would posit his formulation as

---

<sup>23</sup> Taussig, 226.

<sup>24</sup> Werner Herzog in *Burden of Dreams*, dir. Les Blank, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze in *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, dir. Pierre-André Boutang & Claire Parnet, television program, 1988.

one that can have valence *in addition to* the psychoanalytical model (with neither as being primary). This is contentious territory and merits to be further developed in another context, suffice it to say that for the purpose of this exposition *on délire le monde* enables us to read the shot as shock. Furthermore, as a shock that is protracted, extended, stretched infinite.

#### SUICIDE PACTS PART 1

The longevity of the shot, its incessant ringing, is traceable through various faults running close to the surface. Walter Benjamin –modernity, shock, suicide; Michel Leiris –civilization, ethnography, suicide; and Marcel Griaule –ethnography, gunshot. These three authors have traced and sometimes fallen into this fault. They have integrated the disintegration of the protracted shock. How else is one to read Marcel Griaule conducting his classes at the Sorbonne in 1946 in his air force officer's uniform?<sup>26</sup> World War II stretched infinite. Griaule's entry in the *Documents'* critical dictionary under 'Gunshot' stages the shot as peripheral to a seething critique of ethnography. The entry merits to be quoted extensively for it epitomizes the literary ricochet:

[T]he height of absurdity is reached when the other party refuses the African the right to "make art" with a European motif, claiming first that is European —a somewhat amusingly self-castrating remark— and, secondly, that it looks "modern." One could say that a gun is not a decorative motif. Fine, but such is not the view of the servicemen who outfit trophy rooms [...] And if it took a mere rifle to spoil a work of art, how many paintings and sculptures would one have to destroy? This would not, of course, be tragic, but what an effort! Furthermore, if a black cannot without debasing himself use an exotic element, namely a European one familiar to him, what is one to make of our blind borrowings, from an exotic world one of colour about which we must in self-defense declare we know nothing. [...] Boring though it be to repeat it, *ethnography* is interested in both *beauty* and *ugliness*, in the European sense of these absurd words. It is, however, inclined to be suspicious of the beautiful —a rare, and, consequently, a freakish event within a civilization. It is also self-doubting (because it is a white science, and therefore tainted with prejudice) and will not deny an object aesthetic value because it is either ordinary or mass-produced. [...] An informed contradictor might say that I am confusing ethnography with folklore. What of it! I call folklore the ethnography of pretentious peoples, of those colourless peoples whose habitat lies north of a sea of low tides and weak storms, the Mediterranean, the ethnography of those who fear both words and things, and who refuse to be called natives.<sup>27</sup>

Griaule confirms the suspicion that ethnography is not only a site to effectuate a thorough self-critique of its method but also of its purpose. Leiris in *L'ethnologue devant le colonialisme* reminds himself and his colleagues that they are not only from the Métropole, but also *mandated*

---

<sup>26</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Marcel Griaule, "Gunshot" in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, 1995, 98-9.

by the Métropole. He also does well to remind us of the obvious, that the ethnographer cannot cloak himself in scientificity (echoing Bataille's disdain in *Informe* for the 'mathematical frock coat') and dissociate himself from the political, from colonialism. In the concluding pages of this essay, Leiris offers two interesting scenarios aimed at counteracting the power relations inherent in the study of the other. He is aware that these proposals do not erase contradictions and therefore are by no means unproblematic. But perhaps they will better the odds. Number one, train the colonized in ethnography. The idea of 'training' here is of course unacceptable, yet the intent in seeing the other study not only herself but also the Métropole is not without some progressive power. Number two, he states that the ethnographer which has liberatory aspirations for an other, shall wallow in contradictions as long as he doesn't have the same desire for himself and his people. In other words, as is the general thrust of the essay, an ethnography which focuses closer to home or even one that is self-reflexive has a greater chance of relevance. Leiris concludes by factoring in the evident issue of class as the primary concern for any self-reflexive ethnography.<sup>28</sup> Thus, ethnography is conceptualized as an exteriorized interior which remains unsevered, like a phantom limb, a constant reminder, remainder. Ethnography as a science to be read against the grain, and simultaneously a method to read against the grain. Ethnography as the folklore of pretentious peoples, as the mirror of modernity.

## SUICIDE PACTS PART 2

In presenting the shot as one engendering a series of ricochets, one must be prepared for the ricochet that returns, the boomerang ricochet. Benjamin's exegesis of Baudelaire turns the gun to face its owner, it mirrors the shot: "The resistance which modernism offers to the natural productive élan of a person is out proportion to his strength. It is understandable if a person grows tired and takes refuge in death. Modernism must be under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical towards this will. This suicide is not a resignation but a heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernism in the realm of passions."<sup>29</sup> His extollment of suicide can be read as profound pessimism in the face of modernity: "the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Michel Leiris, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme" in *Brisées*, 1992, 141-164.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 1983, 75. It is difficult to discern from the text if Benjamin here is paraphrasing Baudelaire, or quoting him, or speaking for himself.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*, 1968, 194.

Michel Leiris' "poetics of lack"<sup>31</sup> are a veritable anamnesis of the author. Leiris is the target of the shot, and the shooter all in one. The writer as the ambulating, convalescent, shell shocked, traumatized body. He wears the remainder of his suicide attempt, a scar from a tracheotomy, as a mnemonic agent: "The suture resumes all that is dear in my heart. This scar has remained for me the object, not of a retrospective horror, but of a disproportionate pride in a failed act. It also seems to me that it was at this precise moment [the suicide attempt] in which I embraced most ardently this fascinating thing, which one must continue to pursue for it is never fully grasped: poetry."<sup>32</sup> Passion, poetry, aura navigate in this fault which, in Leiris' case, is localized in this intervention on the breathing tract, in close vicinity to his voice box. From a muted voice, to a whisper, to a gunshot. This anatomical fault is a transplant of a geographical lack and a transposition of a social failure. These metonymies are inscribed as patterns on a record, they can be played back and forth, the needle picking up the scratches and scars, amplifying the shot until it can be heard as the echo of every word.

#### REAL ARROWS IN THE BACK SHED

With echoes ricocheting, functioning as truncated copies upon copies of an original, let us return to the real as really made-up. Taussig's 'made-up' refers to a notion of magic and the sacred, Benjamin's aura, but it can also be its evacuation. It can be that hallucinatory state of the body-sieve, the body as a strainer so perforated it cannot fulfill its function. It performs its task both too well *and* not at all. A hallucination of itself. Herzog's 1972 film *Aguirre: The Wrath Of God* has a similar theme as *Fitzcarraldo* which follows a decade later. The main character, Aguirre, here also travels upstream on a river in uncharted territory in search of fortune (in this case the gold of *El Dorado*). By the film's end Aguirre and his crew are reduced to awaiting death on a sinking raft with no provisions. The Indians who have tracked them throughout their voyage and decimated the contingent deliver a final deathblow: a salvo of arrows rain upon the few that remain. The crew is in such a state of deprivation that they hallucinate real arrows, "this arrow cannot be real" says the man as the arrow sits deeply imbedded in his thigh.

This hallucinated real is the elusive signifier I have been tracking. It is a deconstructive reconstruction of ricochets which have the particular property of being self-propelled, they accelerate and chart their own course. British installation artist Cornelia Parker proposes a

---

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Mehlman, "Reading (with) Leiris" in *A Structural Study of Autobiography*, 1974, 65.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Leiris, *Fibrilles*, 1966, 292. Translation my own. [L]a fibule grâce à quoi tout ce que j'ai à coeur se résume, rassemblé par le moyen d'un signe dessiné sur ma chair même [...] Cette marque est demeurée pour moi l'objet, non d'une horreur retrospective, mais d'un orgueil disproportionné à un acte accompli seulement à demi [...] Et il me semble aussi que c'est à ce moment-là que j'ai embrassé le plus étroitement cette chose fascinante, et toujours à poursuivre parce que jamais tout à fait saisie : la poésie.

similar study in her 1991 work *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*.<sup>33</sup> In this work which she describes as “the quiet contemplation of a destructive act,” she first arranged for the British Army to blow up an ordinary backyard shed. It contained garden tools, a baby carriage, a bicycle, and suitcases filled with odds and ends. She subsequently used the debris to reconstitute the shed, in the same proportion as the pre-destruction shed but this time in its full violence. The shards and fragments hung fully contained by their arrangement but permanently exploded and exploding. The thorough *thru*ness of the shot arrests time at the same time that it irreversibly fast forwards it.

#### THE ANNOUNCEMENT WHICH STOPS THE SHOT

The shot is not a misfire, nor backfire, nor a blank. Chris Burden was shot. But Chris Burden’s ‘Shoot’ was also shot —snapshot. Therein lie the ricochets that traverse this polemical exposition. Even fraught with mirrored hallucinations, phantasmical jolts, the shock gets you everytime. The repetitive startling effects occur because the shot remains unannounced, even though all fingers point to it. As in *First Contact*, it can be elaborately staged but the shot itself unravels this elaboration. In “Notes on the Theater Set” Marguerite Duras writes of “The setting should be both that of loss of memory and that of vacillating memory, that is to say, a place with incidents of light, points of intense luminosity, holes of darkness, breaks. A place where things might happen that would not be announced.”<sup>34</sup> These guidelines for her piece *India Song* offer an aesthetic model. The gunshot is hardly an aesthetic proposition, but it causes shock, and as such it is prone to cause that break in Herzog’s *Aguirre* whereby the arrow is not an arrow. It is that break which causes arrows to unannounce themselves. The break which is a breakdown.

Take the needle off the record. The volume drops, the soundtrack is muted. The arm of the needle in Joseph Beuys’ *Stummes Grammophon* (mute gramophone) is a bone.<sup>35</sup> The body of the mimetic is dead. The pig’s squeal is indistinguishable from the shot which muted it. They have cross faded into each other. Both are now indelible, permanent ricochets. They are like scratches on the record, they interfere and interrupt. The record then either skips in arrested time or jumps forwards or backwards. Time is holed. And the tune is killing you.

---

<sup>33</sup> Cornelia Parker in review by Jonathan Goodman, *Parachute* 92, 1998, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Marguerite Duras, “Notes on the Theater Set” in *Duras by Duras*, 1987, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Beuys, *Stummes Grammophon* (1958). From catalogue *Broken Music*, 1989, 103.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Laurie. **Stories from the Nerve Bible, 1972-1992 Retrospective**. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs In Baudelaire" in **Illuminations**. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism**. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Beuys, Joseph. "Stummes Grammophon" in **Broken Music**. Berlin: DAAD, 1989.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Presentation" in **Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean**. Trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski & Michael Richardson. Ed. Michael Richardson. New York: Verso, 1996.
- Clastres, Pierre. **Society Against the State**. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone, 1989.
- Clifford, James. **The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art**. Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "He Stuttered" in **Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy**. Eds. Boundas, Constantine V. & Dorothea Olkowski. Trans. Constantine V. Boundas. Routledge, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles. **Logique du sens**. Les éditions de minuit, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze**. Dirs. Pierre-André Boutang & Claire Parnet. Arte, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **The Logic of Sense**. Trans. Mark Lester. Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Duras, Marguerite. "Notes on the Theater Set" in **Duras by Duras**. San Francisco: City Lights, 1987.
- Fanon, Franz. **The Wretched of the Earth**. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove, 1966.
- Fielder, Leslie. "The Silence of the Freaks and the Message of the Side Show" in **Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self**. New York: Doubleday, 1978.
- Glissant, Edouard. **Caribbean Discourse**. Trans. J. Michael Dash. University Press of Virginia, 1989.
- Goodman, Jonathan. "Cornelia Parker." Parachute 92, 1998.
- Griaule, Marcel. "Gunshot" in **Encyclopædia Acephalica**. Ed. Georges Bataille. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995.
- Lander, Dan & Micah Lexier (eds). **Sound by Artists**. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1990.
- Leiris, Michel. **Fibrilles (La Règle du Jeu vol.III)**. Gallimard, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme" in **Brisées**. Gallimard, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Civilization" in **Encyclopædia Acephalica**. Ed. George Bataille. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995.

Jeffrey Mehlman. "Reading (with) Leiris" in **A Structural Study of Autobiography**.  
Cornell University Press, 1974.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Holes in the Sound Wall" in **When the Moon Waxes Red**. Routledge, 1991.

Sawchuk, Kim. "Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan." **Public 4/5: Sound**, 1990.

Taussig, Michael. **Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses**.  
Routledge, 1993.

Virilio, Paul. "The Museum of Accidents" in **Public 2: The Lunatic Of One Idea**, 1989.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

Blank, Les. **Burden of Dreams**. 1982.

Connolly, Bob and Robin Anderson. **First Contact**. 1982.

Flaherty, Robert. **Nanook of the North**. 1922.

Herzog, Werner. **Aguirre: The Wrath of God**. 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Fitzcarraldo**. 1982.

Kirby, Peter. **Chris Burden: A Video Portrait**. Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1989.

O'Rourke, Dennis. **Cannibal Tours**. 1987.

## APPENDIX A

## COLLAGE

- First Contact. The shot. “[...] and we’ll do the same to you as we did to the pig, because we’ve got the guns to do it. You leave our stuff alone, and we’ll leave your stuff alone. We’re just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along. It’s all we came to look for.”
- Fitzcarraldo. Scene of high tension, drumming by the ‘invisibles’ (this is pre-encounter), a member of the crew detonates some dynamite, the drumming fades out, silence, they find an umbrella floating in the river, the drumming returns, Fitzcarraldo decides to use the phonograph and Caruso (“Now it’s Caruso’s turn”) (notice the direction the river boat is going in the last 2 shots), the drumming subsides.
- Burden of Dreams. Werner Herzog speaking of his use of “authentic natives” in the film. This is as they are filming the scenes of the encounter which immediately follow the scene from *Fitzcarraldo* just excerpted. One of those scenes, the one with the hands touching comes later on in the montage. Here is a transcript of what Herzog says:
  - In this case, we’ll probably have one of the last feature film with authentic natives, they are fading very quickly, and it is a catastrophe, a tragedy that’s going on, we are losing riches and riches and riches, and we lose cultures and individualities and languages and mythologies. At the end we’ll be stark naked, we’ll end up like all the cities in the world, with the skyscrapers and the universal kind of culture, like the American culture. I don’t feel like doing a documentary on the Campas, it should not end up as an ethnographic film, I also stylize them, and I have them in the film as they’re probably not precisely in their normal life, they do things that they would normally would not do. They “act” in this film and that is what interests me even more. Yet they have an authenticity of their culture and behavior, their movements, their language that will disappear from the face of this earth. I don’t want to live in a world where there are no lions anymore, or where there are no more people like lions. And they are lions.
- Cannibal Tours. Opening text: “There is nothing so strange, in a strange land, as the stranger who comes to visit it.”
- First Contact. Laughs.
- Chris Burden: A Video Portrait. “And he... fires it.”
- First Contact. Laughs.
- Cannibal Tours. “...the experts assure us they’re satisfied...”
- Fitzcarraldo. Caruso record heard on the boat.
- Nanook of the North. Scene of Nanook encountering “how the white man cans his voice.” Opening captions of the film: “It is generally regarded as the work from which all subsequent forms to bring real life to the screen have stemmed.” “[...]the most cheerful people in all the world —the fearless, lovable, happy go lucky Eskimo.”
- First Contact. “They’ll keep this picture for each generation to see. So we can say to each other: that’s how we used to be.”
- Cannibal Tours. “I for one feel that it’s too bad if they then deviate from it [their traditional art practice] and work for tourism as such.” In the next shot the person making that statement is seen purchasing a piece of art.
- Chris Burden: A Video Portrait. Chris Burden: “Originally *Shoot* and other work around that time was about making a statement to get art centered again. That you owned it, not literally, but that you had control over it. That’s why when I did the *Shoot* piece I did not invite NBC or the Times photographer. Those people would have taken control over it.”
- Cannibal Tours. “Would you smile for me.”
- Fitzcarraldo. The encounter as a sensual touching of hands.

- Burden of Dreams. Kinski's frustration in being in this "fuckin' stinking camp."

- Burden of Dreams. Herzog, as Bataille pt.1:

We are challenging nature itself, it just hits back, it just hits back, that's all, that is what's grandiose about it and we have to accept that it is much stronger than we are. Kinski always says that it is full of erotic elements. I don't see it so much as erotic, but just as full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base, there's nothing erotic here, just fornication and asphyxiation, choking, fighting for survival, growing, and just rotting away. Of course, there's a lot of misery. The trees are in misery, the birds are in misery. I don't think they sing, they just screech in pain.

- Cannibal Tours. "One of them is looking at you now."

- Burden of Dreams. and finally, Herzog as Bataille pt.2:

It's an unfinished country, it's prehistorical. It's a land that god has created in anger. The only harmony here is of overwhelming and collective murder. And we, in comparison, to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle, we only sound and look like badly pronounced and half-finished sentences out of stupid cheap suburban novels. Overwhelming misery, fornication, growth, lack of order, even the stars here look like a mess. There's no harmony in the universe, we have to get acquainted to this idea that there's no real harmony as we have conceived it. When I say all this it's in full admiration for the jungle, it is not that I hate it, I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgment.