

“I believe we can have real interactions with our imagination, interactions in which the inanimate is fully brought to life.” Mary Ruefle

In his *Zettel*—a box of slips of paper found among Wittgenstein’s effects after he died—he wonders if his stove has an imagination and what it means to assume that the stove does not have an imagination.

What is it likewise to wonder if tinnitus has (or is) imagination?

I can hardly say that I know what tinnitus is, only that I know what it can be like to live with it. Tinnitus feeds on everything but itself in inconsistent flow.

This is a depiction of tinnitus, one that struggles with the difficulty of its depiction and lays no claim to any sense of objectivity.

*The Sound is Hot as a Colour Inside.*

The British Tinnitus Association states that tinnitus is not a disease or an illness, but a symptom that is generated within the auditory system, usually caused by an underlying condition.

Bioacoustician Dennis McFadden suggests that tinnitus is the conscious expression of a sound that originates in an involuntary manner in the head, whilst audiologist David Baguely says that tinnitus “feels like a sound”.

Both question the cranial location of tinnitus by stating that a good number of people start to locate their tinnitus in the environment, around their head, or elsewhere in their body. As Mcfadden says, “perhaps it just all appears to do so”...

*Limen's Love Slop.*

Tinnitus, the elusively emulsive entity with which my thinking and existing is entangled, could well be a creature, a creature that is a collision of atmospheres, a composite of perceptibly imperceptible bolides, passing through the imagination, a turbulent, ionised wake, interacting with the body's magnetic fields among particulates of impulse and action. One offers itself to the other.

What might we say to the person who asks, what is tinnitus?

*Porcupine Herds.*

In the 1693 edition of *Blanchard's Physician's Dictionary*, 'Tinnitus Aurium' (or so-called subjective tinnitus) is classified as:

“A certain buzzing or tingling in the Ears proceeding from obstruction, or something that irritates the Ear, whereby the Air that is shut up is continually moved by the beating of the Arteries, and the Drume of the Ear is lightly verberated, whence arises a Buzzing and a Noife.”

*The Humidity of Humility.*

The previous passage describes what many now classify as pulsatile tinnitus, a measured ghost that keeps time in the heart. All manner of dread trepanations and experiments were performed to try and release ‘trapped air’ from the head or the ear of the person host to the elements, a species of air coursing between one reality and another.

*Leaves are also Veins.*

I am trying to listen to tinnitus as if it were its own ‘lavish absence’, as the poet and translator Rosmarie Waldrop might say. Trying to interact with the tinnital imagination, to not lock it into yet another dualism, to listen without locating, caught between physiology and atmosphere like some kind of biological clairaudient (miscreant).

How might thinking and talking about tinnitus help to extend dichotomous patterns and processes of thought into something sympathetically resonant? How might we erode the conceptual opposition between mediation and non-mediation?

*Every Surface is a Fold in the Fabric of the World.*

Air is said to harden the skin, but when the distance between particles temporarily closes it can be hard to know where the body ends and when it begins.

During a humid stretch just over a year ago, I was forced, by degree, into a supine and yet vertiginous state. I lay on my back for as good as two days, my legs were strangely inert, my tinnitus much more active than usual. Eventually I started to listen to myself outside of myself.

According to tinnitus, I'm constantly reminded that I am and have a body, and yet... surfaces can often be interior folds. The body multiplies. I was so embroiled in what was happening inside to me, neglecting what was also happening outside to me.

The world burst. There were honeybees on the inside of my window, sixty or so wings spinning the atmosphere, triggering memories of when I used to record such insects at an experimental apiary in the University of Wales.

I was there with a couple of beekeepers, both in their 70s, tumbling like children among prehistoric ferns. They told me that when there's static in the air, bees can become very 'angry', as there's something in the wetness of the humidity that causes a lapse in orientation. We opened the hive and a mood of bees swarmed me from head to toe.

Such sound, I can't describe, nor the feeling it caused to surge through me. Just outside of the eusocial hurricane I heard the beekeepers shout; "slowly step away from the hive and they'll no longer consider you a threat".

As I lay on the sofa, I couldn't help but wonder why this particular experience of my tinnitus was more intense than usual, and with all my speculation about what could have changed, I realised that what may have 'caused' my immobility wasn't necessarily inside or outside, but everywhere.

I wondered whether it was the weather itself, the holistic humidity of which sound is a vital part.

Air, like water, is an active mystery, alchemical semiosis. When air is in a humid phase, the particles are pushed closer together, this causes sound to move through mediums in ways that leave me wondering if we're hearing in liquid-air, becoming humans who temporarily experience the world in a plasma of things.

When we immerse our heads in water it can be much more difficult to locate sound, though I would say that the ability to locate merely changes. Skulls vibrate to a much greater extent, and thus ears do the same.

As is well known, sound travels approximately five times faster in water than it does in air, it doesn't seem much of a leap to infer that during this particularly humid weather I was receiving more of the world than I often do.

*Panic Grass.*

Sound doesn't just begin or end with the surfaces of the landscape or the body. Tinnitus may well be a sound, an aggregate that emerges from its own so-called 'absence', though I can't help but think that it also corresponds to the flux and flow of weather, pressure changes, temperature, and mood. Subtle atmospheres of whirling intangibles, like old light deep in the heart, trying to hold a vibration.

I imagine tinnitus as a pervasive phenomenon, an estranged and intimate contiguity that breathes in a wavelike frondage of propinquity.

How might we perceive the world as both around and us? A world where categories of delineation are neither fixed nor permeable, but constantly reevaluated in relation to each other.

Could paying attention to the weather (not as something outside, or as an object of perception, but as something 'in', an atmosphere as conditional upon perception as it is a condition for it) lead to a more nuanced and open understanding of tinnitus and its contingent meteorological relationships?

*A Nest of Crystals in the Brain.*

I think of Jacquetta Hawkes, lying, late at night, on a patch of grass in her back garden, feeling the Earth as it experiences space like the slow chiming rings of an owlet's lungs.

Looking up at the stars with phenomenological intuition, a blend of wonder and familiarity, she wonders in her own self-confessed ignorance if they are not gazing back at her in a reciprocity of tilted affect, “aware of awe but not of terror, of humility but not of insignificance.”

Perhaps such scaleless cosmological relationships subsist on the absorptive and accentuate properties of shapeless particles, the lump and sod of the in between ultrastructures carried along with sound and weather.

The concept of bringing that which was apart together is a mediating wave (a collapse) that is neither a plane of thought nor a plane of sound, but an act of stinging intimacy. A sensate world populated with monsters, medians and marvellous mixtures of interstitial loam. Everything bodily feels indeterminate sometimes.

### *Statues of Wasps.*

Tinnitus, like the imagination, could be a jellied medium, refractive and enfolding, sending and looping its signals like a rotating mandala of echoes. At times, it can feel very much like a membrane, a violent edge, a rigid and porous border that keeps out as much as it keeps in.

The equation of false and subjective, true and false, aside from being an odious lunge in the direction of a stunted discourse, where the isolation of the individual and their tinnitus is flung back at them, as if they should be able to control it no matter what, begs the question, where is tinnitus going?

At the very least I can stipulate that, over the last twelve years, a life lived with the molecular spume of tinnitus has taught me the value of agnosis, the phenomenological doubt, espoused by Ernst Mach, that what we come to understand of a thing is always in the shadow of what we do not.

Such perpetual oscillation is a symptom of the shimmering blur of demarcation. Some powerful sets of opposites simply do not, as Heraclitus said, cooperate. They fight. They tip over the balance of every certainty.

*Sweating in the Shade and Shivering in the Sun.*

When I have to, I sit on my kitchen floor with my right ear, the one that supposedly can't hear, close to the fridge. The displaced borborygmus of its gurgle, like oiled wings in the viscous water of my nervous system, creates periodic repose, as if I can feel the tonotopic ghosts of my ruined cochlea curtailing space between fridge and skin.

I wonder if this sublimation of space, a kind of acoustic consciousness inside the mind of a sense encounter, is so beneficial to me because of the subsequent heightening of time-sensation?

Sat next to the fridge (drowsy colossus), attempting to resonate with it in the hope that my tinnitus will temporarily be sucked out of me, I picture its frequencies and temperature travelling the radial length of my cochlea, wherever it may lead or end up.



Such a vertical labyrinth, can tilt. Sometimes it's like I can actually see it, an experience that is a recollection without memory. I become convinced that I've seen these air pressure fluctuations before, as if my cochlea once had eyes as well as hair cells.

*Mint and Grass.*

The poet Anne Tardos made sound recordings of her fridge-freezer defrosting in 1975. The monaural recording is panned hard left, so when I listen through headphones it can sometimes achieve the opposite effect of the fridge in my kitchen.

The recording highlights the vacillating absence located on my right side, a timorous anxiety that can feel like my insides are trying to push through the membrane that I imagine still oscillates in listless and stoic sympathy to my surroundings.

“I have listened to many refrigerators”, says Pauline Oliveros. “Once . . . a refrigerator sent its harmonics out to surround my head with circles, ellipses, and figure-eights.” Stridulations blend and unbend the hum in an orbit of psychomagnetic curves and invisible headaches.

*The Wound and the Knife.*

“In the sacrifice the sacrificer identifies with the animal receiving the blow. Thus he dies whilst seeing himself die, and even by his own will, at one with the sacrificial arm. But it's a comedy.”

George Bataille.

Just over ten years ago I was waiting in the ENT hospital on Grey's Inn Road. For some reason I can only ever picture myself from a distance, as close to a protective mechanism (a membrane) as I can get.

I was reading *Essays in Idleness*, by Yoshida Kenkō (an administration official born in the 13th century), lingering over the 164th entry which, in Donald Keene's translation, begins:

“When people meet they are never silent a moment. There is always talk about something. If you listen to their conversations, most of what they say is meaningless chatter...”

I was waiting in the ENT for what I thought was going to be yet another nominal hearing test, but clearly, my preoccupations were with the meaningless meaning of tinnital life, with the fricative pell-mell of sinusoidal voices that were now very much a part of me.

After some hours, during which time I barely remember straying from the 164th entry, I was gestured by a technician to follow him down numerous flights of stairs, into what I figured must be the unintelligible caprice of the building, a rarefied atmosphere I have since lazily described as Kafkaesque.

I remember telling this story to a friend the same day, so even though I feel like my imagination has embellished and ornamented the uncomfortably cliched particulars, the patina of dripping water, squeezed and flicked florescence, social awkwardness and the all too typical stance of submission, I can't help but see this even more clearly now than I did then.

The glint of the technician's neck presented itself to me. He hadn't said a word. Walking through what felt like a maze of curls and coils, memory ejects over its own lines of weakness. I saw him disappear, like an apparition, into a room up ahead.

Following him I could hear ahead a scurried toil of fingers crossing surfaces, straps and dry plastic. Eventually he appeared from a small booth that looked like it had been grown from the room, busying himself with acicular test tones and coils of electrodes that looked like leaf venation diagrams.

Amidst this unravelling spine of tones he pointed to the booth without looking at me, and without a moment's hesitation I entered the mucus leaf light and sat on the only chair, aware of the incidence of his rustling.

He started throwing concatenations of wires and cells into the room, deriving a sort of scopic pleasure from the accumulative patterns on the floor, vibrating in almost divined meaning with his unstable objects and turning them, like the delicate ideals of a beleaguered haruspex, through his fingers.

Moments later he'd be scrubbing under my eyes, opening the pores without warning or explanation. A smell of weak beasts wafted through the room, and as he left he no sooner loomed, attaching electrodes to the wounds under my eyes.

A turbulent and muddy heat, lights behind poppy shades, a shock opened itself, more meteorological than sensory. Electricity reared up, one monster at a time. What I experienced, I've since discovered, was a contra-lateral hearing test that delivers spikes of electricity into the eyes to ascertain 'the patient's' capacity for audition.

Voltage sent into the right eye, galvanic light phenomena, so it goes, registers in the plane of the left semicircular canal as the eye moves, a sound like beating my hands in the air, diagnosing a relationship between the organs that desublimates the senses on a physiological level as they coagulate around the intensity.

As pewter clouds of Flaubert's black butterflies, *muscae volitantes*, enfolded my eyes like grief lessons of colour fields, the technician came into the dark booth and pulled the electrodes off my face, immediately setting about cleaning their clammy pads with the care of a parent.

No word of explanation was offered. I got up and slowly left the room like a stuccoed quadruped, feeling my way back along the exuberant beauty and open temporality of the old hospital walls, a sound like green feeding galleries slowly opening my skull.

If imagination is redolent of an organism's capacity to think without thinking, or to think into thinking, to believe in the nuanced sensibility and fantasy of making, to be tinnital could simply mean, to spin, to set in motion the speculative and physiological imagination like a solid sky of tones collapsing into the chaos water of the nervous system.

To be ganglic, a medium-less-medium wrapped around dehiscent ergo-maturational identity, awaiting place as imprint, as stability of aural mirage.

*Itus.*

Adumbral specks rise in the imagination as it seeks to pare or isolate tinnitus as an object. Perhaps, in particular atmospheres, where energy acts as sigil and dust as escort, the tinnital imagination as that which avoids the medicinal panacea of suppression and negation, a wonder that strengthens correspondence.

Such a kinesic climate collapses out of sound to become its own element, neither keeping things apart nor pushing them together, moving in accord, but not necessarily in time.

A presumption of, but certainly not exclusive to, the tinnital imagination is that tinnitus does not relate solely to the ear, the ear does not relate solely to sound, and sound does not solely relate to what is seemingly external to or absent from it. Transmutation of cellular structures.

*Proof of Breath.*

“It does not seem possible to say of the imagination,” says Wallace Stevens in *The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words*, “that it has a certain single characteristic which of itself gives it a certain single value as, for example, good or evil. To say such a thing would be the same as to say that reason is good or evil or, for that matter, that human nature is good or evil.”

The tinnital imagination is part of incipient and scaleless ebullience—imperceptible changes in pressure—alterations within alterity. Form embarks on absence, anxiety cracks itself open.

*A 1Hz Vibration is not a Singularity.*

The philosopher Annemarie Mol writes that “no object, no body, no disease, is singular. Reality is multiple”. Tinnitus as ecotone of multiple histories. Anne Tardos says that there are “as many ways of making art as there are artists”. Are there as many definitions of tinnitus as there are experiences of it? Lisa Robertson states that “a lady speaking to humans from the motion of her own mind is always multiple.” These words make the atmosphere rich in oxygen, photosynthetic, the body ignites with increasing ease.

*Charcoal Catullus.*

A dead ear is motile pollen. As the hair cells in the cochlea die they cease to send signals to the auditory cortex along the auditory nerve. It's such dormancy that many believe to be the 'cause' of tinnitus. The auditory cortex, as it registers lack, can send what many call 'phantom' signals through the brain, signals that are the thoughts of the gravity of lack, the declension of synapses thorough which mind experiences itself as echoed error.

*Dirt Cortex.*

In his *Remarks on Colour*, Wittgenstein writes that there is no such thing as phenomenology, but that there are phenomenological problems.

When I write tinnitus I generally mean, ‘my’ tinnitus, the multiplicitous worms that live and migrate through and beyond my body. A tinnitus that is perceived as if it were thought.

*Newts in Golden Samphire.*

I am, at any given time, living with at least four sinusoidal tones, seemingly just above my right ear, equating to frequencies that understand 12,000 Hz. These frequencies come apart and together in a periodicity that is beyond me. Triggered and stabilized by cracks and scars in the fascia of events.

I often feel like I’m not really writing about tinnitus, but from it, or through it, not as a struggle, but an acknowledgment.

*A Mirror in the Plasma.*

Throughout 2017 I underwent a series of otological tests, the anxious monotony of this time has dissolved in its own brine like a sphere of bird comas.

Most of what I’m able to remember remains affectively locked in caustic networks of nephroid light-wheat on morning walks to the hospital, and in the book I was reading as I waited for my appointments, *The Life of the Mind*, by Hannah Arendt.

At the time I was obsessed with the notion of location, in many ways I still am. I can hear and feel tinnitus as if it were a frayed aura denser than air, bound to the hinge of my skull.

If I focus I can imagine the fluctuations passing through it like a torn screen. But is 'there' where it is located? Can we really say of tinnitus that it is 'here'?

Returning to a chapter in Arendt's book, titled 'Where are we when we think?' I remember how taken I was with her attempts to locate the thinking ego. Considered from the perspective of the every-day world of appearances, the entangled everywhere of the thinking ego is, according to Arendt, "a nowhere akin to a void".

*Visibly Indivisible.*

Flecks of tinnital life relate to what Arendt describes as the *Epicurean lathe biosas*, which is to say that, like certain layers of thought and emotion, it can live in hiding.

This, Arendt argues, is also a negatively exact description of the *topos*, the locality of the person who thinks, or the invisible manifest in actuality.

I'm not suggesting we conflate thought with tinnitus, but the fact that fMRI scans have revealed the latter drifts beyond the afferent and efferent feedback systems of the auditory cortex in the high tide of the head, should make us at least consider that the elusive and almost staggering nature of the tinnital *topos* is one that cannot be mapped or confined to cortical hubs.



Processes of magnetoencephalography detect these incandescent patterns by monitoring the energy fields of inter-communicating neurons, the mangroves of matter and mulch.

Just as John Berger has called the ligands of cells, their ears, tinnitus can act like the echo of sound in the red sleep of the brain. A torn organ of retinal warp.

*From the Sea to the Sea.*

I've read various accounts and studies over the years that postulate the location of tinnitus in the auditory cortex, or even the dorsal cochlear nucleus of the brain stem. As stated, the former theory is concerned with the ways in which the auditory cortex sends 'phantom' signals across the brain as it receives less and less information from the cochlea, often due to, in my case and that of countless others, hearing loss.

The dorsal cochlear nucleus is where auditory nerve fibres from the cochlea form their first synapses, like a paper nautilus excreting calcite from its two arms to make a planispiral shell. The nucleus is a cork of sensory information.

Vibrations build up in affective keels, a slow serum of sundials unfolding into a calyx that grows to sound in the bridged noctilucence of the pelagic and the upper atmosphere. The brain is both water and shell.

*The Last Moon.*

Arendt extends the region of nowhere from ‘just’ space into space-time, or then which is not yet. Concerned that her question—where are we when we think?—was wrong, the notion of *topos* guides her back to Kant’s dictum, ‘time is nothing but the form of inner sense’, the intuition of ourselves in which the senses do not produce time, but suppose it.

Time remains ecstatic in relation to the space of the senses, eyes become hands immersed in light, shadows inside a closed mouth.

*Late Bergamot.*

The Pre-Socratic Zeno was a human whirlpool, he did not believe in place, or edges. If there were such things, he stated, they would be ‘in’ something, because everything that exists is in something. What is in something, Zeno claimed, is in a place, leaving place within place in an infinite series of regressions.

Aristotle, one of Zeno’s many commentators, refuted this with his part-heart, postulating that it is indeed possible for place to be in something else as long as ‘in’ is not understood as implying location within a place, but rather, understood in the convention of, say, heat being ‘in’ the body, because indeed, it is an affection of the body.

I think of place and it partakes, reaching out, extending, a hole momentarily appears, where I will be.

*Golden Rows.*

When we think of the location of tinnitus we act it out, we become it. This is akin to tonotopic analysis, suturing the Greek *tono*, to the *topos* of storied place, a pairing that defies edges with the same intensity as they secrete them.

The acting out of a thought, and the thinking out of an act, in which experiences are given to us in a succession of soundless words (the only medium in which we can think, says Arendt), could lead us to not only de-sense, but de-spatialise, experience.

Tonotopicity is a field of lattice spiral scenery, a territory within a map on which we follow patterns of frequencies, explaining ourselves to ourselves with increasingly tenebrous richness.

*Green Streaks, Spirally Bound Serpent-Wise, Orderly Arranged.*

The tinnital imagination necessitates a language that revolves around haptic nature. One that articulates both action and feeling, a numberless pairing that spins its own lack into distinction, led as much by physiology and affect as atmosphere and environment.

*Empty Snakes Sing as the Net Moves.*

In Soly Erlandsson and Nicholas Dauman's, *The Categorisation of Tinnitus in View of History and Medical Discourse*, it's underlined that a present "common sense" definition of tinnitus will not be abandoned or supplemented unless a new discourse favours research within the same paradigm.

It's appealing, they claim, to notice that the use of 'a sound' to describe tinnitus does not seem to have any bonds to the body, which is otherwise common in medical discourse, the body being the nodal point around which other connotations are materialised.

Perhaps a symptom of tinnitus is that it is a percept of the body that was previously inaudible? Some biochemical and electromagnetic chimera, stunned below the surface of an invisible threshold. We could consider the notion of apophasis, concentrating on what (and when) tinnitus is not...

If the body 'always' thinks, tinnitus 'always' oscillates, the body always thinks that tinnitus always oscillates thus tinnitus always oscillates because the body always thinks.

Such emptying is indeterminately determinate, some monster that cannot be objectively referred to a single object in the world, a mixture that cannot be sutured to anything other than its own movement, thus threatening our own limits, conceptually or otherwise, when we try to locate it, when we try to make of it an object.

*Do You Know What You Have Eaten?*

Fusing inside and outside will leave a mark, an in between, a place wherein we imagine folds to mark dualities such as here and there, sky and earth, light and sound, anxiety and joy.

When I try to write tinnitus it feels like it can only happen on a ground where consciousness and its absence meet, spiralling, incessant and infinitely minute perceptions.

The notion of anamnesis, of coming to know, (in this case tinnitus), may only take place during periods of its absence, its lack. It seems painfully obvious to state that most who are encumbered by tinnitus possess a desire to be rid of it, to disintegrate it.

I wonder (with as much genuine curiosity as I can secrete) how many desire to preserve 'it', to know 'it'? What does tinnitus lack? What replaces tinnitus during periods or moments of lack? And if desire is lack, what is a desire to remain in lack?

#### *Floating Ardour.*

Experiences of tinnitus are more often than not described onomatopoeically, 'hissing', 'ringing', 'buzzing', to name but a few. Many of these descriptions are empirically related to the objects from which they emanate, they are three vibrations of the same sound, by-products, adumbral rays of each other's partial illumination.

#### *Hissing.*

A denotation of opprobrium. Electromagnetic hiss is a naturally occurring low frequency generated in the plasmic blue and yellow radiation belts of the magnetosphere.

Hiss is an element that binds elements to everything but itself. Etymologically, it's difficult not to recall Samuel Johnson's pithy statement (like an ambling uncanny virus), that it's remarkable such a word can't be pronounced without making the noise which it signifies.

### *Ringling.*

Related to tintinnabulation, the strobing peal of a bell after it has been struck, audible to everything but the ears. Tintinnabulum is the Latin for bell, which in turn derives from the verb tintinnare, to 'ring', 'clang', or 'jingle'.

Like the terms 'ting' and 'tinkle', tintinnare originated with a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it. It's interesting to note that 'tintinnabuli', a term coined by Edgar Allen Poe and revered by composer Arvo Pärt, has been referred to by Pärt himself as an area he sometimes wanders into when searching for 'answers'.

"In my dark hours", says Pärt, "I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning, and I have discovered that it is enough to beautifully play this one and only tone." This is echoed by Pauline Oliveros, who played a single note for a year.

### *Buzzing.*

The bourdon is the heaviest of the bells that belong to a musical instrument, particularly a carillon, bourdon is also French for bumblebee, buzz is the insect from which the bee derives.

In Strabo's *Geography* we read that Eunomos, an accomplished harpist, was contending in the Pythian games when one of the strings on his instrument snapped, at this critical point, a cicada landed on the resonant body of his harp and called in the same frequency as the missing string, producing a beautiful cosmic drone.

*Samuel Alexander.*

Sound can change perception of light, just as light can transform sound. Enfolding this relationship are meteorological and temporal gradations of temperature and pressure. In such place, countless centres merge in iridescent globes, fluid emanations of parabolas scattering the boundaries of the body like a cloud.

To picture the tinnital imagination is also to hear it, rendering the transparent opaque, surrounding space with coruscations sweeping in all directions.

To envisage tonotopically is to compose a temporary boundary where untold numbers of polarised particles of luminous matterings indeterminately misalign in an alterity of curved lines and correspondences.

*Apatheia.*

Italo Calvino's *Mr Palomar* opens with its protagonist, the eponymous Mr Palomar, standing on the shore, looking at a wave, unaware of distance. Calvino quickly draws a line between looking and contemplating, for which you need to right temperament and mood, so we read.

Mr Palomar is not interested in looking at the waves' infinite permutations, only at a single wave. Not so much indulging, as breathing, an activity symbolic of his desire to avoid vague sensations and to seek a grid like limitation, of which he must constantly readjust the boundaries, for his small perceptions.

I can't help but note that in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino tells us that vague in Italian, vago, also means 'beautiful', or 'dreamy'.

This particular chapter of *Mr Palomar*, 'Reading the Waves', is an oceanic liber mundi, veering close to the consequences of a withdrawal of trust in the veracity of our everyday impressions of things.

We learn that what Palomar means by 'see a wave', is to "perceive all its simultaneous components without overlooking any of them". To understand the composition of a wave, we hear, you have to consider its opposing thrusts.

There are hundreds of marks, Leibniz says, that force us to judge that there is at every moment an infinity of perceptions in us, unaccompanied by awareness and unaccompanied by reflection; that is, modifications in the soul itself of which we are not aware.

Palomar's omniscient narrator tells us that such an endeavour is an attempt to defend himself against a general neurasthenia, a term for a variety of emotional disturbances.



*The Quail Fattens on Hemlock.*

In an account of Pyrrho of Elis's life, written around the fourth century BCE, Diogenes Laertius tells us that his friends had to follow him about to keep him from falling into rivers, wells, and ditches.

Pyrrho said that he had no reason to believe that his solicitude for his welfare was wiser than the results of an accident. He lived for ninety years.

Ataraxia is a state of mind that, in late Pyrrhonism, reflected a so-called freedom from emotional disturbance, brought about through suspension of judgement. It was also a strain of Epicurean impassiveness, sought by coming to understand that the universe consists of atoms and void.

Seeking to reduce the world to its simplest mechanism, Palomar lets the jungle in.

*Almost Felt but not Such.*

Perception is said to be whole, yet we see the white foam of a wave, smell its brine, taste its salinity, feel its smoothness, attempt to hold its weight. The thought that the true movement of the waves begins from the shore and goes out to sea, instils in Palomar a slight dizziness, and so he walks away, even more unsure about everything than when he started.

We imagine tinnitus is 'located' in the tonotopic gravity of neurons in an auditory cortex, omniscient electrons of an environment. Resonant metamorphoses of biochemical responses drip and disturb as neighbouring frequencies are triggered, 'firing' in loops around various semi-otic wholes.

To consciously attempt to perceive tinnitus is for me akin to locating the shifting parts that compost the unlocatable whole, that is, the psychomagnetic curves of every wave-particle. Each of the little noises that make themselves known only in the illusory collocations of ambered wholeness.

We intuit electromagnetic fervour in kinetic respiration, like influxes of light creating whirlpools of susurrant phantom waters.

One would not hear the sea, says Leibniz, if one did not have a small perception of each wave as it broke out on the shore, and one would not hear each wave, in turn, if one did not hear each drop of water. Clearly, for Leibniz, the sensations of conscious life point toward the existence of infinitely smaller ones, which lie hidden without them.

*A Cochlea Balanced on a Glass.*

In an imagined dialogue, Zeno asks Protagoras if a single millet seed, or the ten thousandth part of said seed, makes a sound as it falls? Protagoras says that it does not, to which Zeno responds, does a whole bushel of millet seed make a sound when it falls?

When Protagoras replies that a bushel does indeed make a sound, Zeno enquires of the harmony between the bushel and the seed, or the ten thousandth part of a single seed. Protagoras cannot help but agree that such correspondence exists.

Well then, says Zeno, the same ratios will hold between the sounds. For as are the sounders so are the sounds. If the bushel of millet seed makes a sound, the single seed, and the thousandth part of a seed, will also make a sound.

I imagine the tinnital husk of a cochlea hair cell, concussive fractions and the affective life of a protein, osmotic transduction of pores, phonons oscillating in cyclonic states of thermal conduction.

Refugia emerge like the hidden jaws of morays within the reticular modes tinnitus sheds from the auditory cognates of mind. Selva, greening gradations of morphic memory.

*A Weed Growing in a Yellow Field.*

Absorbed in a practise of tinnital imagination, I visualise filigrees of finer and finer liquid vibrations that seem to transcend the imagination's capacity to recompose reality.

This is a process of acoustic consciousness, an emergence of relational imagination peckered in maturations of form impossible to adumbrate or suture in the stratified effluvium of simulacra, a rippling series of concentric echoes and affects pushed out of the body as they are pulled in, the electromagnetic and entropic pullulations of the heart.

Tinnitus weaves among environments and we call it absence, invisible except when, as a symbol, it materialises into the language of named things.

*Leaf Mould and Water.*

Leibniz channels Zeno's arguments through the metaphor of a sleeping body. He imagines a slumbering individual, jerked awake at the sound of their name being called by many people at once.

Leibniz argues that the voice of each person on its own would not be enough to wake the sleeper, rather that the call of all the voices together would wrench them out of hypnagogia.

Taking a single voice from this chorus, he wonders if one may truly claim that the sleeping person has not heard it, simply because they did not know it?

The person must have been touched by this single voice, since the parts are in the whole, and if each one, on its own, is nothing at all, the whole will be nothing too. The one voice must therefore have been heard, even if it was not heard 'as such'.

Tinnitus remains regardless of my attention, it does not disappear when I am not wholly conscious of it, it is still affecting me, tacitly influencing my movements and thoughts. My perception of it is but one variety of consciousness. Thinking on this, I begin to attach the speculations of Leibniz's somnolent subject to other states.

A voice, too quiet to be heard on its own, helps me understand the undulating phases of entwined tinnital absence (however such periods manifest, as I find them very hard to recall).

A single voice becoming audible when joined to others ‘of its kind’ helps me think of obverse presence in relation to environmental stimuli (not solely auditory, but electromagnetic, gravitational, meteorological, vibrational, reflective, affective...) that serve to amplify and aggravate in circadian calyces of emotional complexity.

*Seed Tones.*

Jean Itard, whom many say coined the term, ‘tinnitus’, advised that if a patient’s tinnitus was high pitched, they should collect reed sticks from the forest and burn them on their fire, the resultant sounds issuing from the heat of the flames supposedly driving the tinnitus from their head. He also said that if a patient’s tinnitus was low pitched, they should go live next to a watermill. Tinnital intimacy can’t help but render the imperceptible perceptible.

Leibniz used the spectral density of water to invoke similar habitual sensations, explaining that, on the one hand, those who live near a waterfall will often become insensitive to its presence, and on the other, if those selfsame people were to periodically visit the waterfall, they would no doubt perceive it.

*Ox Progeny.*

Where are the affective bases of a drop of water, a millet seed, or, recalling Zeno, the ten thousandth part of a single seed (which surely has its alps and moons, just like Agnes Catlow’s diagrams of infusoria, the marvellous inhabitants, themselves surely inhabited)?

If the threshold of hearing can correspond to air vibrations on the order of a tenth of an atomic diameter, the displacement of a hydrogen atom, a sun in other form, where might we begin to look for the tinnital imagination?

Such points seem to be convertible through a common measure, that of mush, the stomach of everything. The noise of the watermill may be for some the voice of a storm, and in moments where I catch myself falling asleep, I hear voices in voices.

Derrida wrote that to hear is to hear oneself speak; somewhere in that act, of hearing oneself hear (disorder of space and flesh), a memory in the body attempts the awakening of a single cell, a tree bursts its fruit at night.

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