

THE FALL OF CHROME

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2009

Essay for forthcoming cassette edition by Claudio Rocchetti.

If one Roar as in an echo chamber comes in waves. A melody of a violin from a distant place. What is this substance? What stuff is this sound made of? Scattered sparse notes of piano over a recurring wave make the space implode into a blinded stare. Hiss projected from the background allows this sound to exist, it allows me to write out of this mental thickening mist. /// I think of Robert Ashley who wrote of Morton Feldman who said that any composer who went around with a tune in his head should be locked up. "He didn't mean it in the practical sense, of course, because nobody should be locked up, considering what locked up means... Music is still mostly seen as a deliberately conscious activity". What happens when music takes place non-deliberately, outside the musician's intentions, or it takes the place of those intentions? What happens to a writer who goes around with a tune in her head? I decided to lock myself up deliberately, and spend my morning with these sounds that Claudio channelled across, trying to make them seep through the page, with no deliberate structure in mind. To let the unpredictable structure of these sounds emerge across the words; to have words tied in these sounds, embedded in them. I stitch together the tunes in my head and the thoughts in this room, and give to you this rhapsody of aural memories, of projected words and recollected stories. /// These sounds don't belong anywhere anymore. They come from contexts that we would never think of. Claudio collected them in flea markets around Berlin and listened to them. He found a rhythm, a pace across them. Like in those moments when you feel lost, and a simple, unexpected encounter suddenly gives you news about yourself (Breton, flânerie). Claudio set out to appropriate those myriad voices. He listened for hours to those piano chords on a rotating rhythm. To thick layers of muddy sonic waste. To hisses over people talking in a marketplace. To odd compilations. To botanic lessons. To radio programmes in known and unknown languages. To homemade recordings of objects. To aerobic classes. To the voices of people fighting. To demo tapes of folk bands. To travel notebooks. To long stretches of nothing. To absurd field recordings. He collected and composed them together, as if to delay their last breath before their final end. Or maybe to keep their sense of vanishing. He zoomed in layers of forgotten sonic debris that was discarded, residual traces of things no longer known. The illusion of mastered time is shattered, no longer can those hours be repeated. He re-recorded the composition on the same cassettes, and will place some of them back on flea market stalls. They will remain, forgotten keepsakes under layers of dust and acoustic detritus. /// For Claudio this process of mutation, invisibility and dispersion, enhances his work on "sedimentation, endless layers between support and signal, human intention and interference of the support" – now there are no more mediations, just the sound of the tapes vanishing out. Claudio's fortuitous encounters with sound by means of the seriality of the tape collection, and the singularity of each cassette at its utmost intimate and structural, offers a new, overtly slanted angle into his work. He is fascinated by the illusion of a fixed sound against the painful truth of a corroding sound. "Every thing you record or erase leaves a mark, a layer, every time you listen you deteriorate the support". /// This roar now is soaking across the page. Fill it, saturate it. There comes the buzz there comes the metal machine. Too much noise in the brain. *Can I play with madness?* After nearly five minutes of listening, the background buzz of the tape

eats up the rest of the sound, it comes to the forefront. The roar of an engine: the Art of Noises. Why is it that when it comes to discussing sound in Italy, they always bring up I FUTURISTI!? Luigi Russolo and all that futuristic clatter, that zang tumb tumb. For crying out loud. Stop crying out loud, pay attention to the sounds. To Claudio's gestures and actions incorporated within the stillness of this material, memory-laden score. Or listen to this suffocating nightmare, this sonic Götterdämmerung, falling aural deities drenched in blood and rotting across the rest of the time. /// Silence... What about John Cage? 'His' silence, and white noise, and those 4'33". How do you articulate silence? Have you ever spent four minutes and thirty-three seconds listening? The people attending Cage's performance at Teatro Lirico in Milan on 2 December 1977 did listen, for over three hours, to his meticulous and monotonous dissection of Thoreau's diaries that began by omitting phrases, then words, then syllables, until there was nothing but sounds. The atmosphere arose into an explosion of voices and dissent. There was Cage, his words weighing as much as the noises around. The audience started laughing, shouting, mocking, whistling and booing, till it all turned into a revolutionary carnival of infuriating chaos. Cage? He kept reading. Responding with poised rhythm to the tension around, making it resonate even stronger. *Empty Words*, he called his performance. When the urgency of a situation breaks into a fixed score, and the unraveling of verse clashes with the present tense. It's no longer just the words, it's the sound of that disquiet that matters. The aural matter is the sound of that disquiet. It happened five months before Aldo Moro was murdered, I can recall the astonishment of our neighbours outside and the deadly silence of my parents when the news broke, followed by all those phone calls, as if the sound of daily chatter buzzing itself to oblivion could keep that deathly silence away. /// Listen to this. Italo Calvino wrote that it is not the voice that commands the story, it is the ear. So listen. Claudio has always been drawn to the intense potential of found sounds, and to the materiality of music reproduction devices. All of his records, from the melancholy curves of *Another Piece of Teenage Wildlife* to the frantic clashes in *The Work Called Kitano*, take on the alterity of the rhythm of matter. For him, the unfinished has never meant superficial or sketchy, though. It points to an aural continuum that points out to infinity. In an interview four years ago, he told me: "I am interested in melancholy and the relationship between an environment and its history, either as living memory or as reverberations of a presence". Here, Claudio steps back further, and lets those reverberations overtake the construction – which in fact does not appear as a portrait of unity, but as an over-fragmented mosaic of daily encounters and unexpected resurfacing of past audio reveries and memories. /// And now these sounds fade out, and disappear. To restore old deteriorating tapes, you have to bake them between 50 and 60 degrees for eight hours. Alchemy here? Not much: technically, this process is called shedding. So build a hut for those decaying sounds, and then shed a tear over the hours spent entranced, listening to your Existenz and your Wasted years, Just as the day dissolves. /// That buzz again. These sounds won't remain. This space is being shattered by metallic shrieks. What is being torn apart? The hammering noise, the high frequencies that pierce through. Writing as wiring. Every new listening deteriorates the tape, every new reading deteriorates these words until all fades out. Can this page be a long fade out? This is not a record. It is the record of the impossibility of a timeless record, Claudio's eulogy to decaying sound, his aural portrait of the fall of chronos, the fall of chrome.