

Ideologies and Ethics in the Uses and Abuses of Sound  
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## Olvido

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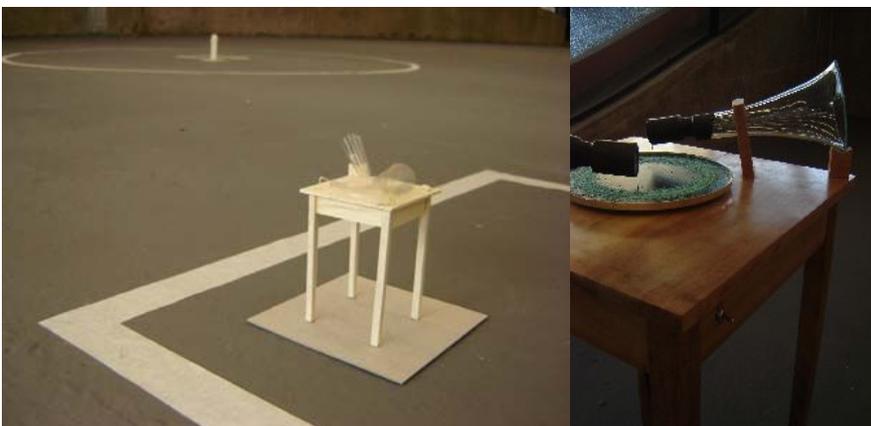
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### ABSTRACT

Both in Portuguese and in Spanish the word "*olvido*" has the same meaning, which in English could be translated to "I forget". However, in Portuguese this word is almost unused nowadays and sounds pretty close to a very usual word that means the same for "ears": *ouvido*. Thinking about this context we've made a very simple wax phonograph with two functional units, both able to record and play sounds at the same time, allowing people to speak delayed conversations or just listen to the emptiness of sounds until the wax disc gets too much recorded and it starts to be almost impossible to record new sounds over the current and deep wrinkles. Looking like an old laboratory machine made from red wood, glass tubes, wax, metal, rubber and a simple electrical motor, this sound-work intend to bring us the sensation of a strange scientific experiment, creating an atmosphere to think about how arbitrary and relative are the truths created by human cultures.



Picture 1: scale model / Picture 2: final piece



Picture 3: detail

## **DIALOGUE**

- "I can hear splendidly through my skull and through my teeth. The sound-waves then come almost direct to my brain. They pass through only my inner ear. And I have a wonderfully sensitive inner ear. I do not know that, in the beginning, it was any more sensitive than anybody else's but for more than fifty years it has been wrapped in almost complete silence. It has been protected from the millions of noises that dim the hearing of ears that hear everything." [1]

- I know what you mean. "The most inexcusable and disgraceful of all noises is the cracking of whips - a truly infernal thing when it is done in the narrow resounding streets of a town. I denounce it as making a peaceful life impossible; it puts an end to all quiet thought. That the cracking of whips should be allowed at all seems to me to show in the clearest way how senseless and thoughtless is the nature of mankind. No one with anything like an idea in his head can avoid a feeling of actual pain at this sudden, sharp crack, which paralyzes the brain, rends the thread of reflection, and murders thought. Every time this noise is made, it must disturb a hundred people who are applying their minds to business of some sort, no matter how trivial it may be; while on the thinker its effect is woeful and disastrous, cutting his thoughts asunder, much as the executioner's axe severs the head from the body. (...) Hammering, the barking of dogs, and the crying of children are horrible to hear; but your only genuine assassin of thought is the crack of a whip; it exists for the purpose of destroying every pleasant moment of quiet thought that any one may now and then enjoy." [2]

- "On the other hand our listening capacity is highly improved in an acoustically clear environment, such as a hi-fi soundscape, where the signal-to-noise ratio is favourable and the most discrete sounds can be heard clearly. In such a soundscape we experience a desire to listen as well as a desire to make sounds. Under those conditions we can find a balance between listening and soundmaking and this balance gives us inner vitality." [3]

- "This raises interesting questions. It is now easy to make a lot of noise, and pretty fancy noise at that. (...) Automation has certainly become a potent player in the studio, but has there been a conceptual gain which affects the lives of those who consume the product?" [4]

- Well, with a Edison Phonograph it was already possible to "record what you or your friends say, or sing, or play, and then instantly reproduced it just as clearly and faithfully as the Records you buy are reproduced. (...) You can send your voice to a friend, preserve the sayings of children, record your progress as a speaker, a singer or a musician." [5]

- "There is also no virtue in the fact that we have come to accept the sound of machine-made music as reality in our media. (...) There is consequently a deep dependence on music machines sixty-four-track mixers, synthesizers, computers-to create magical illusions, which in certain areas become the prime ingredient of success. But the magic fades quickly and more is always needed to sustain the illusion." [6]

- Yes, "I remember I stood right beside the machine. The audience was there, and there was nobody on stage with me. The machine played and I sang with it. Of course, if I had sung loud, it would have been louder than the machine, but I gave my voice the same quality as the machine so they couldn't tell." [7]

- You must know that "even participants in high-end audio culture, an elite culture obsessively dedicated to the pursuit of sonic perfection at any cost, now measure component performance and quality through charts of frequency response and comparisons with reference equipment rather than with live performance." [8]

- Let me ask you: "-Did you ever make a Phonograph Record? Did you ever hear yourself talk, or sing, or play?" [9]

- About this task I would say "there is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death." [10]

- As that "company formed to record and program a specially prepared music product, bearing the same name as the company, for distribution mainly to public environments in which is intended to affect its hearers psychologically in specific ways without drawing undue attention to itself or making any demand to be listened to consciously" [11].

- Or that history: "Inside one of the wide laboratories, two fisicians and a biologist are stand around a huge metal table. They are wearing tick ear plugs. Over the table there is a equipment with size and shape near of a television includinding a display and a horn. The equipment is a kind of siren

projected to generate a high frequency sound in a monstrous intensity. The scientists are researching the effects of this sound over objects, animals and men. They want to know if this sound can be used as weapon..." [12]

- Nevermind... I prefer to think that "the origins of the sounds are monads or prehensions that are filled with joy in themselves, with an intense satisfaction, as they fill up with their perceptions and move from one perception to another. And the notes of the scale are eternal objects, pure Virtualities that are actualized in the origins, but also pure possibilities that are attained in vibrations or flux." [13]

- Yes! "As if the instrumentalists played the little phrase far less than they were performing the rites it required in order to appear..." [14]

- Because "First the solitary piano grieved, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard its wail and responded to it like a neighboring tree. It was like the beginning of the world..." [15]

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[3] <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0003743> (visited in 09 March 2010).

[4] Paul Lansky: "A View from the Bus: When Machines Make Music" in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Summer, 1990), pp. 102-110.

[5] Edison Phonograph advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 Nov. 1910.

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[8] Joseph O'Connell: "The Fine-Tuning of a Golden Ear: High-End Audio and the Evolutionary Model of Technology" in *Technology and Culture* 33 (January 1992), pp. 1-37.

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[12] Max Gunther: "The Sonics Boom" in *Playboy*, May 1967.

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[15] Gottfried Leibniz apud Gilles Deleuze: "The fold: Leibniz and the Baroque" (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 91.