

ART 5

Ultra-red
10 PRELIMINARY
THESES ON
MILITANT SOUND
INVESTIGATION

Prelude

It was dusk. Do you remember? It was dusk and the evening wind pulled at our banners. Our demand: _____. What did you hear? For two hours the amplified speeches of movement leaders, representatives and those supposed to know better than we echoed through the towers downtown. When they gave the signal, five thousand moved through the avenues, our scripted utterances adhering to earlier statements. Our destination was another amplification system and another program of speeches. In an analysis of the echoes that we occupied, what did we hear?

Thesis: The field of sound is the site and the means of the Militant Sound Investigation. Regardless whether analogue or digital, *the record* gives object form to an undifferentiated field of sound. Through both magnetic particles and binary code, experience enters into *the record* and becomes available to be repeated and analyzed. What initially sounded like undifferentiated registers acquires through repetition and analysis a different texture of audibility. It is as if need, demand, desire have been rendered concrete. Militant Sound Investigation, simply put, derives from a practice of listening that intervenes upon the presumed fidelity of the audio recording. Analysis of the registers of need, demand, desire begins with an initial cut in *the record*. This may occur as an edit that differentiates between the terms within a **sound field** that will have been heard in real-time.

The discourse of community development uses the term “symbolic participation” to signify the co-optation of grass-roots participation: wherein the contribution of base communities has only a symbolic value. “Symbolic value” *for whom* remains ambiguous. If one is being charitable, one assumes symbolic only for those who subject themselves to participation. The current “tyranny” of participation requires a more rigorous analysis of each operative term in this critique — an analysis that

Thesis: The microphone facilitates an analytical listening — amplifying, directing, organizing, inflecting, sharpening, and mediating the desire to hear. As an amalgamated apparatus including earphones and recording device, the microphone is an instrument for listening to the undifferentiated field of need, demand, desire. Listening is organized on behalf of the microphone. It need not be the only means for practicing an analytical listening, however. Flip-chart paper and markers have a similar capacity. These technologies organize the collaboration through a practice of analytical listening that we call **pedagogy of the ear**.

takes as its primary object of critique, as Freire once argued, the anthropological concept of culture.

In advancing toward a rigorous conception of “symbolic value” we should begin by intervening upon the conjoining of the terms in the formulation. To such an end, we would do well to distinguish between the kinds of knowledge produced by the rituals of participation, on one hand, and knowledge produced in the organization of an investigation, on the other. Lacanian psychoanalysis assists us in understanding such a distinction through the terms of symbolic versus imaginary forms of

Thesis: The Militant Sound Investigation team comes together out of a shared need. Organizers, researchers, and sound artists are bound in their curiosity, friendship, love. This felt need may alone provide a catalyst for the investigation. Acknowledging an affiliation renders the first cut inscribed in the undifferentiated field of need, demand, desire. Each cut is an opportunity for differentiating, acknowledging, and organizing the field of sound. Hearing the need, questioning that need, and interrogating it in the course of listening marks one contour in an unbounded field. The Militant Sound Investigation convenes to **organize the silence** in which it begins.

knowledge. According to this distinction, symbolic participation (and the knowledge that participation produces) would not signify the kind of value attributed to participation as it is often practiced in the ideological apparatus of political-economic development. In that world, liberal acquiescence to anti-colonial struggles (struggles that cost many lives and brought many suppressive regimes into crisis) has resulted in ritual solicitation where the hopes and fears of “target populations” are brought into compliance with systems of administration and control. The purpose of such performances of participation is not an

Thesis: Inquiry is conditioned by the collective organizing of demands and does not conclude with a demand. The impulse to take the microphone out of the box and switch it to RECORD brings responsibility. If the Militant Sound Investigation waits to record only when the demand is articulated, it will be too late. If the team uses the microphone or any other apparatus only to record the demand then they have not listened with precision. Rather than privileging a demand, the microphone also has the capacity to recall the investigators to silence. Such a call can correct the tendency to fixate on demands that do not resonate with the curiosity, friendship, love that binds the team. In listening, the team transitions to demand. Demand, however, should not displace affiliation, for analysis is not concluded. The microphone does not represent an objective site of political struggle. Despite the longing for technology to provide a disinterested position, the microphone does not stand apart from the struggle and represent it dispassionately. Rather, it and the listening it organizes is a part of the production of the conditions of struggle. Listening is a site for the organization of politics. To help conceptualize this process, the formulation can be written: **sound field + organizing = soundscape.**

emancipatory organizing of hopes and fears but their extraction in value form only. That extraction comes to be signified by a sophisticated grammar in every social sphere once shaken by resistance and struggle, but now managed on behalf of the state.

By de-linking the symbolic from value, we understand the symbolic to be an inter-subjective web of signifiers by which subjects make meaning and act in the world. The key term here is inter-subjective: where those who make meaning and act accordingly do so as incomplete entities not entirely known

Thesis: Silence is the object cause of the desire to listen. They who hold the microphone listen in the space-time of silence. The organization of the sound field demands that the Militant Sound Investigation team listen in desire and that they listen beyond the contours of their needs. When the investigators take the microphone out of the box and switch the apparatus to RECORD, a remainder is produced. This remainder is the medium of inter-subjectivity. It is a manifestation of trust, which is to be together without demand for a time. Trust in/is the process. In a desire to produce cooperation, the Militant Sound Investigation collaborates across localities, identities, and disciplinary borders. The pedagogy of the ear, finely tuned to affective logic, prepares the collaboration to hear the remainder of demand beyond need and the remainder of desire beyond demand. We refer to the inquiry composed from this point as a **soundscape of struggle.**

to themselves nor to each other. Thus, the symbolic accounts for conscious and unconscious registers of experience and the meaning made of experience. For this reason the demand is always inclusive of both its conscious articulations responding to needs and that indivisible remainder known as desire. In its non-value form, participation produces a kind of symbolic knowledge of desire. This is not to say that no knowledge results from those rituals of participation by which subjects identify with the will of the state, the non-profit development corporation, the non-governmental organization, or the institution charged with

Interlude

We call a meeting. It convenes in silence. The silence is organized: What do you hear? When were you last here? What is the relationship between this place and the streets beyond? We collect in the course of listening. Listening is our agenda and our method. The apparatuses vary. Some days it is a microphone. At another time it is a flip-chart, paper and markers. It is always located in silence. Each encounter is a request for trust. Each act of trust is an encounter. What is important is that we have a record: paper, audio-recording, experience. Our collaborators and we enter a state of crisis at the loosening of coordinates provided by pre-inscribed demands. The terms of analysis determine the terms of intervention and the terms of our sponsors, patrons, boards of directors, ideologues, are exhausted. Existing interventions are increasingly ineffective. We build anew from what we hear in our investigations: needs, demands, desires.

The period of our collaboration is agreed upon. If we take to the street it is not a closure but another site for investigation and an opportunity to listen anew. Each new site is an undifferentiated field to be investigated, around which to gather and to engage needs, demands, desires. When we have a record we compose with it. This is not a repetition of an analysis. Rather, it is a re-listening inflected by a growing understanding of the conditions that define the sites and moments of our meetings. They are compositions because they apply a set of collectively defined procedures, the results of which are carefully tested and the procedures reworked. These compositions are the questions and themes for the next phase of an investigation. We record again. We review this record. We record, compose, review. Each composition is a protocol for investigations to be conducted in organizations, homes, institutions, parks, plazas, and streets. In the process, we make a future where we are unnecessary.

Thesis: Participation in its value form can be said to encompass all ten theses, defining Militant Sound Investigation in the negative. Preliminarily, Militant Sound Investigation, as a practice of organizing, can be delineated through ten terms: 1) the field of sound as site and means, 2) the role of the apparatus, 3) the definition of need, 4) of demand, 5) of desire, 6) the negation of the value form of participation, 7) a relationship to the echo, 8) to duration, 9) to crisis, and 10) the status of the technician of silence. The sixth term, the value form of participation, designates an ideology that emerges from political and social practices as they are actually performed, apart from whatever claims they make for themselves. By way of example, activism may claim to activate a site when, in practice, the scene appears to have been prepared prior to the activist's arrival. Activism undertakes research for the purpose of composing fixed analyses that then drive participation. Activism presumes an object/subject division: those who act as ideological patrons and those in need of patronage. It defines political subjectivity as that which the investigation brings to the other. Activism presumes its agents to be already organized prior to listening. Activism holds firm to a knowledge that never allows one to know when to be silent — silence signifies political failure. Activism only uses the microphone to amplify oneself. Activism gives priority to action alone. The sum of these dispositions constitutes the value form of participation.

administering crisis. In its value form, participation produces a very specific kind of knowledge. That knowledge aligns the subject with the terms of the master. In other words, in contrast to a symbolic participation that interrogates the very claims of signification ("Am I who you say I am?"), the value form of participation produces all manner of imaginary identifications ("I am the product of the master's desire for knowledge").

When Ultra-red speak of the value form of participation, we're talking about the university discourse; where the truth unsaid is the

Thesis: One can recognize ideological patrons by the echoes they conceal. In the value form of participation, the voice of the patron echoes pure and immutable. Heard thusly, the echo confirms that the ideological patron has invested the other with an analysis composed prior to their encounter. The echo of the patron's voice affirms the other as lacking and requiring the intervention of a patron. In this social relation, the mallet-like microphone simply amplifies established terms of analysis, delivers demands without listening, and insists on only one form of intervention — the endless repetition of a sealed demand. **The terms of analysis determine the terms of intervention.** The Militant Sound Investigation hears echoes differently. Like a sonographic rendering, echoes measure distance and duration as the materiality of sound. In this precise sense the Militant Sound Investigation holds that listening in the field of sound is the site and the means for the organization of politics.

master signifier masquerading behind the agency of knowledge (the master's desire to know, to subject, and to colonize). Rather, with inter-subjective (or, in Freire's term, dialogic) participation, the hidden truth is the object cause of desire — which, in the invocatory drive, is the object voice; the object cause of the desire to listen. Knowledge, then, is the product — knowledge of the truth of one's unconscious desire. As a result, the split subject acts upon the master signifier, questioning it, interrogating it, testing its limits. And what does it produce by acting (where

Thesis: The Militant Sound Investigation fights for the time to organize the sound field. While activism reacts to crises with speed, organizing intervenes by slowing time itself. Duration is an irreducible attribute of both recording and listening to the field of sound. In time one hears the site being organized. Analytical listening multiplies the recording or playback time of the sound field. Consequently, an hour of recorded time, or an hour of playback time becomes multiple hours in an investigation yielding the soundscape. Thus, to the earlier formulation — sound field + organizing = soundscape — is added: **soundscape x duration = soundscape of struggle**. The Militant Sound Investigation exceeds real-time. When listened to, time slows down. This is the syntax of sound.

action occurs through and along with reflection) upon the master signifier? It produces knowledge *of* the symbolic.

We would do well to remember that, according to Lacan's four discourses, the discourse of the analyst is the inverse of the master's discourse. Likewise, the hysteric is the inverse (the bringing into crisis) of the university. In the latter, the master signifier (the truth owned by the master) lurks behind knowledge acting upon the desires of the other, resulting in a subject who is stamped with the imprint of that master signifier. If this analysis

Thesis: Militant Sound Investigation — with its protocols of listening— has the potential to bring into crisis the investigation, its collaborators, and the organization acting as site for the inquiry. If the microphone records a site in the process of being organized, then any belief that the site is wholly organized prior to the investigation is liable to encounter crisis. How the team manages that crisis becomes the ideology of the Militant Sound Investigation. With trust, it is possible to engage productively the contradictions within the collaboration called forth by the investigation. The crisis of contradictions has its pedagogical uses: the re-organization of desire. Yet, dialectically, profound dangers also accompany crisis: specifically, **the inevitability of betrayal**.

invokes the image of a factory, one can think of the neoliberal term “knowledge factory” as descriptive of both the process of interpellating subjects but also of a particular mode of over-production as the basis of value. But this analysis should not be reduced to the specific institution of the university alone. The university discourse as analyzed by Lacan captures the operation of interpellation by any, in Althusser’s term, Ideological State Apparatus — whether that apparatus assumes the institutional framework of the university, the church, the trade union, the

Thesis: The initial voice of inquiry — the research militant — decays in time. In order to negate their own status as ideological patrons, research militants organize themselves as technicians of silence. Investigation team members are not the heroes of an analytical listening. In time, the team becomes irrelevant as the bonds of cooperation organize and re-organize the field. When the pedagogy of the ear obviates the investigation team, others assume the task of organizing the silence. New technicians of silence facilitate compositions from contradictions, devise strategies of listening from compositions, and register contradictions in the process of rigorous listening. At the moment of letting go, the team faces the threat of fixing itself into a vanguard of ideological patrons. If resisted, the team makes good on its promise of being **technicians of silence** and betrays its pedagogical position.

family, the law, the museum, or any civil society institution managing the other on behalf of the state. The question is, do those hailed by these institutions resolve their hysterical demands by establishing a new apparatus by which to be managed? Or, do they realize utopian capacity and transition from hysteria to analysis, i.e., from desire as the hidden truth of agency to desire as agent? If the organization of participation has any effect beyond mere value, it will contribute to precisely this transition.

Epilogue

It will be dusk soon. The demand presented in the crowded city will materialize as the result of a process simultaneously intended to constitute the crowd and the demand itself. And yet this will not be the moment in which we will exist. In this place and time soon to come, thousands will bind together based on some individual need to refuse their alienation in the wake of repressive and ideological state machineries. The catharsis pretending to be politics, in the end, will grant no remedy for that alienation, only a placebo in participation's value form.

The Militant Sound Investigation team will enter into this situation under cover of the public address system. The team will move through the crowd calling those around them to gather together. Questions will be asked: questions developed within the space and processes of their own engagements with communities in struggle. One can imagine the one-hundred questions in Marx's worker inquiry arising from just such a series of encounters. Instead of a questionnaire, the team will have adopted the form of a score. The questions in the score will resemble a composition founded on problematics enunciated in the course of investigations undertaken in another space and an earlier time. The impromptu gathering will convene in the plaza under the modernist public sculpture. With microphones in hand, the team members will diligently record the group's every reaction to the questions. Those

reactions that analyze the questions as either prelude to or refusal of an answer will acquire significance. While the grand sound-system amplifies one speech after another, these groups will work through the score, teasing out the themes contained within the echoes.

Later, the massifying mobilization will reach its solipsistic ending. Not far away, the Militant Sound Investigation team will compare their recordings of the discussions. An analysis will be written (with bibliography), proposals drafted based on the themes to arise out of the group discussions. Those themes will lead to new compositions — sound works, street theatre, graphic designs, handbills, or counter-chants — that will be reintroduced into that space during the next value form rally and massifying gathering. These compositions will compel two things; 1) They will not be read without being analyzed, this being the definition of listening, and 2) In reading and analyzing the compositions, the listeners on the street will organize themselves into new forms of being together. Out of this encounter, alternative or contrary actions will be planned in distinction from the value form that diminishes participation to a mere identification with the ideological patron. While we cannot know now the precise demand this inquiry will come to perform, we do know that the organization of the demand will enact a sonorous refusal of participation in its value form.

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The members of Ultra-red, occupying simultaneous positions as sound artists, researchers, and organizers in a variety of social movements, submit the following ten theses toward what we have termed, Militant Sound Investigation. The text has benefited greatly from critiques resulting from an earlier draft published in the single-issue online journal, "In the Middle of a Whirlwind: 2008 Convention Protests, Movement and Movements," organized by the collective, Team Colors. In order to challenge political and artistic radicals to rigorously conceptualize a practice of organizing, Ultra-red hope to put into circulation a lexicon of analytical concepts that seek to rethink the headlong rush into activism with its predetermined end-points and self-righteous street festivals. In asserting the priority of organizing, Ultra-red herein — as so often over the years — invoke the procedures of thematic investigation developed by Paulo Freire. We also acknowledge the more recent contributions to a praxis of research militancy by the collectives, Precarias a la Deriva and Colectivo Situaciones. Ultra-red offer these ten theses for Militant Sound Investigation for testing in the crucible of practice and reflection; the pillars of our constitutive utopias. The authors welcome ongoing feedback.

P.O. Box 291578
Los Angeles, CA 90029
U.S.A.

www.ultrared.org
www.publicrec.org
info@ultrared.org