

Self-Cancellation

When we are all guilty, that will be true democracy — Albert Camus

Western culture has burned out.

Modern society inherently tends towards a process of self-cancellation. You can see it in the 'integral accident' outlined by the great French philosopher Paul Virilio, which describes how every new technology contains within itself a new and never before imagined accident; before the train, there were no derailments.

And you can see it in the cancelling of geographic intervals due to globalisation. It used to be that the politics of nations and their alliances were governed by geographic distance, by international time differences. These barriers neither have their old influence or relevance in a society and global economy that has suffered a loss of local time and that now operates a 24 hour, round the clock global time, brought about by modern telecommunications and global industry.

Mutual assured destruction, Chernobyl, global warming, ethnic cleansing, suicide bombers, our mainstream mass media descending into a form of technological/ social control, the gambling 'industry', non-biodegradable plastics, the grave disarray, dishonesty and the ethical failure of UK politics, fevered right-wing/ nationalist objection to immigration, bloody hell, even social networking sites that insert computers as data-harvesting mediators between human relations are destroying our ability to communicate face to face.

***To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.* — Theodor Adorno**

In his introduction to *Art and Fear* by Paul Virilio, John Armitage recounts how Virilio considers Adorno's above statement to be, in today's climate, an underestimation, "given the increasing pace of artistic desperation, the catastrophes of modernity and the crisis in modern art". Yet while most art forms ignore Adorno's sentiment, some confront it and the catastrophes it refers to face on in the belief that artistic discourse, when allied with a broad social outlook, can raise awareness of these issues; can effect change.

One of the first artists to address this tendency towards destruction, and to believe that art could challenge this, was Gustav Metzger. In 1959 he wrote his first Manifesto for Auto-Destructive Art, which outlined in bold, inspired language an approach to art that calls for the creation of works that destroy themselves as a conclusion of their own conception and whose transience exists as a metaphor for this wider social trend towards self-destruction. Examples of this approach include *Acid Action Painting*, in which hydrochloric acid is painted directly onto large canvasses of nylon, corroding and eating the nylon on contact, and *Construction with Glass*, in which glass sheets (suspended with masking tape), were arranged in such a way as to fall to the ground in an orchestrated, composed manner.

In 1966 Mr. Metzger also convened the highly influential Destruction in Art Symposium; an unprecedented gathering of underground and counter-culture artists whose objective was "to focus attention on the element of destruction in Happenings and other art forms, and to relate this destruction in society." In a decade of so many incredible artistic upheavals and leaps forward, DIAS, (with the participation Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, Peter Weibel and Henri Chopin to name a few) stands out as one of the most significant turning points in 20th Century avant-thought, introducing ideas of destruction, performance, aktionism and trauma in art to a wider public and for the first time.

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This event is inspired by Mr. Metzger's early manifestoes. It's been created very collaboratively as a commissioning project: principally with Rhodri Davies, with the support of London Musicians' Collective, Arika, and I'm proud to say, with keening and collaborative input from Mr. Metzger himself. We were interested in looking at how ideas of auto-destruction, or self-cancellation in sound and music could be presented and worked up.

In response to Mr. Metzger's original manifestoes, Rhodri has written a new document, *9 Principles for Self-Cancellation in Sound*. We have invited a clutch of experimental musicians to respond to this document, under Rhodri's guidance: each of the performances in some way involve a musical form of self-cancellation. For example; Mark and John Bain will present performance project where they attach seismic sensors and oscillators to the buildings. Working with the direct sound of the architecture they create a resonance and feedback within the physical structure, itself becoming an instrument of its own cancellation; Rhodri Davies has composed a new graphic score *palimpsest 1* inspired by Mr. Metzger's work with newspapers, in which 9 consecutive days Su Doku puzzles from The Guardian are overlaid, creating a self-cancelling set of instructions for 9 musicians.

Barry Esson

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9 Principles of Self-Cancellation in Sound

1. Self-cancellation is a form of correction, an auto-destruction. Every correction is annihilation. What could be considered improvement is nothing but deterioration and destruction.
2. Sound dissipates – it is transient. The kinetic energy of the vibrating particles in a sound wave is eventually transformed into heat energy.
3. Self-cancellation in sound involves physical manipulation. There are times where the artist is in firm control of the character and timing of the cancellation process; there are other times where the process controls the artist.
4. To annul is to create a void that opens up the possibility for something else.
5. Self-cancellation in sound incorporates the idea, site, space, scale, form, timbre, method and timing of the disintegrative process.
6. Memory, hearing, body and instrument all auto-destruct with time.
7. Materials and techniques that might be used to demonstrate self-cancellation in sound include: acid, acoustics, amplification, auditory-masking, battery, breath, combustion, compact disc, computer, corrosion, difference-tones, dry-ice, electricity, electromagnetism, feedback, frequency, harp, heat, hearing-aid, headphone, human energy, invisible ink, lathe, light, metal, microphone, nut, nylon, oscillator, paper, phase-cancellation,

piezo, pressure, radio, reed, sand, sound, slide-projector, speaker, standing-waves, tape, vibration, vinyl, water, wood.

8. A score can consist of a self-cancelling, process-based palimpsest.
9. Destruction leads to change and creation. Auto-destructive becomes auto-creative sound.

Rhodri Davies

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