

The Noise of the World

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This essay traverses a heterogeneous terrain, finding important links in the ideas of Jacques Derrida and John Cage, and relating these to diverse cultural topics such as film soundtrack design, audio art, Saussurian linguistics, the sound and light shows at the Egyptian pyramids, the analogic nature of digital information, and cybernetics. Furthermore, the essay attempts to create some bridges—through the concept of “perceptual difference”—between the divergent world pictures (to use Heidegger’s term) of cognitive psychology (with its quantitative frame of analysis) and the more slippery domain of hermeneutics.

I. Locating Silence

The question of silence is inseparable from a certain atopia. It is nowhere to be heard, as there is no such thing as a place without sound of any kind. Everyone knows that outer space, to be sure, is silent, but this silence is only technical, and is a kind of limit-possibility, is an absolute in the way that death is an absolute. It is always on the other side of the horizon, and thus it bears within itself tropes of quests and intimations, as it also beckons a slew of repressions and compensations. Thus our science fiction films always give us the roar of the rockets, the booming explosions, and the affective omniscience of film music—the silence of space is made loud and noisy, bustling with activity so unlike death. The occasional films which omit sound when outside the spacecraft still have to contend with the candy wrappers and plastic lids and the coughing of the theatre space, so the silence of space can only be alluded to, barely auditioned. Perhaps the closest we get to the silence of space is the tinny voice of the headset, and the rhythm of breathing amplified in the astronaut’s helmet, the claustrophobia of atmospheric recirculation, such that silence is brought so close that it frames our perceptions and the action. Silence then takes on the explosive-ness of an immanent possibility. Like death.

It is no accident that we bring up cosmic space in our first consideration of the thematic of silence. For we can say, silence is the sound of space, quiet is always the sound of a place. For the closest approximation to silence is quiet, but to think of quiet is always to suggest *a* quiet: the quiet of the library, of a forest clearing, of anywhere at three in the morning. Silence, however, is a corollary of absolute space, of pure, uninterrupted extension,

the space of Descartes and Newton, amongst others, deplacialized space, or space uninflected, the happy medium for grids of all kinds. Noise localizes, for sounds have sources. They emanate from centers, or multiple centers, as in the accumulation of the traffic hum which is the acoustic signature of urban spaces.

Silence is as well the transposition onto the acoustic plane of the blankness of paper, whether white or yellowy. Western art music shares this white silence with writing and painting.

Rauschenberg had presented, in the early fifties, a series of monochrome paintings entitled the *White Paintings*. Here, too, the apparent emptiness reveals an active vitality and presence of light, color, and movement. Rauschenberg's radical move towards white paintings certainly drove Cage to present his own "white" work, the silent piece.

'To Whom It May Concern: the white paintings came first; my silent piece came later.'¹

There is no purely and strictly phonetic writing. What is called phonetic writing can only function...by incorporating nonphonetic "signs" (punctuation, spacing, etc.).²

The imperative of silence for music, one can imagine, originates from the margins of the notation system, the white in-between of notes and staff lines, as well as the silence that is reading and writing, i.e. the silence of speechlessness, St. Augustine's instinctive horror at the silence of the figure at the lectern, the silence of unvocalized interiority, the silence necessary as the medium of thought.

The superabundant display of vitality, which takes the form of knocking, hammering, and tumbling things about, has proved a daily torment all my life long. There are people, it is true—nay, a great many people—who smile at such things, because they are not sensitive to noise; but they are just the very people who are not sensitive to argument, or thought, or poetry, or art, in a word, to any kind of intellectual influence...On the other hand, noise is a torment to intellectual people. In the biographies of almost all the great writers, or wherever their personal utterances are recorded, I find complaints about it; in the case of Kant, for instance, Goethe, Lichtenberg, Jean Paul...³

Western art music traditionally has existed in a sort of subtractive relationship to the soundscape, being predicated on a certain silencing of the world. If this seems an overstatement, one need only look to certain recording practices for confirmation. On the Telarc⁴ recording of Mendelsohn's "Organ Symphony," for example, the sound engineers rerouted traffic in a four-block radius around the cathedral in which the work was being recorded, in order to prevent acoustic contamination. Or consider the invention of the noise gate, created to minimize or eliminate extraneous and unwanted sounds in the recording space. By contrast, on many ethnographic recordings the sounds of insects, wildlife, weather and village life are apparent, infiltrating the music which exists in a certain additive relationship to the soundscape. The music is a sound amongst others.

Silence is an effect, specifically, a technological and architectural effect, a hyperquiet that perhaps can trace its lineage to the invention of masonry walls, i.e. walls composed of solid planes and thus impermeable to the sounds that might creep in through a mesh of leaves or the gaps in bundled saplings. Silence as a fantasy or an act of imagination will thus be linked to a certain stage of civilization. For we can imagine the difference between death in the jungle and death in the polis. In the former situation, one imagines that the cessation of movement on the part of the deceased may lead to a heightened sensitivity to the surrounding activity of the place—the animal sounds, the wind in the foliage; in other words, all that may have been tuned out when giving attention to another would uncannily return to the foreground. By contrast, city death implies the silence of the tomb, prepared somewhat by the echoey sonorousness of the temple. Thus silence can be linked to a certain stony sense of enclosure, interiority, and ultimately—implosion.

II. "A" Silence

There are no noisy tourists in Derrida's pyramid.

- ...the silent writing of its a...
- ...the inaudible but displaced character of this literal permutation...
- ...this silent spelling mistake...
- ...it is written or read, but is not heard...
- ...by a silent mark, by a tacit monument, or, one might say, by a pyramid...
- ...silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb...

...It is a tomb that cannot even be made to resonate...
 ...this pyramidal silence...
 ...this silence that functions only within what is called phonetic writing...
 ...and it is itself silent...
 ...is inaudible. The inaudible opens the two present phonemes to hearing...
 ...the silent token I must give...
 ...this unheard-of thought, this silent tracing...
 ...a task whose statement has remained nearly inaudible...
 ...in being sounded it dies away, like the writing of the a, inscribing its pyramid in difference...⁵

The silent a of difference, a grapheme without a phoneme, or writing without the presence of speech to authorize it, shares a space, to be sure, with a certain invisibility:

It will perhaps be objected that, for the same reasons, the graphic difference itself sinks into darkness, that it never constitutes the fullness of a sensible term, but draws out an invisible connection⁶

The “matinal trace” of difference is lost in an irretrievable invisibility, and yet its loss is covered, preserved, regarded, and retarded.⁷

But this invisibility is somehow “less” than the inaudibility. For certain strategic reasons (i.e. the traditional privileging of speech over writing), the difference between “difference” and “difference,” or between presences and their effacement, phonemes and their spacing and temporization, will be made a matter for silence.

A silence, however, made visible, embodied and envisaged, by the pyramid, the letter “A.” For it is necessary to *imagine* difference, since it is properly neither a word nor a concept. It is approachable only by way of metaphor, and by a certain deafness. It would not be incorrect to characterize difference as an implosive potential in language. For the metaphor of the pyramid only works insofar as it is the interiority of the pyramid where the silence resides. (“Shhhh. The tour guy’s speaking.”) The trickle of stones down the sides and through the cracks, the attrition and gentle sandblasting of the hard angles, desert crickets, that fat lady who won’t stop cackling, the

echoes and reverberation of footsteps—these are not what Derrida’s image of the pyramid is meant to bring to mind. It may be objected that any opposition between interiority and exteriority is itself a construct put to work by difference, but we respond that insofar as this construct may destabilize, the threat will be intrastructural.

We do not have to squint too hard at Derrida’s text to note this implosiveness.

How do we conceive of the outside of a text? How, for example, do we conceive of what stands opposed to the text of Western metaphysics? To be sure [the trace]...escapes all the determinations, all the names it might receive in the metaphysical text. The trace is sheltered and thus dissimulated in these names; it does not appear in the text as the trace “itself.”⁸

The thinking of difference prohibits a certain outside, almost as a kind of law, “You may not go outside.” There is nothing outside of the text, as Derrida has said. Or, we may write, *outside*. The trace is always “sheltered,” within the pyramid, within the silence. It is intervalic, always the “between,” spacing and deferring presences. The Derridean text is a kind of closed universe which opens inwards, towards a quasi-transcendent interiority which is neither a center nor an origin but which is nevertheless originary. The image of the pyramid guides us, but other images begin to become superimposed upon it: the gravity well of a black hole, or the spiral of the vortex, even a certain image of emanation, and perhaps of emanationism (without, of course, the implications of the surplus Being of negative theology, which Derrida is at pains to set his thinking off against, as difference relegates any “being” to the status of an effect.). But already we are causing the image of the pyramid to resonate with other images, and silence does not resonate.

Or at least it is prohibited from doing so, for then it would lose something of its myth, its aura, its power of fascination, its gravity and danger. (“Keep your hands off- your finger oil will destroy the ruins!”) And of course, we must wonder at the reification of silence in the figure, and repetition, of the pyramid.

There is of course another “outside” that is cancelled in the thinking of difference—the outside of language we might normally, in a move of infinite naiveté, call the “world” as accessed through “perception”—an outside so banally obvious it risks being irrelevant. But nevertheless it would be the

outside of the “shelter” of the trace, the desert of the pyramid (lest it be a figure without a ground). This outside would then have to be something audible, and efface the acoustic image of silence which has guided the thought of difference, the thought of the silent a:

There will be no unique name, not even the name of Being. It must be conceived without nostalgia; that is, it must be conceived outside the myth of the purely maternal or paternal language belonging to a lost fatherland of thought. On the contrary, we must affirm it—in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmation into play— with a certain laughter and a certain dance.⁹

Laughter and music (insofar as the sound of dance is music rather than heels clogging on the floorboards or the little shuffling sounds of the ballerina, at least until John Cage and Merce Cunningham appeared on the scene) appear after the long sojourn through silence that is the reading of this text, “Difference.” However, laughter and music are certainly within the realm of the audible and visible which hitherto had been perhaps relegated to the plane of differences rather than difference. It is as if at the threshold of silence one has to make some noise, as if throughout the reading of the text we have been holding our breath, in order not to hear it, and that now we must let it out, in a specifically audible affirmation. Why bring out the noisemakers at the conclusion of an essay primarily concerned with the thought of silence?

We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy’s founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible.¹⁰

We can of course wonder if the text has in some way sided with the intelligible over and against the sensible. For it seems somewhat risky to posit the imperceptible (i.e. the unseen and unheard) as a strategy for negotiating and destabilizing the “founding opposition.” The very characterization of difference in terms of the inaudible and invisible puts a certain strain on the ears and eyes, forces a certain squinting and calls for a kind of sonar on the part of the reader, in order to “hear” the unheard but imagined silence at the heart of the tomb, while at the same time guaranteeing that the thought of difference remain intelligible in its exposition, with the graphic of the “a,” or with the parenthetical remarks “with and a” or “with an e” which are

given, as the essay was indeed written to be read to an audience. A text by Kierkegaard thematizes this phenomenon of “squinting at the text,” and we reproduce a part of it here in order to better grapple with this squinting.

Somewhere in Holland there lived a learned man, he was an orientalist and was married. One day he did not come to the midday meal, although he was called. His wife waits longingly, looking at the food, and the longer this lasts the less she can explain his failure to appear. Finally she resolves to go over to his room and exhort him to come. There he sits alone in his work-room, there is nobody with him. He is absorbed in his oriental studies. I can picture it to myself. She has bent over him, laid her arm about his shoulders, peered down at the book, thereupon looked at him and said, “Dear friend, why do you not come over and eat?” The learned man perhaps has hardly had time to take account of what was said, but looking at his wife he presumably replied, “Well, my girl, there can be no question of dinner, here is a vocalization I have never seen before. I have often seen the passage quoted, but never like this, and yet my edition is an excellent Dutch edition. Look at this dot here! It is enough to drive one mad.” I can imagine that his wife looked at him, half-smiling, half-deprecating that such a little dot should disturb the domestic order, and the report recounts that she replied, “Is that anything to take so much to heart? It is not worth wasting one’s breath on it.” No sooner said than done. She blows, and behold the vocalization disappears, for this remarkable dot was a grain of snuff. Joyfully the scholar hastens to the dinner table, joyful at the fact that the vocalization had disappeared, more joyful in his wife.¹¹

Kierkegaard’s parable throws reading back onto seeing, vocalization back onto breath, and dislocates the silence and solitude of reading with the intervention of another, the wife, who with a breath dispels the vexing dot. The silence of reading is effaced by the smell of dinner on the table, and scholarly struggle effaced by domestic joy. The furrow in the text mirrored by the furrow in the scholar’s brow materializes, becomes pervious to breath. The mysterious “dot” in Kierkegaard’s text bears a curious semblance to Derrida’s invisible “point of nonrelation,” i.e. a point to be squinted hard at, even in coffee shops, impossible to see. Derrida’s effort is in part to bracket out “the perception of gain and the gain of perception”¹² from this new

order, this order other than the sensible/intelligible opposition.

But do not the senses perceive differences? Why not organize a reflection on difference around a meditation on the most obvious differences, the differences of the striations of wood on the podium at which Derrida speaks, for instance? What if the differential order of language were an order amongst other differential orders? But then this would perhaps threaten the “originary” status of linguistic difference. Cognitive psychologists, for example, speak of “just noticeable differences” in the perceptual organs, and attempt to quantify the difference thresholds. The point at which the ears detect a change in pitch, or the eyes a change in color, have the philosophically uncomfortable, or at least untrendy (to today’s audience) characteristics of universality, innateness, of being “hard-wired,” i.e. “outside” of cultural milieu, of history and tradition, of oh shall we say *text*. It is perhaps in this light that we can see Derrida’s investment in warding off perception, of avoiding perceptual difference.

There is of course a prejudice which holds that language alone has the power to make distinctions, but such a prejudice runs the risk of being very close to a kind of omnipotence fantasy. This prejudice is certainly prevalent in Saussure:

Psychologically our thought—apart from expression in words—is only a vague and indistinct mass.... Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebulae. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.¹³

Thus without language there are no differences, just the non-image of the nebulous or amorphous (which is still an image!). Of course, anyone who has ever wondered at the exquisite sensitivities and intricate structures of our perceptual organs would find it difficult to grant language all powers of distinction that be. Else how could the grizzly bear discern the fish beneath the frothing brook, or the eagle single out the tawny rabbit darting amongst the undergrowth?

We start with the elementary concept that each living organism is continuously engaged in interchange with its environment.... The composition of the immediate environment cannot therefore be regarded as unchanging. Consequently it may become important to the survival of an organism that it should detect and respond to certain crucial

aspects of environmental change....

The function of each particular sense organ is to focus upon one specific feature of environmental change and to signal the current value of the intensity of that change.¹⁴

Thus it is claimed that the sense organs are responsive primarily to changes, i.e. differences, rather than discreet presences. It is not as simple as all becoming an indistinct mass without the discerning power of language.

Thus Derrida will have to take pains to route the body from any claim on difference which may threaten what one might call the hegemony of linguistic difference.

...[C]ould we not, quite simply and without any neographism, call it differentiation? Among other confusions, such a word would suggest some organic unity, some primordial and homogenous unity, that would come to be divided up and take on difference as an event.¹⁵

A certain impoverishment is imputed to discourses of the “organic.” An inadequacy towards the multifarious and heterogeneous, as well as a certain nostalgia for the undifferentiated, is ascribed to what necessarily intersects a multitude of discourses, from zoology to biochemistry to bioacoustics to micro physiology to ethology to psychoacoustics to plain old high school biology. At a time when bodies have come to be seen as “a complex ecology of subsystems,” “corporate entities of...cellular communities,”¹⁶ i.e. when precisely the text of the organic is not dominated by a worn-out aesthetic principle but is rather composed of a host of discourses which may at any point intervene, take on relevance, even contaminate post-Saussurian linguistic discourses (i.e. the aforementioned bioacoustics and psychoacoustics), it seems to be a strange move on Derrida’s part to at one stroke eliminate perception with an impossible, barely imaginable, imperception. It is as though silence and the invisible had to be invented because they are the imperceptible as such. Moreover, the emphasis on the silence rather than the invisibility of difference seems necessary precisely because on the visual-spatial plane there is no “in between” of differences—there are just differences, two colors side by side, for instance—whereas the acoustic plane is temporal, and the intervals between sounds can be conceived as silence, as the absence of perception. But as John Cage discovered, this too is a fiction.

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we might 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 materials, 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. One need not fear about the future of music.¹⁷

Derrida's pyramid is Cage's anechoic chamber. At least up to the point when Cage entered. Then, at the exact moment when silence would have been heard, and culminated itself as a place, the pyramid vanishes and what might have been an intimation of death becomes a soundscape of life. It may be that the anechoic chamber is in a sense the vestibule of Derrida's pyramid, for the pyramid will of course be on the other side of mortality, finitude, of all that is delimited. This vestibule anticipates silence, prompts mortal reflections, "Until I die there will be sounds." Until... Death deferred, the anechoic chamber postpones and displaces even the pyramid. Like the pyramid, and the space shuttle which attains the proximity of silence, and even like the technical language which is philosophical discourse, the anechoic chamber is a highly engineered situation. It is a giant astronaut's helmet, throwing perception back onto the body's irreducibility. And yet the technics necessary to silence contradicts precisely and paradoxically the entropic character of death. It is as if absolute silence shared conceptual space with technics as well as death. The different registers of the nervous and circulatory systems resounding on the threshold of silence function in an analogous manner to the noise of affirmation which culminates and usurps Derrida's metaphor of the tomb.

To amalgamate J.D. with J.C., *there is always already noise.*

Amongst the most interesting discoveries of bioacoustics is the phenomenon of ecosystemic vocal differentiation. In other words, it is found that, within a given ecosystem, the frequency bands of the acoustic spectrum will be divided up amongst the inhabitant species, such that those bands of frequencies primary to vocalization will overlap only at the extremities, while species within a given ecosystem that share a common bandwidth of

vocalization will be temporally differentiated into nocturnal and diurnal orientations, so as not to jam each others' signals. Thus the soundscape is a kind of radio dial wherein each species has been allotted a bandwidth. Not by some kind of trans-species FCC, i.e. some Authorial Being, to be sure (such a being would already have its bandwidth allotted to it by a difference which would exceed it), but, undeniably, out of a difference in the general economy to which each species' communicative wavelengths would be as restricted economies. And it is no different for human speech, which has its range that overlaps and is delimited by the vocalities of other beings.

Between the phonemes there is not silence, but rather *the noise of the world*, the spacing and placing within an interval, it should go without saying, that has little to do with silence. There is room for us and others to communicate. Language is a sound amongst sounds, perhaps even a language amongst languages. It is a clearing in the field of noise, though permeated by it, sensibility within an excess of signal.

III. *Vanishing Silence*

A certain outward move is required, an ecstatic opening in the text to counter its implosive tendencies, its tilt toward the silences and violences of primal repressions, "the death of the king,"¹⁸ the tilt towards the always-sheltered, quasi-noumenal meta-traumatics of "primordial difference."¹⁹ We can trace such an ecstatic condition in certain ecological discourses which destabilize language as the property, or what is proper, to homo anthropocentricus, and dislocate the specism constitutive of logocentrism. One trace of this destabilization can be sought out in theories of the paralinguistic and preverbal, and the relationship of human language, thought of as digital, to analogic animal communication systems. This distinction of digital and analog does not bear the structure of an opposition or dialectic, but rather resembles the distinction of difference and difference, insofar as its structure is that the latter underlies, sustains and produces the former.

How does it happen that the paralinguistics and kinesics of men from strange cultures, and even the paralinguistics of other terrestrial mammals, are at least partly intelligible to us, whereas the verbal languages of men from strange cultures seem to be totally opaque?....

Verbal language is almost (but not quite) purely digital. The word "big" is not bigger than the word "little"; and in general there is

nothing in the pattern (i.e. the system of interrelated magnitudes) in the word “table” which would correspond to the system of interrelated magnitudes in the object denoted. On the other hand, in kinesic and paralinguistic communication, the magnitude of the gesture, the loudness of the voice, the length of the pause, the tension of the muscle, and so forth—these magnitudes commonly correspond (directly or inversely) to magnitudes in the relationship that is the subject of the discourse.²⁰

Thus language, we might say, resonates with nonlanguage, or not-quite-language, takes on perceptual magnitudes, is contaminated with the foreign bodies and the animal like-language which we ascribe to those bodies, “communication systems” or “signaling” patterns. The silence of the trace can only have meant the silencing of the animal in the voice, even the silencing of the tree in the paper, and the petroleum biomatter or squidean vicissitudes of ink. The imperceptibility of the order of difference seems to have attempted to obscure a certain bewildering profusion of signification. As a comment to the Kabbalah reads, “Do not think of it as ink on paper. Think of it as black fire on white fire.”²¹ To recognize this is only to call attention to the noise floor of language, which at the same time introduces an inescapable ecstatic horizon to the text.

The unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its-environment.²²

The individual mind is imminent not only in the body. It is imminent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem....

Freudian psychology expanded the concept of mind inwards to include the whole communication system within the body—the autonomic, the habitual, and the vast range of unconscious processes. What I am saying expands mind outwards. And both of these changes reduce the scope of the conscious self. A certain humility becomes appropriate, tempered by the dignity or joy of being part of something much bigger.²³

David Dunn, a sound artist and theorist, has built upon this image of ecological communication to propose an interface for questions relating

music to language. In his thinking, music functions as “creative dissociation,”²⁴ a vital play of sound which “demilitarizes”²⁵ language. He writes of the “interactive imperative,”²⁶ the necessity of thwarting the closure of the digital realm:

If an individual species developed sufficient self-referential complexity (i.e., the cognitive domain of the conscious human mind) to escape the “orbital influence” of the larger mental structure within which it was resident, conflict might arise. Unless balanced patterns of interaction are retained that allow for “linkup” between individualized consciousness and the ecosystemic mind, the individualized mind could forget itself as a component and begin to behaviorally subvert the larger structure. Such a separate mental system might, however, retain elements susceptible to influence from the ecosystemic structure and continue to exhibit behavior reminiscent of its more archaic function as a mental component.²⁷

It would be the task of music, then, to activate this “archaic function,” to keep operative the forgotten and repressed linkage to sounds-at-large.

As an escape valve [music] has channeled the overflow of our body expressivity into a communicative act, which allows other levels of the mental structure to be resonated. Musicians have generated interactive mental structures analogous to the now truncated ecosystemic mind which may also fulfill a similar function within the deep structure of our individual physiologies.²⁸

Despite our CDs and DVDs there is, properly speaking, no such thing as digital sound. The closure of the binary apparatus is effected by a double opening, analog-to-digital converters on the input side, digital-to-analog converters on the output side. The opaque, quietly humming box of the computer at the heart of a digital audio workstation is an ecstatic image of language, *an image of the digital as analogic detour*. The digital of writing’s black and white, or speech’s vocalizing and pausing, takes on the analogic vertigo of something we perceive. It is an inverted Derridean pyramid—it lights up and hum—and quietly so, unlike like the sound and light shows one finds at the actual pyramids, i.e. a fervent repression of silence and death, of the quiet one might like to find there.

We can answer that famous smart alec question posed by some sleepy, semiotic student: “Uh, what about onomatopoeia, Dr. Saussure? Isn’t that, like, nonarbitrary? Isn’t that kinda sorta like language glued to perception?” Onomatopoeia, like signaling “hunger” with your hand on your belly, is analog communication. The various ways of saying that you are hungry, in the world’s cornucopia of lingo, is digital stuff. There is no formal opposition, no privilege to get uptight about, because even digital signs have to be seen or heard. And once perceived, we imagine it digitally in our heads, or wherever our culture tells us the seat of thought happens to reside that day.

We should, finally, touch upon the characterization of *differance* which we have as yet neglected, namely, the image of play. It is pertinent to recall play precisely at the moment we have been thinking of music. For play is of course the source of the hubbub of dancing and laughing which affirmed the silence of the text.

With its *a*, *differance* more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the play of differences.²⁹

We are here to think of play as an originary element, thrust out of its difference and opposition to work, though one could say that the work of *differance* is difference, insofar as differences are said to be produced. Play, one might say, unlike work, produces nothing, or simply produces itself.

Obviously the non-rigidified mental play of children forms an important part of their language acquisition skills and may have always played a major role in the evolution of language throughout human history.³⁰

More specifically the incomprehensibility of later twentieth-century art to which I refer has much to do with its syntactically assumed/speech-modulated language constructs.³¹

We have allowed the thought of play to lead us, quite naturally, to the thought of children, to thoughts on acquisition of syntax, and to thoughts about work, i.e. production. Of course, the play of children, like the work of adults, is often noisy, though to attend to these differences, these oppositions constructing themselves so quickly, almost, so silently, we require a certain

quiet place to think them. It thus seems appropriate to end with such a quiet place, a beach, for instance, as opposed to the rambunctious noisy silence of outer space where we began this essay. We might end, perhaps, with an insuperable poem, of play and work, laughter and ocean waves, children and men, by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore.³²

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

Notes

¹ Eric De Visscher, "There's no such thing as silence...": John Cage's Poetics of Silence" in *Writings About John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelnetz (University of Michigan Press, 1993), 131.

² Jacques Derrida, "Difference," in *Speech and Phenomena* (Northwestern University Press, 1979), 133.

³ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Noise" in *Great Essays*, ed. Houston Peterson (Washington Square Press, 1964), 157.

⁴ As related on a radio program by one of the album's recording engineers.

⁵ Derrida 133-159.

⁶ Derrida 133.

⁷ Derrida 157.

⁸ Derrida 158.

⁹ Derrida 159.

¹⁰ Derrida 133

¹¹ Soren Kierkegaard, "The Wife of the Orientalist." in *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Princeton University Press, reprint edition, 1989), 126.

¹² Derrida 142.

¹³ Ferdinand de Saussure, "Course in General Linguistics" in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (University of Toronto Press, 1992), 7.

¹⁴ T.D.M. Roberts, "Energy, Transducers, and Sensory Discrimination," in *Handbook of Perception Volume 3- Biology of Perceptual Systems*, ed. Edward C. Carterette and Morton P. Friedman (Academic Press, 1973), 2.

¹⁵ Derrida 143.

¹⁶ David Dunn, "Environment, Consciousness, and Magic," in *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics*, ed. John Rahn (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1994), 243.

¹⁷ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 8.

¹⁸ Derrida 132.

¹⁹ Derrida 138.

²⁰ Gregory Bateson, "Problems in Cetacean and Other Mammalian Communication," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 373.

²¹ As related by a Kabbalah scholar on National Public Radio.

²² Gregory Bateson, "Form, Substance, Difference," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.

²³ Bateson 467-468.

²⁴ David Dunn, "Speculations: On the Evolutionary Continuity of Music and Animal Communication Behavior." in *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics*, ed. John Rahn (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1994), 182.

²⁵ Dunn 191.

²⁶ Dunn 185.

²⁷ Dunn 184.

²⁸ Dunn 189.

²⁹ Derrida 130.

³⁰ Dunn 182.

³¹ Dunn 190.

³² Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (Scribner, reprint edition, 1997), 78.