

OUT OF PHASE::

or

RE-THINKING THE DESIGNED ARTEFACT IN 'ACOUSTIC' SPACE

or AGAINST ABSOLUT IMPOTENCE or A SEARCH FOR AGENCY or ACCESS > POSSESSION or ARTICULATING ANTI-DESIGN

or FEEL FREE TO SUGGEST SOMETHING:

(WHO SAYS A DOCUMENT MUST BE FINISHED WHEN YOU PRINT IT?)

About the title

“OPEN WIRELESS TRANSMISSION,
BEING TRULY/ACOUSTIC, IS A GROUP VOICE.”

Marshall McLuhan: The Global Villiage

Out of phase is the audible loss of integrity/fidelity in which two sound waves to or from a source point arrive at different times. One of the waves opposes the other, causing undesirable overtones and harmonics to be heard, and fundamentals to be cancelled out. In positing *anti-design* as a considered oppositional/alternative practice, this body of work will attempt to nullify or interfere with the conventions of ‘graphic’ design practice and the rhetoric surrounding it.

This week I have begun learning C++/Cocoa programming language to gain access to lower level hardware functions not afforded by my training in web languages. The “::” operator indicates an *interface*, which is also an extension of an existing class/framework. An interface allows an object to inherit the functions of its parent, while extending them to perform new functions. Since human/computer interfaces are to be an important part of the methodology, I included this reference in the title.

The notion of ‘phasing out’ also signifies a trend I observed during my time working in the corporate identity/branding industry. Designers and advertisers as mediators of communication are being ‘phased out’ by *user-driven point-to-point media contexts*, a trend that is important as we imagine what the future holds for [visual] communication designers and the artefacts they produce.

What?

I intend to re-imagine the role of the designer as we move from sculptors of artefacts to builders of contexts. I propose to explore this paradigm shift through a series of interventions and provocations in digital and analogue space. [Perhaps we are all to become spatial designers?]

It is a nuanced implementation of anti-design (or perhaps post-design) as a considered oppositional or alternative practice, less the pseudo-punk overtures of Lasn and (more recently) Brody. Their frenzied and largely shallow, aesthetic approaches (particularly the Adbusters) to the critique of 21st Century cultural production have led to an important baby being tossed out with the PMS-102-and-spraypaint bathwater.

I also wish to extend/update the thinking of Matt Soar's assertions to include perspectives on the role of digital media in cultural production. He wrote mainly around 2001-2002, well before social media was a

legitimate publishing vessel, and well before it challenged the design industry monopoly on communication practice. Since interfaces can 'take care of' the functional aspects of design practice, designers can be freed up to be active agents, initiators rather than intermediaries.

The context and message required to form meaning are inseparable, "Meaning inheres in the world as we find it" (Dourish, p.22). Designers-as-content-mediators are being replaced by designers-as-context-makers in which interface acts as the mediator, not the creative practitioner. The creative agency is expended in producing the context or set of instructions, and the message is the creative agency of the participants (actors).

McLuhan's notion of 'acoustic' transmission offers a framework for this body of thinking through design. If communication is carried in sound waves even in its derivative technological forms, then properties of audio transmission and the notation of

music (scoring) provide a poetic structure for documenting and understanding this project. A useful precedent for implementing metaphor as structure (or meta-structure) in a body of thought is found in Paul Carter's *Material Thinking* (2004). Carter utilises allegories of weave, the cadence of the shuttle, and temporal apertures (the "critical time") to arrive at a fresh perspective on collaborative practice, and in an artful twist of language, demonstrates how these were never merely metaphor, but rather a way of thinking through material.

When approaching my project with this new set of eyes, I was surprised to discover the strong 'acoustic' components of my previous experimental work with the fax machine. Since facsimiles are transmitted through the telephone line (an electro-acoustic medium), they are in effect a modulated voice. I believe this validates the role of audio as a vital structural element, and have begun to apply it to sections of this document.

What?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (AND CONCERNS)

- How will graphic designers measure 'success' in a post-capitalist space?
- What is the future role of grapheospatial designers as mediators, navigators or tour guides of 'common space'?
- Is 'graphic dissent' valid?
- What distinguishes this design activity from other forms of creative practice?
- Where is digital culture located? In our bedrooms? Our pockets? The ether?
- What is the agency of interface?
- Why does any of this matter? Isn't it just elitist grandstanding retarding the progress of humanity? Sagmeister, Beirut et al argue that since our practice often involves some form of intentional distortion our best hope is to 'do no harm'.
- VCD + language... is it really 'visual' communication or is it a form of audio?

EXPERIMENT IDEAS

- Digital eternity vs analog destruction: Ghost of graphic past, busker performances, the day/night reveal? Haunting a location through the digital 'trace' of the area.
- Pin/Pin: Put the photo of the thing on the thing.

Central to this process is the idea of disrupting sites of branded communication, and providing tools for the wider community to engage in this critique, facilitated by my practice. Perhaps my "like" experiment started to head in this direction, using tools of communication in ways that were never intended (but always possible).

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- Twitter Lemmings - Who are you following?
 - Audible Tweet garden - the Avery. The internet is a very noisy place but our audible experience is the raindrop of keystrokes and the whirring of fans. And potentially some Rebecca Black or Biebermeister.

MATTERS OF FACT

- There will be a code/digital component. Various languages, code problems and technological challenges to be solved.
- The experiments will be largely autonomous once set up. Things you may happen across, a kind of busker?
- Transcription, photo & video processing.

MATTERS OF CONCERN

- Methods of code scraping, interactions with social network APIs such as Twitter/Facebook. This is a form of bias, so will have to be considered carefully.
- Audio/audible component. Important to avoid this becoming an audio visualisation project which is somewhat cliché and detracts from the original intent.
- Construction of a score for organising performances/interventions.

Why?

Designers have lost their agency.

BIT OF A PROBLEM

- High/low distinction in design is occurring, certainly the industry and academia trying to validate their hold on an essential human practice - creativity.
- Graphic Design is being subsumed into all other design practice as it becomes a no-longer specialist skillset requiring specialist technology. Perhaps bookmaking and specialist print (ie. StudioOnFire) will remain, but as we use the same tools as accountants, lawyers and highschool english students the requisite craft skills of the design profession are somewhat diminished. (Why do we still pass typography off as a whole field of study?)
- Importance of design to be active in [rapidly] dominant modes of communication, online and embodied (all design is to become spatial design).
- Piracy of applications and typefaces, LINDA.com, value of a degree and system that supports it?

DESIGNERS HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR ROLE HAS BECOME...A MEDIATION BETWEEN CLIENTS AND AN AUDIENCE, WHERE THEY ACT MORE LIKE TELEPHONE LINES THAN THEY DO LIKE INITIATORS.

- *Milton Glaser*

- What about the parts of the human experience that design activity shouldn't reach into? Design rhetoric lauds the extension of design into all areas of human life, but some things should be left well enough alone. Unbranded, undesigned. What's the role of the sacred?

Why?

FEEDBACKFEEDBACKFEEDBACKFEEDBACK

A signal received by the microphone is amplified and passed out of the loudspeaker. The sound from the loudspeaker can then be received by the microphone, amplified further, and then passed out through the loudspeaker again.

The paradox, and Soar discusses this in depth, is that our ideological reaction against consumer culture (afforded by the sociological/philosophical components of design education) is metred (or muted) by our unbridled lust and access to articles of ‘high’ culture deemed necessary for our practice: the best Macs, the best software, the trendy publications, stylish clothing etc. In the “circuit of culture” posited by Pierre Bourdieu, this is effectively a ‘short’ circuit (Soar, 2002), as designers are arguably the biggest consumer of ‘designed’ ephemera. Michael Bierut suggests it is almost impossible to offer authentic design critique while bound within this framework, we are designing for ourselves.

Matt Soar puts it very dryly in this review: “Design Anarchy (ORO Editions, 2006) is chock-full of very disturbing eye candy, the voyeuristic gore-porn of the Internet age: an appalling world of degradation, deprivation, and devastation. Unfortunately it’s also rather familiar territory for anyone who reads Adbusters. Here, as in the magazine, Lasn reminds us yet again that graphic designers – yes, graphic designers – are the new political avant-garde; that it is we who will bring capitalism to its knees by, well, designing stuff in a really anarchic way. (One can only wonder what the Chinese folk who printed the book made of all this.)”

If design is so subservient to a process of capital accumulation (Soar, 2002), and the means of critiquing design practice from within are complicated by the short-circuit/feedback loop, then it stands to reason that the works produced will need to sit outside the bounds of this type of design. I will need to further determine what the borders of are, and how I may overstep them intentionally. Is design valid without a client? Audience? Message? What about designing things that break the short-circuit: things that will intentionally be ignored or indigestible by the eye-vory towers of design?

Why?

FRONT



REAR

VOLUME

(CLICK TO PLAY)

(IF YOU'RE READING A PRINTED COPY,
INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRODUCING THE PIECE
ARE PROVIDED WITH THE TRANSCRIPT)

TRANSCRIPT FOR PRINTED VERSION

(Read as Alex from mac osx speech tools. If you're feeling adventurous, read as Bubbles or Good News)

The Pin Pin is an object that signified to me a rising problem in graphic design practice: volume. The wide dissemination of knowledge afforded by the web continues to create a demand for increasingly distinctive design as a means of keeping ahead of competition in the roaring din. This paradigm is confounding large agencies and their business models. Since graphic design tools and training are now readily affordable, virtually anyone can join their club. It's a neat club, you get a badge.

The Pin Pin is beyond differentiated design. It is devoid of the desire to be anything other than a pin and obstinately refuses to do what it is supposed to. It does not beam with an optimistic smily face, it does not heart Christchurch, or feature a hopeful statesman's empty promise. Its content is both rational and irrational, as it presents itself as the content. We observe at once the infinite, perfect image, and the object, bound in time, which rusts and accumulates dirt from under the fingernail. It is tranquil and inert, and in so being, speaks louder than the masses that toil in vain for that very privilege.

Who?

MAPPING SOME INFLUENCES

"The problem with using design as a disruptive force is that everyone uses design as a disruptive force." - Michael Wolff

TARGET.

Audience is designers, design critics, design educators, purchasers of design. But then, it isn't, as this would perpetuate the short circuit that Soar describes.

People that make stuff

KEVIN KELLY

Access Trumps Possession

ERNST BETTLER

Anti nazi poster artist c.1950s. A fabrication in 2000 by UK designer Christopher Wilson. Designers own superman myth.

BRODY-A.D.F.

Anti-design festival was a necessary agitator even if it felt like a page from Adbusters. The lecture series was the most valuable part.

TIM HOLLOWAY

Designer at Research Studios, London. Fine-art design crossover.

MCLUHAN.

The notion of the 'probe', doing things 'to see'. Medium as message is largely still applicable. Acoustics and the group voice.

LARS SPUYBROEK

V2 - Institute for Unstable Media

MATT SOAR

I need to find some critiques of Soar's writings, but he seems to articulate the issues I'm concerned with rather well.

People that write stuff

ALVIN TOFFLER

Anti-Ephemerization

SCHOENBERG

JOHN CAGE

I explored Cage's ideas in my Major Project in 2009, but missed his alternative scores/ways of producing.

PAUL CARTER

Material thinking is starting to help organise the project.

BRUNO LATOUR.

Brilliant article on the impetus for critique: that we actually need to solidify things, not deconstruct them.

PIERRE BOURDIEU

Circuit of culture, cultural intermediaries.

Who?

PRECEDENT ACTIVITY

Julian Oliver

Julian's application *psworld* maps processes that occur on the computer to real-world motion events detected by a camera system. Changes in the physical environment (ie, a bird flying away) result in an application being closed (or opened) on your desktop. It is described as 'philosoftware', and part of a set of 'aberrant and impractical tools'.

<http://selectparks.net/~julian/psworld/>

Syndyn

André Rangel and Anne-Kathrin Siegel built Syndyn as a synthesis between live show, sports activity and a tool for producing images. Badminton racquets fitted with sensors trigger audio and lighting events when the shuttle cock is struck. The project draws together aspects of urban life: embodied play, work, and entertainment (the arts of theatre, dance, and music).

<http://www.creativeapplications.net/environment/syndyn-maxmsp-game-environment/>

Candy Chang

Considered appropriation of ready-made design elements underpin much of Candy's work, such as *I wish this was...* Her interventions are always analogue, but have included digital components (such as *Ghost Walk*). She manages to achieve an authenticity about her practice through using small, iterative works, handwriting, the context of the 'local'. Classic McLuhan: her media are always carefully considered design choices.

Link

Link is a commentary on the fleetingness of modern memories, allowing visitors to the installation to store, recall and explore memories projected onto a city scape of cardboard boxes. It was developed by London/Seoul agency Kimchi and Chips. Created in response to the Design Korea 2010 theme 'convergence'.

<http://www.creativeapplications.net/flash/link-openframeworks-ipad-flash-vvvv/>

How?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research through design and research about design (critical theory).
- A series of experiments, unfinished works, and incursions into 'common' spaces both analogue and digital.
- Any digital components to the work will automatically log user interactions as cold data through built-in reporting. (Brynskov, Dalsgaard, Ebsen, et al)
- Photography/videos/audio recording, temporal records of common space. Key focus on 'embodied' approach.
- Archaeological records of interactions, artefacts left over from events.
- Daily workings to be stored via blog. This will be the best way to collate elements of a disparate nature (photos, writing, temporal activity, real-time stuff).

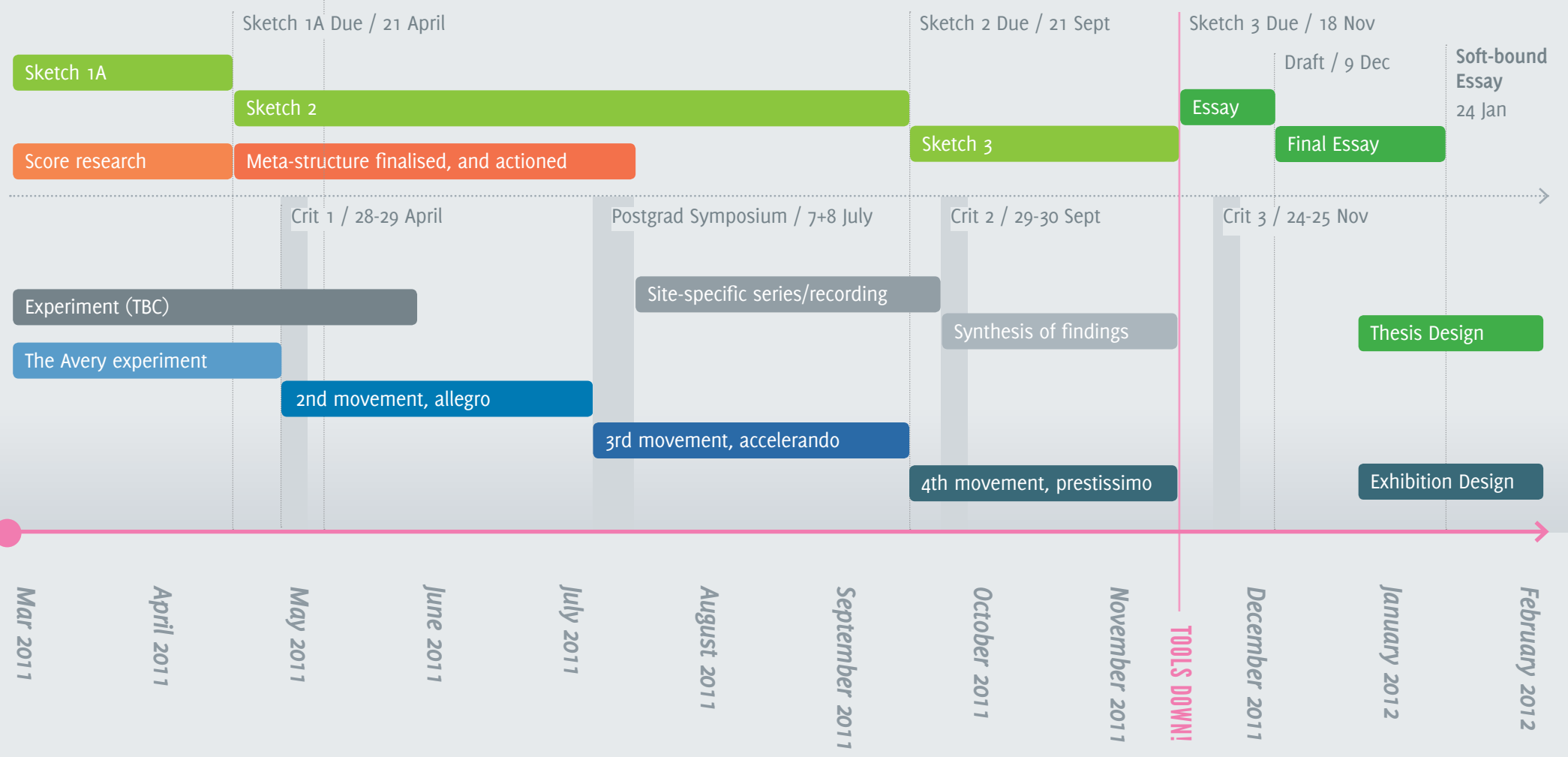
DATA COLLECTION FOR LIVE EVENTS:

- Contextual Interviews on-site, in place.
- Rapid ethnography method (Millen, 2000).
 - more than one researcher
 - carefully select the time period
 - avoid lots of passive video recording (requires greater editing/curation time)
 - Structured contextual interviews (but avoid leading subjects).
 - Participant observation method (self as subject).

RECORDING

- Design a system of notation that combines blogging, photographic/audio recording, the software console log, etc. This notational system should be graphic and temporal in the same sense that a musical score is, and needs to be transportable or performable by others.
- In his later years, John Cage worked with Andrew Culver to develop frameworks and notational systems on the computer in the C language (ic, tic, TBrack, etc). Perhaps I should design a programmatic way of generating the score for this series of works?
- Timeline of project to follow an alternative score metastructure. Specific interventions to be scored into timeline on particular days, and times. Allows for disparate disruptions to be unified by structure, rhythm and cadence.
- Provide parameters, raw material, sets of provocations.
- Obviously there are ethical considerations with this type of research. Design the interventions in such a way that they can be seen via observation or active participation. Note that observation is not necessarily 'passive', as we very 'actively' choose to filter our experience of common spaces. Candy Chang achieves this balance nicely with works such as "Before I Die" and "I wish this was".

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LIVE CALENDAR

A full project plan with all workstreams and targets will be built on Hive this week ending 25 Mar, and the link disseminated to all concerned.

Who?

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My reading is currently focused on four key areas: Critical inquiry, Site-specific interactions, Social media, and interface design (HCI).

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Who?

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