

Dirty Ideas /  
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The Dirty Ear Forum is an ongoing project – a type of meeting point, collaborative platform, or mobile zone for sharing, producing, and disseminating sound matter and ideas about sound; so I imagine this as the first of many activities to come.

One of the things that I've been particularly interested in is to understand sound as the basis for what I would call "radical diversity". And certainly the idea of a Dirty Ear goes in this direction: to appreciate the movements of sound as a type of possibility, for participation, for collectivity, or even better, for multiplicity.

I would say that sound is movement itself – already my voice is moving into this room... Yet where it, or any sound will end up can be appreciated as a sort of open horizon of possibility: maybe it will find its way into your listening, maybe it will leak out of the window, or maybe it will slip under the door to be heard by someone hiding there... Which is to say, that sound is fundamentally a poetic movement, because it immediately invites, or I might say, requires the imagination. What I hear might be something, or it might be nothing; it moves into the open space, it tries to reach me: in other words, sound is an act of proliferation – it is always more than you think. It rushes forward, touching walls and floors, brushing against this body; it is a special agitation, because as a consequence of its intense movements it also coheres and unites: it brings together; we are already participating in the space that it creates. You can't escape, you can't hide; this sound has got you – it has all of us, it carries us along in its wave, pushing us together.

This of course brings us to the topic of listening: and maybe the notion of a dirty ear automatically brings us to the idea of a dirty listening – which I would propose is a platform or a path for an expanded listening: the multiplying, agitating and unifying movements of a sound also widen our attention.

I'd suggest that listening is fundamentally a position of *not knowing*; to listen is to stand *in wait* for the event, for the voice that may come; it is a preparation for common recognition. Listening as a space of encounter made from these primary agitations, those that move from under the skin, through this mouth, and into this public life, and back in again. In this regard, listening can be understood as the unsettling of boundaries – sound draws me forward, away from what I know; it interrupts me. If we follow this further, I might say that listening – this act of *giving* one's ear – is a gesture that invests in the making of a future relation.

This relation might turn out to be a friend, or a stranger, or it might in fact turn away from us; listening is never stable or certain; rather, sound is a type of radical pressure upon the skin, onto the bones, and sent directly to the heart, to tremble us: with agitations, imaginings, and demands.

To return to my earlier thought, I'm interested to propose sound and listening then as the possibility for multiplicity, a ghosted and unsteady territory populated by such diversity: even in that moment of hearing myself, whether my own voice speaking to myself, or maybe hearing the sounds of my steps across the pavement, sound becomes like a second body echoing away from the first – these sounds fall away from my

body and in doing so they immediately unsettle any form of singularity: what I hear is not myself, but myself hearing myself, as another, and another: I am always already an echo.

I understand this precisely as a form of dirty listening: maybe what I'm after is a dirty theory to capture what I perceive as sound's forceful and provocative potential: to instigate the making of a new body, a body that is always more than myself, a body constituted by an array: of imagination and movement, proliferation and agitation, echoes and vibrations.

But I want to also say something about dirt, since this is also kind of a theme here:

I would say that Dirt might be understood as that which crosses the line; we might think of mud tracked into the house, for instance, or a smudge of some unknown substance there on the wall or table, or maybe on our shirt; of course, dirt can also be thought of as a type of transgression, as Mary Douglas details in her book "Purity and Danger", dirt is what should be kept out of view, held back or monitored: dirt, in other words, is what should be kept at a safe distance; dirt may contaminate, it may trespass, and it may also foul the body; my mother used to say, "You have such a dirty mouth!" which leads to the practice of washing a child's mouth out with soap – to literally wash away the foulness of speech. Yet, in a way, dirt always comes back; it is quite literally that which cannot be fully repressed: the body will always give way to its most hidden desires, it's dirty little secrets.

Maybe what's interesting with dirt then is just how dramatic it is, while also appearing as a rather formless thing: dirt is fundamentally dynamic because it evades formal arrangement: it is not so much an object, but a patina that may form along surfaces, an indescribable mark or scuff, or even a vapor that eases itself into the room. Dirt is radically formless, objectless, ungraspable, which is precisely why we fear it: the one who is dirty may also infect.

Yet dirt also leads us to expressions of the erotic: we can immediately think of that phrase, *Talk dirty to me...* a dirty speech that trespasses the line of friendly conversation, so as to stir the blood; or, of course, dirty dancing, which puts on display the palpitating energies of bodies in heat, a sexy repertoire of moves that definitely turns the dance floor into a feverish space.

What I like about dirt then is precisely its ability to not only undermine or sabotage the stability of forms, through its smudges and droppings, to transgress the certainty of particular social orders, but to do so by always introducing the excluded, the marginalized, and the unwanted, or by reminding of their continual presence: maybe dirt is a kind of smuggler dragging in what should essentially remain outside.

We say: Look what the cat dragged in! A dirty subject that once brought in cannot be ignored.

So, to conclude, I would propose a dirty theory of listening as the basis for an expanded ear: the dirty ear is not so much an ear full of too much, but an ear made sensitive to what it previously could not or would not allow itself to hear.