

Reflections on Immediatism and Aesthetics

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the aesthetic and political implications of Hakim Bey's (also known as Peter Lamborn Wilson) Immediatist project. The paper begins with a discussion of the cosmogonic notions of Chaos and nothing that Bey adopts in his work and explores the ways in which these notions are foundational to his concept of Ontological Anarchy. It is then explained how, through indiscriminately drawing on a variety of mystical and magical traditions (from those of Pagan Greece and Ancient India to the contemporary Western Occult world) Immediatism aims to establish an experiential foundation for the reality of interdependent non-dual wholeness. In order to advance Bey's critique of 'the sleep of Order', pathological (calculative) reason, and Western technological development, his work is brought into dialogue with that of schizoanalyst and philosopher Felix Guattari. The final part of this paper discusses the implications of Bey's Immediatist project for contemporary artistic practice, with special emphasis placed on musical forms and the possibility of reviving Occidental sacred musical traditions.

KEYWORDS: Hakim Bey, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Felix Guattari, Chaos, Nothing, Ontological Anarchy



Hakim Bey begins his manifesto Immediatism with the claim that human beings cannot attain absolute certainty concerning, or definitively and unchallengeably predicate, the 'true nature' of any thing, event, or situation. From this claim, Bey proposes that nothing, or our radically undetermined, uncaused, and unconditioned basic groundless ground, be accepted for what it is: the only possible foundationless foundation for, the untranscendable imaginative wellspring of, all human projects, beliefs, and value systems. Coming to 'see' the faceless face of nothing, coming to accept and embrace our unconditioned being and our ever-present timeless, deathless, conceptless and predicateless foundation, is not cause for resignation, indignity, and defeat. Nothing in this sense does not give rise to nihilism; accepting nothing as our only basis, as our basic ground, is not synonymous with catastrophic failure or annihilation. Rather, coming to the realization that we can, and must, create out of nothing can greatly facilitate the onset of the miraculous and the magical¹.

In what follows, we will develop an outline of Hakim Bey's Immediatist aesthetic and political project. We will begin by discussing the notion of Chaos that Bey adopts in his work, which stems from the "nothing" that he takes as his starting point. This will lead us to a discussion of his concept of Ontological Anarchy and the ways in which "the sleep of Order," pathological reason, fears and attempts to dismiss Chaos, fundamentally distort the perspectives and dimensions of thought and experience that Ontological Anarchism requires. Bey's critique of Order and rationality will then be brought into dialogue with the work of schizoanalyst and philosopher Felix Guattari. We will compare their views on love, desire, and machines. We will then discuss Bey's vision of Immediatism in greater detail, especially the implications that it has for contemporary artistic practice. The focus of the final part of the essay will be on Immediatist musical forms and sacred musical traditions. Throughout, there will also be some discussion of the work of poet and inveterate anarchist Robert Duncan, whose work resonates with Bey's in many ways.

We will also be concerned in this work with demonstrating the ways in which the Immediatist project involves the establishment of a liberatory relationship to the groundlessness ground of nothing. Through indiscriminately drawing on a variety of mystical and magical traditions (from those of Pagan Greece and Ancient India to the contemporary Western Occult world) Immediatism shows us a way into the reality of interdependent non-duall wholeness; Immediatism leads us beyond the dread that the fragile, reified sense-of-self feels when confronted with its own groundlessness. By accepting and yielding to the groundlessness of nothing, as David Loy writes, "I can discover that I have always been grounded, not as a self-contained being but as one manifestation of a web of relationships which encompasses everything" (Loy 1992: 176). Through the realization that "one" is part of the vast reality of interconnected wholeness, the desire to reify the self is let go of and the freedom to let-be, the liberatory possibility of unbounded becoming (i.e. that one can become anything), is consciously and decisively arrived at. Nothing, it turns out, is deprived of nothing. In Eastern contemplative traditions, this experiential position or view is referred to as 'thusness', and it is also a central realization of Immediatist aesthetics and politics. From this position the human being is recognized as a nexus of perceptual possibilities, the limits of which are radically unknowable; the human being is embraced as the expressiveness of unutterable mystery.

The nothing that Bey takes as his starting point resists concrete definitions and definitive explanations. To talk about this nothing we must resort to metaphorical language. In Bey's formulation, nothing "appears to be a "chaos" (ibid). Bey is not propounding a view of Chaos as an impenetrable, annihilating void. The vision of Chaos that we are discussing can be thought of as synonymous with the anima mundi (which is often conceptualized as a perfectly spherical form, just as generative nothing is sometimes imaged as an "O"). Attempts to avoid or deny

Chaos, or to conceive of Chaos as essentially unruly and disordered, suggest a fundamentally distorted relationship to the world soul. The de-souling of the organic world through the adoption of a mechanomorphic² worldview and the repression of Chaos are the same.

Chaos does not perpetually radiate absolute cold, does not serve to channel powers of unbridled violence and terrible feelings of malice. Chaos must be recognized as the tremendous repository of ordered beauty that it is; reality does not facilitate Chaos understood as the hypostatization of an ultimate state of disorder. As the Earth poet and naturalist Gary Snyder writes:

The world – ordered according to its own inscrutable mode (indeed a sort of chaos) – is so complex and vast on both macro and micro scales that it remains forever unpredictable. The weather, for hoary example. And take the very mind that ponders these thoughts: in spite of years of personhood, we remain unpredictable even to our own selves. Often we wouldn't be able to guess what our next thought will be. But that clearly does not mean we are living in hopeless confusion; it only means that we live in a realm in which many patterns remain mysteriously inaccessible to us. (Snyder 1995: 173 – 174)

To this let us add that Chaos is not the antagonist of creativity and imagination, but rather a necessary component of what amounts to a cosmogonic trinity; Chaos is necessary to life's dynamic flourishing and underlies life's inherent capacity for continual innovation and unbounded novelty. The repression of Chaos inevitably leads to the inhibition of creativity, and thus to a fear and resistance of imagination.

Bey has something akin to Hesiod's primal Chaos in mind, which presided "over the vast long dreaming of the Paleolithic – before all kings, priests, agents of Order, History, Hierarchy, Law" (Bey 1992: 1). Werner Jaeger provides a clear and poignant historical conception of the vision of Chaos that Bey is adopting:

Hesiod's thought never reaches beyond Heaven and Earth, the two foundations of the visible world; before these was Chaos....In the *Physics* Aristotle speaks of Chaos as empty space....Apparently the idea belongs to the pre-historic heritage of the Indo-European peoples...and from the same stem "gap-" Nordic mythology has framed the word "ginunga-gap" to express the same notion of the gaping abyss that existed at the beginning of the world. The common idea of Chaos as something wildly confused is quite mistaken; and the antithesis between Chaos and Cosmos, which rests on this incorrect view, is purely a modern invention. (quoted in Rhode 1994: 103)

When we take up this vision of Chaos, the nothing and its magical, generative powers start to manifest before us: "the smooth, featureless egg-or gourd-visage of Mr. Hun-Tun, chaos-as-becoming, chaos-as-excess, the generous outpouring of nothing into something" (Bey 1992: 1). Bey, much like Robert Duncan before him,

is concerned with “the pulse of the living egg-cell itself” (Duncan 2011: 167). Tuning into the pulse of the living egg-cell, the fundamental rhythmic underpinnings of what is, and the cycles of what is coming to be and what is passing away are revealed in their effulgent splendor. Rhythmic attunement serves to animate life, to birth, unfold, and reveal the continual evolution of life’s generative and magical powers and potentialities. When Chaos is taken to be unruly and confused, when human beings close themselves off from the pulse of the living egg-cell, a colorless wearisomeness and dread filled stupor cast a thick pall over existence; non-unitary, separative modes of experience based on binary divisions and oppositions set in and solidify. Transformational and evolving rhythmic vitality takes on the guise of static monotony. There is apparently no magic, no grand potentiality of the nothing to be found here, but only the blind propulsion of deadening habits and the concomitant psychic deadness. Fiendishly, this mode of reality, with its dire wearisomeness and terrible, constantly thickening dread, presents itself as the only possible one.

Robert Duncan writes: “life itself is an endless, monotonous flow, wherever the individual cannot enter into it as revealed in dance and melody to give rhythmic pattern; the world about goes inert and dead” (ibid). Both Duncan and Bey agree: Irrespective of how great the might of this deadness is at any given time, it cannot ever permanently stamp out the forces of magic. The forces of magic are eternally reborn through the generations and will forever course through every human being, even if they are not willfully and intentionally taken up. The experience of the ensouled cosmos is always within reach.

There are many strategies for combatting this avoidance and denial of Chaos. One of the things that Bey, who now writes under the name Peter Lamborn Wilson³, advocates for reconnecting with the Chaotically ensouled cosmos is the revitalization of entheogenic ceremonialism. In *Ec(o)logues*, Wilson argues that the ascendancy of repressive Church powers brought about a necessity to “hide the role of entheogenic ceremonialism as the path of attainment in pagan mysteries” (Wilson 2011: 122). The knowledge concerning the place of entheogens in pagan and shamanic mystery religions is on the rise, but law now almost universally prohibits the sacraments. Wilson believes that the “very illegality [of the entheogenic sacraments] is a sign of their spiritual efficacy. Consciously directed (e.g. at Eleusis) the Soma Sacrifice is the *upaya* or “skillful means” of attaining the pastoral experience of immanent divine Nature” (ibid). We will return to Wilson’s notion of the pastoral in what follows, but let us now continue with our discussion of Chaos. When Chaos is erroneously taken to be synonymous with confusion and is feared, the monotonous flow masks Chaos’ ecstasies and unbounded becomings. The fear of Chaos generates a habit of dismissing the visionary bases of psyche and soma, thereby casting traditions such as entheogenic ceremonialism under, at best, a paranoiac and suspicious light. Attempting to dismiss and avoid Chaos blocks the wellspring of intuition, thereby preventing living experience and stifling the truth that it contains.

That there is no distinction to be made between Chaos and Cosmos, as Jaeger shows, allows Bey to establish his position of Ontological Anarchy. This position is opposed to any branch of anarchism that, out of a confused fear of Chaos, strives to establish some sort of “natural law.” Ontological Anarchism is not concerned with founding a new order that, according to popular anarchistic parlance, can be established only once the current state is ‘overthrown’. Bey’s claim is much more radical than this, for he calls into question the very possibility of a state’s existence: “all ontological claims are spurious except the claim of Chaos (which however is undetermined), and therefore governance of any sort is impossible” (Bey 1992: 2). On this view, any “order” (i.e. form of togetherness) that does not emerge from and/or facilitate forms of ecstatic communalism is rooted in a crippling illusion.

Violent plagues of illusions are necessary for maintaining “the sleep of Order,” and Bey offers this vision of Ontological Anarchy as a wake-up call. The Immediatist project aims to replace the State’s “dreams of Order [that] metastasize as spasms of spectacular violence” with a visionary splendor that will allow us to “create our own day” (ibid). This visionary splendor and the acts of creation that stem from it must have their basis in desire (or what Fourier called ‘passion’) (ibid). “Just as Chaos and Eros (along with Earth and Old Night) are Hesiod’s first deities, so too no human endeavor occurs outside their cosmogeneous circle of attraction” (ibid). Under the unobscured vision of passion, the impossibility of ‘states’ and the delusions of ‘order’ are clearly revealed. Desire dissolves ossified social hierarchies and habitual modes of organization by revealing that “the only viable government is that of love, or “attraction”” (ibid). Contemporary technopathocratic civilizations, in the words of Lama Anagarika Govinda, do not make room for the transpersonal or super-individual experience of reality, in which “our momentary form of appearance is like a temporarily assumed mask [persona]⁴ through which the voice of a higher reality sounds” (Govinda 1969: 227). The exalted powers of love and attraction thus remain hidden and obscured; “a thin static scrim of rationality” comes to fuel current civilizing processes, which inevitably spiral asymptotically towards a one-sided disorder, confusion, and dreadful uncertainty (Bey 1992: 2).

Bey is certainly not alone in attacking the obscuring scrim of rationality, and in revealing the ways in which it can bring about catastrophic distortions and corruptions of desire and the powers of love. Felix Guattari amplifies Bey’s sentiments when he attacks, time and again, the fiercely prevalent belief that “if you abandon the discourse of reason, you fall into the black night of passions, of murder, and the dissolution of all social life” (Guattari 2007: 288). Both Guattari and Bey are concerned to show that “the discourse of reason is the pathology, the morbid discourse par excellence” (ibid). Guattari also provides resources with which to expand upon the notion of desire that Bey presents in his Immediatist manifesto. If desire is to dissolve ossified social hierarchies and habitual and repressive modes of social, cultural, and political organization by revealing that the only viable government is

that of love, or ‘attraction’, then desire must be conceived of outside of narrow and reductive personological and familial frameworks.

Guattari writes: “liberated desire means that desire escapes the impasse of private fantasy” (ibid). For Guattari, desire is not to be adapted, socialized, ordered, and disciplined in any way; rather, desire must be “plugged in” so as to ensure its uninterrupted infinite spreading throughout the entire social and communal body. “It is not a question of directing, of totalizing, but of plugging into the same plane of oscillation” (ibid). Guattari also provides the resources with which to elaborate the notion of love that Bey puts forward as the only viable government. Guattari is concerned with the flourishing of a nonhuman transsexuality that would explode the repressive regime of familial and Oedipal sexual morality. In order to call “the entire individual libidinal economy closed back onto itself” into question, ‘making love’ must not be restricted to persons: “one can make it with flowers, with science, with art, with machines, with social groups” (172).

Before elaborating the resonance between Guattari’s nonhuman transsexuality and Bey’s conception of love as the essential basis for government and his recent vision of ‘queer pastoralism’ it is important to note that these two differ quite dramatically in their conceptions of and positions concerning the “machine.” Though they both maintain the view that desire must course through the entire social and communal body, they disagree as to what desire should be “plugged in” to. Wilson, for his part, often propounds Luddite values. For example, he writes: “if you can’t revert to the Stone Age at least you can join the Amish in 1907. No electricity or internal combustion or telephone” (Wilson 2011: 42). And in a recent interview he states:

Why are people so hypnotized, why do people think it’s a law of nature that technology has taken over the world to the extent that it has? It’s not natural: It has historical roots, it has economic explanations, and these things can be worked on. They could be changed, but I don’t see any will to it. I don’t see one single Luddite institution. Nobody is working for this. If I were to defend violence I would defend machine smashing over all, which is a total heresy. Nobody smashes machines. They’re sacred. (Akers and Wilson, 2015)

Guattari’s conceptions of the machine are rather more complex than those that stem from Bey’s archaizing commitments and they cannot be fully elaborated here. Suffice it to say that one of Guattari’s major aims was to define a new aesthetic paradigm after a process that revisited subjectivity via the machinic. This revisited subjectivity is plural, polyphonic, and heterogeneous and is diametrically opposed to the structuralist tendency to reduce subjectivity to the signifier; “what the structuralists say is not true: it is not language and communication that engender subjectivity” (Guattari 2009: 74). Guattari argued that it was impossible to reduce the machinic to mechanics, to physical machines alone. He maintained that all machines are related in some way to an “abstract machine” (that is, all machines are part of an arrangement) and that as machines evolve they may very well enter into

increasingly symbiotic relationships with human intelligence. He writes, for example, that “rather than the subject passing into the clutches of the machine, nothing prohibits machinic networks from engaging in a sort of process of subjectification, in other words, the possibility that machinism and humanity might one day start to entertain fruitful symbiotic relations” (Guattari 2013: 40). Guattari embraces machines because he believes that they can significantly “enlarge the scope of perception and complexity of human behavior” (Guattari 2009: 74). Guattari takes issue with the overwhelmingly prevalent tendency to bring machines “down to the level of human stupidity” and he may very well have had trouble with Bey’s work in this respect (*ibid.*). However, I believe that Guattari would have agreed with Bey that the current deployment of machines is far from ideal and is terrifyingly giving rise to a society of digital domination and control that greatly hinders the flourishing of the kind of heterogeneous and polyphonic subjectivities that Guattari and Bey both value so highly.

Despite these differences in view concerning the machinic, there is a deep resonance between Guattari’s nonhuman transsexuality and Bey’s advocacy of what he calls ‘queer pastoralism.’ Wilson writes:

“the unnatural is also natural” (Goethe) – the Pastoral Uncanny. Our relation with Nature is tragically flawed by Civilization or perhaps even self-consciousness itself. The queerness of our desire for union with Nature is symbolized by the Orphic cult of Paracelsan Tantra – sex with Nature Elementals (as attested by Cornelius Agrippa, the Comte de Gabalis, etc.) From the p.o.v. of the Technopathocracy even normal reproductive sexuality becomes perverse & archaic, & the defense of Nature a crime. (Wilson 2011: 43)

The pastoral uncanny can be truly realized and embraced only with the disintegration of the order that the technopathocracy creates and maintains, allegedly through the reproduction of desire. In actual fact the technopathocratic order knows nothing of desire, as it is entirely oriented toward the “production of scarcity and can only reproduce itself in unfulfillment, negation, and alienation” (Bey 1992: 3). For Bey, machines can only serve to exponentially increase this scarcity, while for Guattari machines must be utilized in the struggle to combat it. Bey enforces the opposition between humans and machines, whereas Guattari insists on exploring their ever deepening symbiotic connections. They are in agreement however when it comes to regarding technopathocratic “desire” as scarcity.

Bey and Guattari both hold the view that individual and familial manifestations of desire will not lead to human fulfillment but to repression and the stifling of human creative potentials. Such manifestations of desire always serve to greatly narrow the range of expressive possibilities that one feels capable of embracing. My expressions, as Guattari points out, can never be reduced to me alone, though the forms of desire that predominate under the technopathocracy necessitate precisely such a

personological reduction of expressive and subjective elements. Guattari writes: “my typical expression at present is no more ‘my own’ than any other. It is perhaps even that of another; not necessarily that of another person. But also that of an animal, a plant, a constellation of objects, a familiar space, an institution” (Guattari 2011: 81).

Learning to embrace modes of desire, expression, and identity that shatter personological frameworks can be an exceptionally difficult and painful thing to do if one has been brought up in a society that enforces the enfeebling myth that human beings exist separately and externally from each other, and stand at an even further remove from the “hostile” nonhuman world about them. Technopathocratic societies viciously attempt to prevent human beings from conceiving beyond the narrow confines of “me.” This tendency to ground thought and existence in a narrow conception of the personal “I” can be seen in all corners of technopathocracies, not least in artistic production. Shattering the personological trap that has taken root amongst many contemporary artists is one of the major aims of Bey’s Immediatist project. This shattering begins with the recognition that we are lived and experienced by powers and forces that we pretend to understand. This “pretending to understand,” when considered in its ignorant forms, is another way of saying attempting to order and control or deny Chaos. When artists operate under the pretense that the personological “me” is the source of all agency and power, when artists succumb to the usually crazed quest for celebrity and other such forms of control, this can only lead to the creation of artistic products that are designed for distribution and consumption via the circuits of the various entertainment industries. These personological pretenses lead to the stifling of soul and serve to shut us off from the profound immediacy of the inspiring (*inspirare*, to breathe in) animateness of the world and the often nonhuman and transpersonal powers that can live us. Learning to be lived by the animating powers of the ensouled cosmos through artistic endeavors requires, for one thing, giving up the tendency to fearfully cling to idealized conceptions of happiness and success (which are popularly equated with meaning). The burden of professionalization that is increasingly imposed on contemporary artists can very well lead to an inability to see beyond such false goals. In this light, Robert Duncan compellingly argues that the great gift is the time of the Work, not the quest for success:

it is the hour itself that comes as a gift, the time of the Work; and the artist learns that it is not happiness, but what is meaningful, an appointment, what verges upon the mystery of his being, that may be heard to bear, that opens once more, more than happiness or unhappiness, the joy or flower of life. It is not a chance on the wheel of fortune but a chance to work he must seek, where from the many roots of what he is and of what he has known streams of humanity, of animal life, of divine wish, flow towards the beauty that can be terrible, the flower, that precedes the good fruit. (Duncan 2011: 551)

The flower of life can flourish only when the false oppositions (e.g. individual vs. group, self vs. other, etc...) that are “propagated through the Media of Control” and through conventional means of linguistic and artistic expression are dissolved (Bey 1992: 3).

In working to bring about this dissolution, Bey summons Hermes, the Angelic intercessor, “the medium [who] is the Messenger” (ibid). The Messenger and the powers that live us can show us the way towards what Bey takes to be angelic modes of expression and communication on the condition that we give ourselves over to them, that we make ourselves vehicles for divine inspiration rather than vessels for the expression of the self-replicating viruses of the technopathocracy. As Bey writes, “all forms of communicativeness should be angelic – language itself should be angelic – a kind of divine chaos” (ibid) The grammars and modes of sense that stem from the “infinite crystal of separation” ultimately “prevent us from killing Nobodaddy [great enslaver, Father of Jealousy] once and for all” (ibid). Angelic modes of communication and expression reveal that allegedly opposing terms such as “self” and “other”, “self” and “world” really are necessary to each other, serving to complement and complete each other. Bey suggests that this tendency to conceive of relationships in terms of irresolvable binary oppositions, as well as the desire for totalization and control that often stems from them, can only stifle the flow of becoming. He writes that “there is no Absolute Category, no Ego, no Society – but only a chaotically complex web of relation – and the “Strange Attractor”, attraction itself, which evokes resonances and patterns in the flow of becoming” (ibid).

Out of this flow of becoming, Bey argues, arises a utopian poetics. Any utopian poetics must not stop at theoretical speculation, but must also serve to facilitate a perpetual upsurge of the marvelous through the creation of situations. The marvelous is rooted in the material bodily principle, the imagination and the “living fabric of the present” (4). The “living fabric of the present” is another way of saying “Immediacy,” and even a glimmer of Immediacy can lead us towards the generation of great ecstasies. Bey sees experiments in Immediacy as the necessary means of combatting the evermore-mediated state of dread filled hypnosis that has infected the contemporary psyche/soma. The ultimate aim of any Immediatist project is always the “doubling and redoubling [of] ourselves even as the Other multiplies itself in the eros of the group” (ibid). The activities of such multiplicitous groups must, Bey argues, “replace Art as we poor PoMo bastards know it” (ibid). Bey gives the example of the “quilting bee”: “a spontaneous patterning carried out by a non-hierarchical creative collective to produce a unique and useful and beautiful object, typically as a gift for someone connected to the circle” (5). As things now stand, these groups must practice in secret; they must not market themselves, establish a following, or attempt to draw in a profit. Immediatism is to be practiced in secret because secrecy is the only way, given present social, cultural and political conditions, “to avoid any contamination of mediation” (10). This does not mean that those involved in Immediatist projects must cease producing art for a public, only

that their work must not stop at the public. There should always be an aim to create something that falls outside of the circuits of mediation, marketability, and passive consumption. Immediatist works elude the “agents of alienation”; they completely lack any kind of market potential and so can serve to generate value that stands beyond commercial status and price; they are usually “occult yet woven completely into the fabric of our everyday lives” (ibid). Bey claims that the content of Immediatist works should not be taken up as a major concern. Insofar as Immediatism is “more game than “movement””, only the spirit of play and exuberant creativity can determine what content a given work is to have, or whether it is to have any content at all (Bey suggests that banquets and feasts are examples of Immediatist happenings without content) (26).

It is only through the activities of such groups that a utopian poetics can be realized, that is, a poetics that can give rise to a non-authoritarian utopia (non-authoritarian in the sense that it is a utopia that is not in any way imposed upon the members of a society or group), a utopia that is rooted in natural Chaos rather than malignantly birthed from a deathly quest for order. The modes of artistic creation that are characteristic of a non-authoritarian, Immediatist utopia completely escape the all too familiar cycle of commodity reproduction and exchange that is characteristic of our present time. Immediatist creation is rooted in a ““Dada epistemology” [that] will meltingly erase all separation, and give rebirth to a psychic paleolithism in which life and beauty can no longer be distinguished” (4). This Immediatist utopia is not a solid and unchanging state; we cannot ever give a firm or final description of it. It is “a process, not a “state” – a movement, not a form of governance” (3). From the standpoint of Immediatism, order becomes tantamount to death and is the cause of the greatest horrors of civilization.

Bey stresses that the Immediatist project is not a revolutionary project, for he sees little value in facilitating “the instant sclerosis of a politics of revenge” (5). Whenever a revolutionary project seeks after power, this can only serve to create a new order. Bey suggests doing away with the fetishization of constancy and permanence. Don’t bother trying to create a new order; don’t attempt to facilitate the coming to power of this or that vanguard party. Immediatism wants to reveal the importance of brief and mysterious encounters between individuals and small groups of people, the importance of pirate utopias, festivals, and holidays. Though many Immediatist formations do not last for a very long time, this does not detract from their potency, transformational vitality, wonder, and importance. Whenever an institution glorifies permanence Bey takes this to suggest that “what they [really] mean is death” (ibid). Immediatism, in contrast, lauds “the excessive, the strange – which for us has become the sole possible norm” (ibid). For the strange to become the sole possible norm, the habitual intolerance of the unknown, the striving instantaneously to feel that the unfamiliar must be made explicable and “understandable,” needs to be done away with.

Translated into an aesthetic register, these ideas concerning the strange raise the problem of what is sometimes called “outsider art.” Bey argues that the apparent marginality of outsider art has to do with these forms of making being situated in relation to the only surviving category: “Too-Late Capitalism. The Spectacle, the Simulation, Babylon, whatever you want to call it” (45). Bey argues that this is the ultimate “category” or “discourse” by which any and every form of making has come, to greater or lesser degrees, to be situated and understood today. It is because of this monolithic and homogenizing “para-medium” (in all its sinuous complexity) that outsider art appears to many of those who encounter it as marginal and secondary, as a “lesser” form of making (ibid). Outsider art is Immediate insofar as “it does not pass thru the para-medium of the spectacle” (ibid). The common aims of producing work to sell on the market, to feature in a portfolio, etc.... are completely foreign to Immediatist forms of making. Immediatist works are “meant only for the artist & the artist’s “immediate entourage” (friends, family, neighbors, tribe); & it participates only in a “gift” economy of positive reciprocity” (ibid). It is only through the circuits of reciprocity that Immediatism creates that we can understand and defend the corporeal and sensuous dimensions of outsider art. These corporeal and sensuous dimensions are completely removed from the mediation and alienation that usually characterizes the work that is produced under the flag of capital. Immediatist work is simply not amenable to “spectacular recuperation and reproduction” (46). If the content of any given Immediatist work does not play a part in establishing its non-alienating qualities and non-mediated status, then the Immediatism of a work must lay “solely in its means of imaginal production. It communicates or is “given” from person to person, “breast-to-breast” as the Sufis say, without passing thru the distortion-mechanism of the spectacular para-medium” (ibid).

To conclude, let us consider some of the ways in which the Immediatist framework that we have outlined can be applied to music. Wilson has recently written a paper on the suppression of Occidental Mystical Music. In this paper, titled “The Perspectival Lute,” he argues that there was once a vital mystical musical tradition in the West that resembled the sacred music of Persia and India. The source of inspiration for the Occidental tradition was different than these Eastern traditions, having its roots in “the Renaissance rediscovery of Antiquity – in this case, Neoplatonic theurgy and Pythagorean numerology” (Wilson 2010: 402). The underlying assumption for the occidental mystical musical tradition that Wilson is discussing stems from these teachings:

Sound both organizes the cosmos and is organized by it – hence the “Music of the Spheres” as well as a kind of musico-magical therapeutics or alchemical music for aligning the Humours – “Piles to Purge Melancholie” as the title of an old English songbook promised. (ibid)

This Occidental mystical music was a form of “popular esoteric knowledge” that was made accessible through the previously widespread ability to play musical

instruments and to sing freely and often, alone and in public, without any fear, shame, or embarrassment (403). This was a time when esoteric and occult knowledge could take on popular instantiations, as popular occult practices would not become grossly distorted through the excessive mediation that is now viciously bound up with all popular forms.

Wilson argues that the withering away of popular esoteric musical knowledge had, in large measure, to do with the introduction of recorded music and the concomitant decline of individual and communal music making and sharing. This view obviously coincides with his Luddite stance concerning machines. Wilson believes that though we now have instant access to far more music than ever before, this music comes to us in the form of data, mediated music that is inextricably bound up with electronic devices. He writes: “We are ‘represented’ by professionals and stars who sing and play for us – since we cannot do it for ourselves. Recorded music can of course still be magical – but always with a magic imposed upon us rather than created by us for ourselves” (ibid). When magic is imposed upon an individual, he is not lead to develop a magical view of his own and may even remain completely oblivious of the potentially disastrous effects that this imposed magic is having on him.

Wilson outlines Tantrik teachings on sound as mantra, in which every musical mode, and even every note, is overseen and directed by a specific deity, angel, or living soul. It is further maintained in these teachings that every mantra “constitutes the sonic body of a divine persona” (404). Though Wilson is clear that these teachings cannot simply be adopted wholesale in the West, he does believe that the spiritual psychology of music that they imply is worth careful consideration by Westerners. This spiritual psychology of music involves a kind of participation mystique in which “the musician (or listener in an ecstatic state) identifies the limited self with the god or angel-self of the mode” (ibid). These ecstatic states lead the participants of mystical musical rituals to the realization that desire is the structuring principle of the cosmos, that desire is not an abstraction but “exists only amongst living beings” (ibid).

Wilson equates non-representational sounds (i.e. unmediated, live, and usually without words) with what he calls the angelic body. Recall his claim that “all forms of communicativeness should be angelic – language itself should be angelic – a kind of divine chaos” (Bey 1992: 3). The angelic body that stems from non-representational sound facilitates a synesthetic fusion of the senses, especially when mystical musical rituals also embrace the other arts (poetry, dance, theatre, cuisine, etc...). The glorious union of all the arts in an ecstatic festival has the ultimate aim of facilitating a “breakthrough into the ‘invisible’ Mundus Imaginalis” or world of the creative imagination” (Bey 2010: 406). The complete artwork is a form of communal ritual in which there is simply no room for any kind of separation between spectator and performer, “where no one is ‘represented’ and all are present” (ibid).

This is a vision of full-fledged Immediatism: any apparent divide between art and life becomes unintelligible, being overthrown by a complete immersion in the living fabric of the present.

Wilson does not elaborate any specific historical notions of non-representational sound in his essay, but there are many such notions to be found. In the ancient musical traditions of India, for example, there is a great emphasis placed on unsounded sound. Unsounded sound is thought to be deeply and profoundly musical. It is taken to be the wellspring from which all externally audible sounds stem. Further, unsounded sound is perceived as the vital source and animating force of all life. In several medieval texts on Indian music, most notably the *Sangitaratnakara* (Ocean of Music), *nada* (sound) is granted a supreme metaphysical status. In this system Brahman, the indefinable, unknowable, ultimate and unchanging ground of the universe, is inextricably bound up with *nada*. The realization of Self, and the worship and ultimate communion with Nadabrahman, are the highest aims of Indian music. The Trimurti, the holy trinity comprised of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Maintainer and Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer and the Transformer) is often taken to be *nada* in its very essence. Shiva is sometimes directly referred to as *nadatanu*, one whose body is sound. As *nada* is the very essence of these Gods, they can be propitiated when one devoutly worships sound.

The distinction made in this tradition between two forms of *nada* is crucial: the struck (*abata*) and the unstruck (*anabata*). As Donna Marie Wulff explains:

the unstruck *nada* is a vibration of the “ether” (*akasa*) that permeates all space; like the ether itself, it cannot be directly perceived, yet it is the basis of the entire perceptible universe. Alain Danielou compares it to the neo-Pythagorean “music of the spheres” in that it is understood as forming “permanent numerical patterns that are the basis of the world’s existence.” (Wulff 1983: 155)

The perceptible, struck *nada* is, on the other hand, produced by the physical manipulation of a musical instrument or the use of the voice. Its temporary and fleeting vibrations are directly and immediately perceptible to mortal ears. But despite the transitory nature of *abata*, it is taken to be a manifestation of *anabata*, the eternal *nada*. “This fact is clearly of immense significance for the Indian view of the religious value of music, for it is musical sounds in particular that form an image of the unstruck *nada*” (*ibid*). To extend Wilson’s argument in light of these views, we may say that recording technology completely obliterates the presence of the *anabata* by transforming *abata* into a gross representational, non-sacred form.

Unsounded sound does, I believe, have microcosmic physiological correlates and forms, perhaps especially the heart (‘ear’ and ‘hear’ are contained in the word heart) and the breath. In this light, consider Hazrat Inayat Khan’s claim that all sound emanates from the unity of breath. The enormous variety of sounds, he argues, all

stem from the same source; different sounds are “various degrees of breath: human breath, or the echo coming from a vessel, an instrument or a bell, for that is also breath, the breath of human beings as well as the breath of objects. From the one breath many sounds manifest” (Khan 1996: 35).

Wilson believes that recorded music is in large measure responsible for the wide scale forgetting and suppression of the angelic body that can emerge through non-representational sound. Certainly, one might also argue that recorded music further serves to obscure the microcosmic human physiological correlates of unsounded sound. Due to its high degree of mediation, recorded music simply cannot generate the same forms of communal, mystical union that the invocation of the angelic body through Immediatist festivals can. Even the best recordings are dead and inert; “every recording is the tombstone of a live performance” (Wilson 2010: 406). Recording technologies vastly increase musical data but they greatly hinder the flourishing of occult musical wisdom and experience. Societies and individuals evermore forget and are shut off from these forms of occult musical wisdom as the prevalence of recordings increases. The enormous barrier that often stands between audiences and performers today has to be done away with if “practical mysticism rather than dry theory is the goal” (ibid). Wilson suggests that there is a time and space specificity of mystical music that renders it impossible to record. Any recording of a live performance is only a pale, impotent shadow of the thing itself.

Though Wilson stresses the importance of space and time specificity, he acknowledges that it is at present very difficult to find willing and interested participants for these kinds of Immediatist rituals (irrespective of the practices and the arts that are involved). Even when events that resemble an Immediatist ritual are staged today there is usually a distinction that emerges between the audience and the performers. The problem of the unreceptive audience, the audience that stubbornly remains an audience even when the performance aims to do away with spectators, can always arise, irrespective of how powerful the intention and execution of a given performance is. Even the audience of an extraordinary ritual can be rendered passive and inert, revealing that even the most magical performances can be greatly neutralized when they are carried out in a deathly cultural climate. The following passage powerfully summarizes these last points:

The 20th century magician Aleister Crowley once dosed an entire audience with mescaline before a performance of his “Rite of Eleusis;” but he judged it a failure, since “asses on drugs are still asses.” We cannot simply wish into being a cultural climate in which people know how to fall into ecstatic states. We’ve all grown up in a world where technopathocratic Too-Late Capitalism has attempted to abolish not only Nature but even human society – and has largely succeeded. We find ourselves inundated with music but somehow paradoxically plunged into mourning over its absence. The same might be said of all the arts in as much as they are reduced to systems

of commodities sold to an atomized populace rather than poetic artifacts produced by a free and creative people. (ibid)

Wilson ends his reflections on the possibility of contemporary musical mysticism by relating his realization that he has not heard anyone singing in the streets for many years. The near constant barrage of recorded music has brought about a great stunting of musical capacities and capabilities, leading many to relegate themselves to the position of a total silence of sorts, to what from the Immediatist vision appears as nothing less than a kind of musical deaf-muteness. Wilson suggests that many Americans go to church precisely because it is the only remaining place where they can engage in amateur group music making – “and in some Pentecostal or Spiritual churches music still whips up hal-like states of ecstasy, even glossolalia and snake handling” (407).

For Wilson, machines and too-late consumer capitalism have inflicted many great blows on the human soul, not least when it comes to art appreciation and creation. In “The Perspectival Lute,” Wilson again insists on the necessity of a Luddite uprising that is to be lead principally by poets, artists, and musicians. This uprising would, he argues, essentially involve a “Hermetic Revival, and a renewal of Romanticism as the eternal avant garde” (ibid). Wilson recalls the words of Nietzsche, that “life without music would be a mistake”, and suggests that this (unfortunately worsening) error of mass mediated music replacing Immediatist musical expression has already done considerable damage to human society (ibid). The only way to get ourselves out of this error, Wilson believes, is to reverse it: the revival of popular mystical music is the only available remedy to our contemporary deaf-mute condition. The only choice that we seem to have is to “return to our own Occidental wisdom-tradition and come to conceptualize music as alchemy” or to watch the mistake of life without music worsen and increase until it reaches beyond the present stage of unimaginable catastrophe (ibid).

Notes

1. Throughout this essay, ‘magic’ can be understood in a general sense as referring to any technique, practice, or worldview that facilitates the liberation of consciousness from the thralldom of individual existence.
2. Mechanomorphism: the projection and imposition of a mechanical reality onto the natural world.
3. I will henceforward use his two names interchangeably, depending on which was used to author the writings under discussion.
4. ‘Persona’, in ancient Greek-mystery-plays, was the mask of the actor which represented his character and through which his voiced sounded [*sonnare*, ‘to sound’].

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