

# FO A R M

magazine no. 1

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## Daring the Utilitarian in a Languid La(lavish lands)scape

What excites us most in presenting this first issue is the precedent for diversity, although we hesitate to name it so. Certainly we are avoiding finding categories to "cover." More readily we pursue resonance. In a sense it is the effect (in effect it is the sense) of the placement of individual pieces which we would like to emphasize - the *audible* between the pieces. Intersections between the individual and the collective, the part and the whole - the between is where common forms can be reapproached and molded to new use. We attempt to draw up a space among these pages, fertile for inflection or color. Or, perhaps a non-space where non-events can be blown sideways into one another. What we are left with is a more-or-less slowly disintegrating collection of materials (or words) being absorbed through a constantly shifting lens.

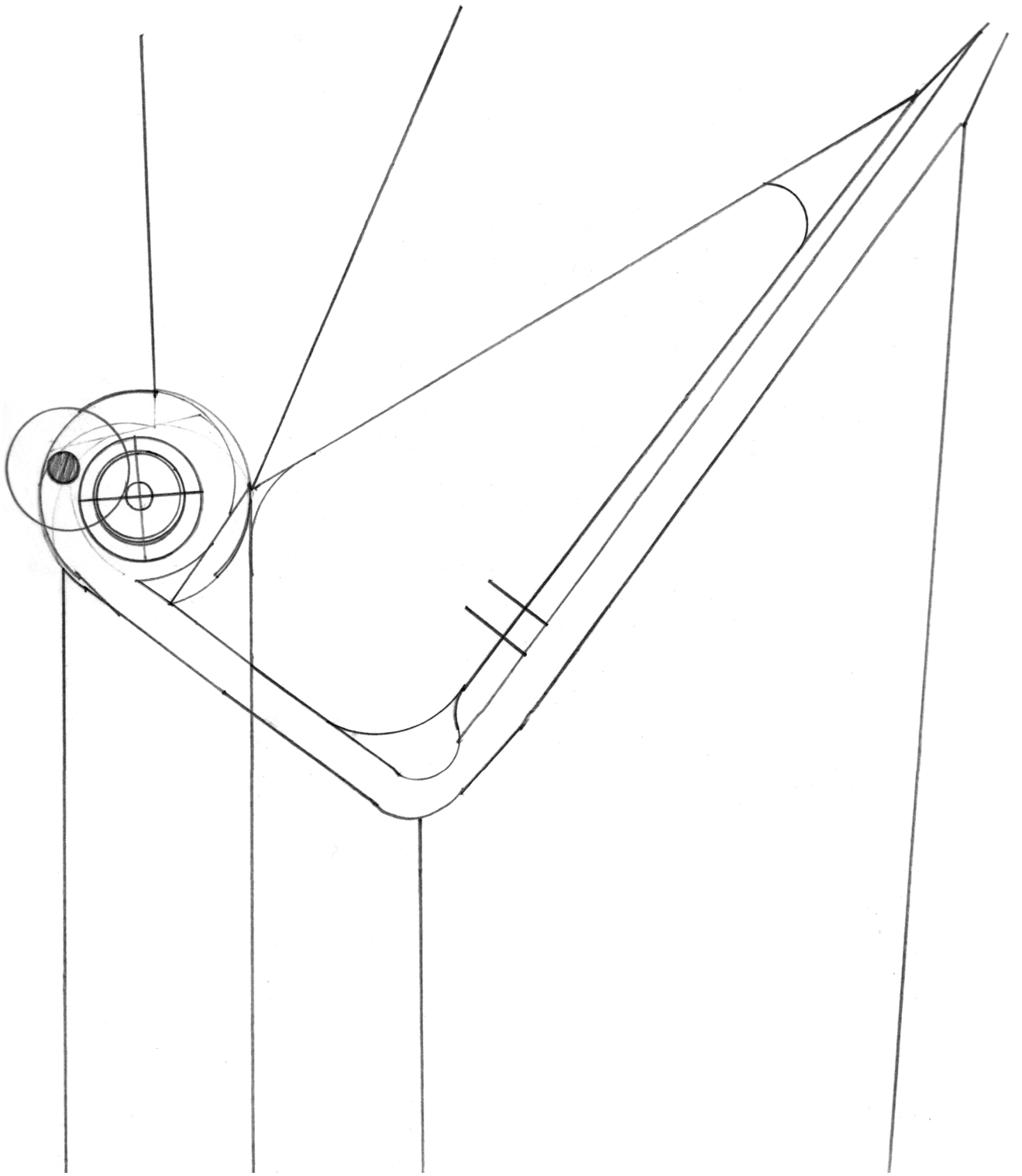
To speak of a richness in what is gathered here, in the sounding and re-sounding of the various elements. **We are seeking the extravagant and the pedestrian and the juncture between. Form being (*becoming*) a forum for the discourses of sociality...** As editors we are likened to sympathetic strings being tuned and re-tuned. Rather than capturing a straight picture, a "ghost image" determines the shape and character of the body- as they find new planets by understanding what surrounds. The content of our information surrounding a work influences the way we approach it, and changes the way we 'use' that relationship.

{ What does it mean to cater to expectations ?  
To seek out provocative resonances  
Questions of audience/market/tourism  
Social realm(s) of art-making - art as "how" in the construction of social relations  
Relevance (revised) of influences into present context  
Dialogue with societal constraints affecting/inflicting art  
What is utilitarian?

As global capital continues to grow and expand - and with it its imperialist cultural standardization - we seek to cultivate the multifarious, the small, that which reaches out. The reason for bringing FO A RM into existence is that this can only be done communally - community begins with sympathy of understanding and interpretation. We plan FO A RM (and each piece within) to act as a vessel which can help to facilitate this understanding, or, more precisely, these *understandings*.

The "A" in FO A RM stands for the inert potential for rupture. With every consideration of this rupture we are beginning before getting started, so we will stay at "Alpha." Or, the progression of change is so vast we must speed it up 100X to hear. Like lightning and whales. We want to keep this open to diverse context. It will be for counter-informing as it will involve as many as other: poetics, history, evaluation, sound theory, interviews, overviews, letters, imaging. More important, though, is the oscillating chord of all these attentions in accordance with each other, forming an amassed body, reminding us of the hidden letters in all words we take for granted.

\* joseph bradshaw/seth nehil/bethany wright, editors





a 9th C. relief depicting the baptism of Clovis I at Rheims in 500 A.D.



...IhvkυoV,

Matthew Marble

Ampulla, ((mother)) Vessel...

Sound has to do with interiors as [such], which means with interiors as manifesting themselves,  
not as withdrawn into themselves, for true interiority is communicative.

Walter Ong

## 1

Resonance is an excess that clarifies the state of the situation: all at once now. It must first hollow out such a space for itself. This cleavage is both the place of maternity and desire. To have a dream in which your mother digs a hole, enters it, saying, "resonance is the excess that clarifies I might claim emptiness as my car." To say car say vehicle is my emptiness - we are moving. Or what allows one to move is this re-sounding, a matter coming to support: mother, move on. The very concept of a tone is fundamentally a wave that re-sounds. A wave that re-sounds, a matter of coming to support the very possibility of a tone by giving it (indeed, this is a gift) the power of duration (and, consequently, the immanence of death: a wave's disappearance, oblivion). Resonance is taking one's time - an active or performative memorial. It is an eidetic constitution that weaves its lifeline in and around the intestines of a clock. Boa constrictor is mother and we're moving slowly now without realizing it. It implies other bodies, other spaces. I might say it implies that one lives in one's exteriority, clarifying the stakes of our habituation - we are moving in time handled by the textuality of our movement, becoming-indexical. Open system. The ampulla is a fold, pregnant with ambiguity. I desired molasses but found the jar empty, founding mother. It ceases to be unilateral in any sense. It is transparent. Its presence is inseparable from its emptiness and is not so in a binary manner, but, rather, in a dynamic of constant potentialization. What did you call my mother? She cannot be handled as so much metonymy, and, consequently, she cannot be 'mine.' It is by what it engages, so that the first time that most of us come upon a seashell and put it to our ear, we hear more than is possible... nostalgia.

## 2

Horace, both in his letters and in *ars poetica*, uses the word 'ampulla' to refer to pompous but 'empty' language. The Greek form of ampulla, *lhvkυoV*, was often used in this way. Such a meaning, playing on the oppositional conjunction of the ampulla and the ampulla-as-represented, opens a space for 'meaningful' language to enter and it is in this sense that the hermetic use of speech, especially in the medieval period, is most revelatory.

*In the beginning of things, black-winged night  
into the bosom of erebos dark and deep  
laid a wind-born egg, and, as the seasons rolled,  
forth sprang love, gleaming with wings of gold,  
like to whirlings of wind, love and delight -  
and love with chaos in tartarus laid him to sleep;  
and we his children, nestled, fluttering there,  
till he led us forth in the light of the upper air.*

These words from Aristophanes' "The Birds" are intoned by Vergilius the Magus into the enchanted egg (born of an ostrich) of Naples (a.k.a. Neopolis). Further intonations secure the egg within a glass ampulla, protecting the egg's shell from becoming broken. Simultaneously, as this egg represented the security of Neopolis, the rigidity of the ampulla represented the strength of the city walls: "The fate of the city was bound to this egg."

The ampulla contained not only the ostrich egg, but the spirit breathed into this egg by Vergilius, as well as the fate of a prominent city. Such synecdoche is not dismissed as ludicrous for within the ontology of such a culture the voice was capable of maintaining its indicative power, its infinite resonance, well beyond the moment of its audibility. Such a vessel is best understood as a radio - perhaps one that has not yet been turned on.

In ancient Rome an ampulla primarily referred to the glass or earthenware bottles that were used to contain oil for the anointing of the body after the benefits of a bath. Perfumes were also another common content kept in an ampulla. It could later be found involved in the anointing of French Kings and eventually (around 1919) in Western European and American art galleries as the "Air de Paris" found and re-contextualized by Marcel Duchamp. It is interesting to note that Duchamp, in trapping air, had succeeded in trapping the medium of sound itself within the sealed ampulla, which here quite explicitly ambiguates the notion of the vessel or the air itself as being 'empty.'

## 3

"The proper tone of the resonator may even be sometimes heard cropping up in the whistling of the wind, the rattling of carriages, the splashing of water." Herman Von Helmholtz invented his resonators in order to find things external to them - it was the relation between vessels with which he was concerned. It was by the use of such resonators that a tone could be 'proper' in the first place: proper, historicized, already welcome. Helmholtz's significance lie in the discovery that what we tend to hear as a single tone, or a single sound, is almost always a conglomerate of many (often inaudible to the untrained ear) tones/sounds; and transversely, concerning sympathetic vibration, one tone/sound is capable of vibrating the tone/sound of a another body.

The sounds contained in Helmholtz resonators are a phenomenon that, like Pythagorus' monochord, allows us to experience a certain kind of thought or reasoning, the crux of a cosmology that, over time, has become more suffocating than revelatory. Helmholtz's and Pythagorus' concerns with experiencing math, perceiving reason, etc. push them to the conclusion (or vice versa) that "the theoretical view... is founded in the nature of the thing itself." In the same way that the ancient Greeks used ampullae and other objects to incorporate language, Helmholtz and Pythagorus endeavored to incorporate and justify mathematics. From another perspective we may understand that Helmholtz used the vessels to isolate sound as a measurable object, thus changing how we listened to sound – this is thoroughly explored in Jonathan Sterne's superb study of acoustic modernism, *The Audible Past*. Where the power of sound could not be injected or transferred, it would be sculpted, manufactured, produced.

4

The Oxford Portable American Dictionary defines 'ampulla' as "...a vessel used for holy purposes", which is more likely derived from and applied to the purposes of historiography; regardless, such a meaning is pervasive in the use of such objects, or spaces, if you will.

Denying invention or before Helmholtz was even in the acoustic envelope of his mother's womb, ancient mosques and other 'holy' architectures could be found with quite similar devices (vases, jugs, and pots made of ceramics) implanted within their walls or ceilings. It is supposed that these vessels were there 'for a reason' - ornamentation alone not being reasonable. A reason perhaps, but eventually one not accorded to rational thought. These vessels would draw in the tones that they inherently mimed, amplifying them slightly, diffusing the voices. In a very literal manner prayers were coming out of the walls; the building itself took part in worship. More empathetic than sympathetic vibration, the building physically felt what the people were feeling, the wash and wave of ecstatic sound. In a sense the vessels' function was to emphasize the role of the church as an ampulla, as a 'vessel used for holy purposes.' Through a rhizomatic or fractal process, one might understand the sole purpose of a church to be that of provisioning infinite resonance. As a gathering place, it resonates the individual voice; as a large enclosed space it resonates a marriage of voices; and, finally, as the smaller vessels within the architecture of the church, there is more explicitly a resonance of resonance. We are engaged in an arrangement that leads us from the individual to a meta-bios or the infinite, which may in this context be metaphysically understood as 'God'; and this transformation occurs instantaneously within the resonant frequencies of what we might consider a cornucopia, an overflowing reservoir of anima.

5

The Shamanic whistling vessels that were in use from about 500b.c. until 1532 a.d., when the Spanish invaded the upper Amazon, were tuned to a frequency that was particular to the civilization that presided. The frequency itself, being higher for each succeeding culture, evolved with the people. These vessels were intricate sculptures, depicting various deities that were used as shamanic instruments, inducing trance states brought on by the particular congregation of difference tones that would arise from several whistles blowing at once. Such an ampulla serves as a cultural talisman and contemporaneously a spiritual tool. As a whistle, the ampulla receives the breath (from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning spirit, breath of life) of an individual and proceeds to morph it into a divine trumpet. The 'passive' vessels used in architecture are here engaged in a dynamic performance. Thus, the horn of the cornucopia shifts from being a passive receptacle or storehouse to becoming a performative instrument, an evocative instigator. Many people wore the whistles around their neck (many still do, though often without the inspiration of shamanism), and many took them to the grave. The ampulla of the Greeks accompanied a person in the same fashion. Similar to the hermetic incorporative use of language we see the vessels of these societies representative of the gods and spirits they were shaped in or as. Thus the significance of the sculpted vessel informs the projection of its contents. Whereas, Helmholtz perceived and qualified the acoustic environment through his resonant tools, the Pre-Columbian societies performed and were transformed by their acoustic environment.

6

It is an eidetic constitution at midnight that would start by someone singing, someone hearing "Steal Away to Jesus." This was the impetus to make towards the secrecy of darkness. It had many names, this place, inextricable from the actions it gave haven to: "hush harbor," "arbor mass," "the invisible institution," "old time religion." After the Great Awakening in the mid-Eighteenth century (and, indeed, the second Great Awakening a century later) Christianity had taken America, whites and blacks alike, by storm. For the first time slaves and their masters found themselves on a plane of equality in their mutual subservience to the 'higher' power of the lord Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, landowners typically, outlawed slave congregations of any kind. So, at night slaves would sneak off into the dark quiet of the woods and make do an evocative faith.

"Secrecy was maintained through the slaves' control of silence and sound." The implementation of vessels was constantly used both to muffle their sounds from the master and to amplify it for themselves. Often the area of worship would be surrounded with empty bottles, jugs, and even large wash tubs 'to keep da echoes from gettin back', to 'keep da voice inside'. Some would sing with pots on their heads, while others would sing directly into the earth. It was in this 'secret' space of the dark woods, where the essence of what the African slaves found in white Christianity could resonate in a more refined or natural manner. In this way the Christian religion developed into a particular branch of what was already a Pan-African practice. One might even venture to say that the spirit possession present in much African religious practice had found its way back into the African-American community through the secret communion of these

subversive gatherings. Though the use of vessels in slave religion is architectural, it would not be thorough enough to say that they merely served to reinforce or resonate something that was already there - though, of course, they accomplished this. Rather, it would be more revealing to notice the fact that these vessels actually produce a space wherein resonance can manifest. It made possible a convention of voices; it made possible the resonance of their unity; but more than anything these vessels, nomadic architects themselves, allowed the slaves, wherever they found themselves, to establish their church and at the same the very idea of church.

Alvin Lucier has spent the majority of his life resonating 'empty vessels'. The site of Lucier's resonance is, more like ancient Mosques than Peruvian whistles, from within the vessel itself. Their internal nature is perceived more than their external affects. Whether by literally entering the space (e.g. "Empty Vessels") or by using microphones as substitutes, Lucier draws the listener into the vessel. In this manner he is pouring out its emptiness in order that we might fill it with the intensity of our ears. In his compositions there is neither metaphysical pretense nor virtuosic skill involved, both by composer or 'participant.' In fact, it would not be far removed from Lucier's intentions to say that the listener's participation and experience border on the mundane. But it must be noted that it is the mundane sound of the ocean that we are so fascinated by when we think we perceive it, almost transubstantially, coming from within the body of a shell; and it is only in this surrogate body that its voice has the potential to become fantastic ('fantastic', in Latin, originally meant both 'empty', vanus, and 'wonderful', mirus). Lucier often creates situations that will produce feedback, in a sense, testing the limitations of the vessel by encouraging the beyond of its 'signal' threshold. As in listening to the sound within the seashell, we are forced to perceive an excess marked by the abjection of its birth, the body into which it is cast.

Lucier's composition "Theme" of 1994 in which John Ashbery's poem, of the same name, is read aloud by four people, is heard from inside the mouths of the various vessels that Lucier had chosen (which, interestingly, included a small milk bottle, a sea shell, and an empty ostrich egg). Lucier, literally, draws the 'empty language' of the vessels into the exterior. The words are encrusted in the non-semantic resonance of the vessels, and the whole space becomes saturated with their emptiness. This kind of linguistic corporeity and phono-transubstantiation is reminiscent of the egg of Naples we encountered earlier.

All we are doing is making connections, drawing bridges, falling when necessary. Forgetting and remembering.

At this point, you might consider that which constitutes repetition (perhaps the miscarriage), or every trope begins as trivia. The egg has many centers; its children, neither living nor dead, are legion.

Such is mother, momentarily. A prayer arriving in the density of ire. Always leading beyond itself or wherever there is emptiness, there it is resonating and the vessel is many nomadic cars. It plays on the ambivalence of its very structure, the thinness or fragility of its definition. The maternal comes to realize, perform the very idea of the vessel. One comes to realize that the very idea of the vessel is subject to a profound permutation. It is what it is not: I can only engage in such subtractions, despite the banality that contemporary academia has given to such conundrums. If listening, I bend my pinnae and hear the impossible as a mobius cavity, the maternal womb. This is the act of the vessel - the sole manner in which one has no choice but to use it: to amplify by the exponential power of lack.

A constellation of uses bound by a shared object a constellation tells us something but in a language that 'I', only, can understand and dare to put into words. I call her mother because she is before the word. In the beginning was mother with her hand gracing her belly - fecundity can only be alluded to. In the dream. There is always something missing and it is by the plurality of these dormant aporias that one might, thus, infer an infinite number of vessels, the idea of an infinite resonance. I say mother and mean nostalgia. I have not said enough, but this will have been satisfactory at the moment it is an egg. It is the grand excess where not a one is superfluous. Perhaps this is what Leonardo Da Vinci understood, in terms of perspective, when he observed:

"The body of the atmosphere is full of infinite radiating pyramids produced by the objects existing in it. These intersect and cross each other with independent convergence without interference with each other and pass through all the surrounding atmosphere."

February, 2003

Valencia, California

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## 1 THROUGH ZERO

**1, or *Intra-***

One penetrates other's worlds  
and breaks out of one's own

First the reach, then touch

The worlds spill into each other  
in constant movement of engagement, of touch

One moves in these worlds, among many ones

***Zero***

Teetering both *on top of* and *within*  
things created, effected into being

At the brink  
of control  
and the loss of

Wholly given in  
to other, the same  
and the push toward distinction

***Here, or 1***

This is where indistinction arises  
where one becomes simply what one does  
in totalized chaos  
The totality always under the threat  
of a breaking force  
forcing the whole open  
and forcing chaos from the outside, in  
to chaos

***Here***

This is where things are made  
this is where things are used  
this is where touch *makes* use

To throw a thing against another  
*into* another