

Richard Garett & Andrés Michelena: *Revealing*

April 23 – June 4, 2022

*“But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It speaks, and yet says nothing.”*

– William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

Richard Garett and Andrés Michelena have shared a friendship dating back to 2006, always marked by mutual respect and admiration. Transfixed by the concept of emptiness (or the perception of absence), both Garett and Michelena frequently call the subtle nuances of space, matter and subjectivity into question. This subjectivity is the dividing force which artificially separates a ‘primary’ signal from a nebulous pool of minute perceptions.¹ The two artists seek to disrupt this barrier by foregrounding the subconscious, offering a glimpse of totality from which all signals emerge and eventually return.² Interweaving text, image, movement and sound, *Revealing* meditates on immateriality and manifestation from a phenomenological yet poetic point of view.

Suspended from the gallery ceiling, Garett’s *30 Cycles of Flux* is an *objet sonore* which paradoxically is unlistenable.³ An oscillator emits a 30 cycles wave (right below human beings’ hearing range) to activate speaker cones, which in turn move strings in a constant flow, subsequently producing a kinetic visualization of the wave. The dissolution of an audible vibration can initially be traced by an echo, though the entirety of its gestation gradually becomes undetectable to the human ear.⁴ Capturing vibrations that would otherwise dissipate into the space covertly, each string marks a sound we cannot otherwise bear witness to. At the intersection of absence and presence, we instinctively strain to hear these sounds; This active mode of listening allows the “white noise” that lies dormant in our subconscious to infiltrate the initially perceived silence.

Michelena’s *Loop Whole* accepts the notion that principles of logic follow an already extant

¹ Cox, Christoph. “Sound Art and the Sonic Unconscious.” *Organised Sound* 14, no. 1 (2009): 21. In his 2009 essay, Cox cites Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s coining of the term ‘*minute perceptions*’ (petites perceptions), stating “...Each of our conscious perceptions is grounded in a vast swarm of elements that do not reach conscious thought. Such unconscious perceptions have what Leibniz calls a virtual existence. They determine conscious perception but are not present to it.” Garett and Michelena ostensibly foreground minute perceptions within the gallery space, and deliver them to conscious thought.

² Cox, Christoph: 21. Our unconscious perceptions have what Leibniz calls a virtual existence. In contrast, the actual existence consists of what we consciously perceive. The transference of the virtual into the actual is what Cox refers to as “totality.”

³ Schaeffer, Pierre, *Traité Des Objets Musicaux: Essai Interdisciplines* (in French) (2nd/Nouv. ed.) (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002 [1966]): 271. Schaeffer coined the term “objet sonore” in 1966, defining it as a unit of instrumental gesture. The sound object is therefore an acoustic action and intention of listening.

⁴ Evens, Aden, *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 14.

reality.⁵ Using the preordained architectural logic of the gallery, Michelena acts as a collaborator, activating contours of empty space with thread. Inside of the contour, Michelena punctures the walls, articulating barely perceptible phrases. Each poetic gesture is an accumulation of voids. One such aphorism—“residual space”—aptly defines this subtractive process, demarcating what is left after other parts have been taken away. Like an engineer dampens background noise in a recording, the modern gallery aesthetic, commonly referred to as the *white cube*, eliminates visual distractions from the art object.⁶ The green exit sign is one such ‘distraction’ which many modernists would desire to have next to no visual impact upon an exhibition. Michelena appends the phrase “misplaced space” to the exit sign and outlines it with thread, defying the white cube’s prescriptively discrete nature. The very notion that it is possible to create a space entirely devoid of character is controverted by Michelena’s interventions; the cryptic boundaries and recesses do not mythologize the gallery space, but in fact, distill the invisible logic of its configuration.⁷

When viewed together, *30 Cycles of Flux* and *Loop Whole* relay Marshall McLuhan’s emblematic proposition: “The medium is the message.”⁸ The content does not blind us to the characteristics of the medium, but instead imparts its most imperceptible traits. The artists necessitate a careful mode of observation, entreating spectators to look rather than see; to listen rather than hear; to search for something real, just out of our realm of perception. Each sense is heightened by the absence of stimuli. Like eyes adjusting in a dark room, gradually the invisible and silent things that live among us come into focus.

Text by Betty Alice McGhee

⁵ Murakami, Haruki, Jay Rubin, and Philip Gabriel, *Iq84* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011): 734. “Ushikawa always saw himself as a realist, and he actually was. Metaphysical speculation wasn’t his thing. If something really existed you had to accept it as a reality whether or not it made sense or was logical. That was his basic way of thinking. Principles of logic didn’t give birth to a reality. Reality came first and the principles of logic followed. So, he decided, he would have to begin by accepting this reality: that there were two moons in the sky.”

⁶ O’Doherty, Brian, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1976, 1986).

⁷ Robinson, Andrew, *An A to Z of Theory Roland Barthes’s Mythologies: A Critical Theory of Myths* (Ceasefire.com, 2011). Robinson outlines the central argument of Roland Barthes’s 1957 book, *Mythologies*, emphasizing the insidious power myths hold to suppress and obscure reality and history. Robinson adds: “Crucially, myths remove any role for the reader in constructing meanings. Myths are received rather than read.”

⁸ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). In his seminal essay, “The Medium is the Message,” McLuhan warns that American understanding of technology is concerned only with the content it presents rather than the medium itself: “I am in the position of Louis Pasteur telling doctors that their greatest enemy was quite invisible, and quite unrecognized by them. Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot.”