

Dead Air

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Bush (and others) called Saddam “Hitler”: a matting phenomenon. Instead of maintaining an *am Saddam*, Saddam should have countered the *amBush* constituted by this abstraction from Hitler’s historical context (neither the Ba’th party and the Nazi party nor Iraq and Germany are interchangeable. Moreover, in terms of being the most advanced technological and military power in a given region, Israel, rather than Iraq, plays that role in the Middle East) by for instance appearing on TV both made-up as Hitler and—through the special effects that made possible the layering in *Zelig*—in the company of Nazi generals. The ridiculous books that suggest that Hitler did not die but is in hiding (and the books that maintain that Elvis is not dead) should have been translated, distributed, and mentioned on Iraqi TV¹ and in Iraqi newspapers (in fact Saddam did not have to look far to find something similar, but this time not ridiculous at all: the notion of the hidden imam in Shiism). Saddam did nothing of the sort, lacked any humor. So the ball was back in Bush’s court.² Bush compared Saddam to Hitler: the Iraqis did not grasp some of the implications of that comparison, for instance that the main mass medium in their country would become the one used in Germany in the 1930s and 40s: radio—indeed, in the first hours of the war over 90% of Iraq’s electrical capacity was taken out of service by air attacks, with the result that virtually all televisions were rendered inoperative (moreover, the trauma of the devastating war must have flipped many Iraqis, a number of whom may as a result have experienced a radio-functioning of the world³: auditory hallucinations [mainly voice]⁴; *thought-broadcasting* [of both one’s thoughts and the thoughts inserted in one]; literal variation in the sound volume [“During the last while back I have noticed that noises all seem to be louder to me than they were before. It’s as if someone had turned up the volume”⁵]; echolalia/palilalia; thought blocking [as if the mental radio that each of us is to himself has been turned off the air]⁶). With regard to the inability of the Iraqis to (detect, let alone) see the airplanes attacking them—a paucity in images especially manifest in the case of the Stealth fighter⁷—the destruction of Iraq’s electricity grid and the resultant uselessness of television sets may have had one salutary effect: preventing *presence*. While the coalition was using smart bombs, bombs that moved and redirected themselves on their own, the obscene amount of destruction inflicted on Iraq must have driven at least one Iraqi to go mad and to begin thinking that his TV was still receiving images⁸: a smart TV. The link between the announcer/broadcaster and the listener is far less clear in two-way communication than in instances when “dead air” becomes dead air, when “‘dead air’ is not only unaccounted or unshaped time, but a deadly vapor

(dead airs) that signals disaster, the operator no longer there, the station obliterated by a nuclear bomb or chemical weapons" (John Corbett), for the inferred disappearance of the announcer at the same time implies the inexistence for each listener of all the others, each listener becoming the only remaining one.

Radio, like film and TV, is usually only the mold of time. Radio, like film and TV, embalms the living, for the dead on radio were once alive. But what has to be risked is the dead part of those alive. We always send more than we broadcast (always something *on the side*): aparté. Hence we have to acknowledge what we have a knowledge of. This acknowledgment should induce us to help those with whom we are interfering whether we know it or not: the mad, (the dead?) and some of those in other altered states. "What if I broadcast an album of static? What does this do to the station, since the signal will be undetectable? Can this be considered 'dead air' (FCC's legal term for a broadcast signal with no sound, which is illegal), or is it acceptable camouflage?" (Corbett). Camouflage in relation to whom? To the broadcaster who does not know that he is broadcasting unbeknownst to him the other dead air, the voices and sounds and thoughts of both the dead and the dead element of the living? Disappearance and camouflage is not as simple as it may at first seem. One must not become only an unconscious (the dead?), one must not have an unconscious. Once one acknowledges that which is undetectable to oneself in what one is sending, but detectable by some others, one notices the proliferation of the intentionally undetectable in one's work: John Cage's *4'33"* is one of the works listed in the credits of Toufic's *Credits Included*. In the impossibility (or extreme rarity) of such a disappearance, i.e. non-interference, one has to counteract this obscene interference by creating something between the living and the schizophrenic that awakens the former to their interference with the latter. This in-between is not the medium (Kurosawa's *Rashomon*), who merely connects with the ghost, who, though dead, is a living, all too living entity; but an art of radio that lets itself be interfered with by a dead air it constructs.

A station intentionally sends a signal that simulates one that would result from the mixing of its signal with that of another station broadcasting in a different language, with the latter broadcast, spoken by a different broadcaster, being, strangely enough, a translation of what the announcer is saying on the first station. If the listener tries to get a better reception of the second station, he will hear a different subject being addressed by the second announcer. This uncanny effect should be intentionally created by the two stations in collaboration unbeknownst to the audience (it would be felicitous to complement the planned collaboration between different radio stations unbeknownst to the listener by their occasional featuring of musicians who improvise their collaboration, for instance free jazz musicians). Since there are so many people using headphones, one should take advantage of the fact that each is lacking a witness to corroborate or refute the objectivity of what he heard: for instance have as an ambient sound the variable ticking of a clock, the clock from time to time ticking at a much

reduced rate. But the listener can and should also try to induce the uncanny in the broadcaster: from New York, I call John Corbett in Chicago (having, just prior to that, called one of our joint friends in Chicago to inquire about the music pieces John has just played on Radio Dada) and congratulate him on some of the choices and ask to hear a specific piece of music. This inducing of the uncanny should not be limited to radio or TV but has to be done in life. Have a recording of your voice asking your roommate to remove the boiling water from the burner or yelling at your cat to stay away from a vase; while talking to someone on the phone, you playback your recorded voice. Is there a danger that such practices may be used to lead to prolonged paranoia? Indeed, but what is required is to immerse people, for a short period, in a different mode of mental functioning so that they will be in their disorientation more clear about the plight of more than one hundred thousand seriously mentally ill (it seems that one way to get the intellectuals with hygienic quotation marks to push for making available places to stay (and not shelters or prisons⁹), even if non-tenure, for the huge number of homeless schizophrenics and depressed people is by leaving the latter unsheltered by quotation marks) homeless persons in the U.S.¹⁰ (where many have experimented with psychedelics, and hence know what it is to undergo a psychotic episode. These persons have no alibi, and indeed there is no appeal for them because it no longer seems possible to appeal to them. Therefore, we will solicit that to which they cannot appeal, their double, wagering that...¹¹ A nice old woman told me that she is for long term rather than alleviating measures when it comes to dealing with the homeless. What does long term mean when we are dealing in the case of many of them with eternity and/or an absence of time or a cyclical or bifurcating time? Every second, no — since they can feel sometimes what is on the time scale of $10/12$ of a second — every fraction of a second counts.

During the years of civil war in Lebanon a certain radio program warned against taking certain routes that were then currently dangerous whether because of actual fighting or due to the presence of snipers — a voice-over that somewhat was not itself in danger. Satellite images are ending the voice's monopoly of the -over; when seeing on the news satellite images of a war, we are watching voice-over on images-over. Both such voice-over and image-over are outside of risk. Prophetic lines from Artaud's canceled 1947 radio program *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*: “[In order to fight one must be shot at...] / I have seen machines fighting a lot / but only infinitely far / behind / them have I seen the men who directed them.” The psychotic flight-simulation programmer's “I could feel the targets, weapons,” and “I am a weapon myself rising through the air... my destination was the moon” in David Blair's *Wax* (1992) is a good place to differentiate between the full-blown psychotic sensation of *every name in history* [including Fat Boy, the first plutonium bomb] *is I* and the generalized limited identification that will be one of the near-future repercussions of the *flying carpet* feature in computer simulation programs, which allows one to put oneself in the tank of one of

the participants, or on a missile heading toward its target¹² (we will find it increasingly difficult to identify with the victim when in addition to having the point of view of the murderer, we are provided with that of the weapon itself [Kevin Reynolds, the director of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) a version where the aristocratic, Christian Robin accepts for brother an illegitimate son of his father and befriends a Moor, must have sensed this, for in the shot with the point of view of the arrow he had for target a tree, reverting to an external, objective shot from the side of the speeding arrow when the target was a human being], identifying also with the latter). Is it at all surprising that this identification with weapons and other objects is concomitant with their becoming intelligent? We saw the same conjunction in the case of Vertov's Kino-eye: his "I am Kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.

"... I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse... I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies... I put together any given points in the universe, no matter where I've recorded them..."

"Within the chaos of movements... the eye, all by itself, enters life" ("Kinoks: A Revolution," 1922, trans. Kevin O'Brien) is concomitant with a smart camera: in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) the camera comes out of its case, mounts the tripod, which performs a series of movements on its own, while the camera's winding mechanism revolves by itself, signaling that the camera is filming (the criterion for whether the camera is truly filming on its own, a true kino-eye, is that, as in Snow's *The Central Region*, the absence of the filmmaker/cameraman behind the camera, i.e. of human vision behind the viewfinder, not be felt as a lack that has to be counterbalanced by the presence in the film of an extra human vision, that of a film audience watching the sections of the film that were shot by the camera on its own, as in both Vertov's film and Snow's *Seated Figures* [which contains large sections that Snow shot without looking through the viewfinder]).

Christ could and did incarnate precisely because with humans *seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear* (Matthew 13:13). Christ would not have incarnated were people beings who have eyes and only see. Christ could incarnate because this facet of people allows the coexistence in him, and despite his incarnation, of the visible and the invisible. What makes miracles inaccessible to perception is not that they cannot happen — i.e. that they don't exist — but that even when they happen there is a component to them that is inaccessible to vision, unbearable to see, thus affecting people with a more or less pronounced inability to see. What Christ said to those who witnessed his miracles, for instance to the parents of the dead child he resurrected (Luke 8:49-56), was understood prescriptively by Luke as a command not to report to others what they fully saw and heard ("but He charged them to tell no one what had happened" (Luke 8:56)), whereas we can understand it in a Spinozist manner — as descriptive of the aforementioned constitutive inaccessibility to vision: the miracle by which a blind person

is turned into a seeing person has something invisible, unseeable in it, and this affects its witnesses with a blindness, turns them into ones who *have eyes but do not see*; the miracle by which the mute is able to speak affects its witnesses with a deafness, turns the ones who witnessed it into ones who *have ears but do not hear*. The modern so-called medical miracles, which allow some people to regain a large part of their sight or hearing, are miracles only figuratively, not only because they have a scientific explanation and are repeatable by anyone who has the knowledge and the facilities, but also because they are wholly within the sight and hearing of the witness. One's personality and one's every gesture, even the seemingly most natural—for instance that of surprise—is an interpretation; a shot is objective only when this interpretation of the character is undone¹³ (documentaries are often still too subjective because they maintain this hold of the character on himself/herself). The aforementioned undoing can be psychological/dramatic, pertaining to the character; or it may be indirect, structural, as in Assia Djebar's film *La Nouba des femmes* (1978). In Djebar's film, there is a solidarity of the woman protagonist with the older Algerian women peasants, who until then had not been given the opportunity to publicly tell of the horrors they underwent during the Algerian struggle of liberation: she wants to redress this through the interviews she conducts with them in the various parts of Algeria in which they live. But there is also a solidarity of the male protagonist, a veterinarian, with these women; it shows itself in his seemingly-accidental fall off his horse—a fall that reduces him to limping and using a crutch. The shot of the veterinarian steadying himself on his crutch while examining a cow manifests a certain unbearable in the shots of the peasant women, loosening the hold of these women on themselves and on what they are saying—this loosening is not psychological, for the crying and the sadness of the women is still an interpretation on their part. Without his fall, which acts as a parapraxis of the set of circumstances, there would be mere visibility of misery when we see the women and hear their stories; this man almost reduced to vision—in several shots at different points in the film, he is sitting in a wheelchair at one of the corners of the room looking at his wife and her small son bathing—is a necessary presence for the invisibility of the images to be deployed. The woman and the man form a complementary couple: one purposeful, slightly too confident in her wish to record the voices that have not been recorded before; and one who, reduced to his wheelchair, just looks, allowing the unbearable to become manifest, and thus infusing everything around with an invisibility. The film achieves the task of giving voice to these women who were deprived of it and of making them visible, but at the same time makes them invisible and inaudible through the disclosed unbearable. One invisibility, Algerian society's prescription against the appearance of young women on film, is decried by the female filmmaker Djebar; the other is revealed/constructed by her. At the end of Djebar's film, there is a six-minute catalogue of images that appeared during the rest of the film, with one image following the other at the end of a wipe (the wipe underscoring the flatness of the image, i.e. underscoring that it is an

image). This section, which is moreover underscored by a declamatory, triumphalist song, shows bad taste on the part of Djébar; but also implies that Djébar sensed that the images she had shown earlier were in whole or part impossible/unbearable to see, and hence that if she wanted them to be seen she had to show them again in a manner that will reduce them to visibility. Sometimes the filmmaker can show us the unbearable and think that he or she has actually made it visible, i.e. bearable at least at the level of vision: this merely reveals his or her naiveté, his or her insensitivity. Sometimes after showing one the unbearable, and more or less pedagogically, the filmmaker explicitly provides a commentary, whether diegetic or extra-diegetic, to the effect that one has not seen the unbearable: in Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour*, the Japanese man's "you have seen nothing in Hiroshima."¹⁴ One possible way to respond to the absence of images in the Gulf war is to have one of the characters in a film "on" that war performatively describe the events happening in the theater of operations, concluding these descriptions with the Durasian question at the end of the performative creation of vision through words in *Le Camion*: "You see?"; then have the interlocutor answer, once more as in *Le Camion*, "Yes, I see";¹⁵ then to the latter's affirmative response, have the former character reply in a manner similar to that of the Japanese man to the French woman's claim to have seen what happened in Hiroshima (with the help of newsreel footage, etc.): "You have seen nothing in Iraq and Kuwait, nothing" (obviously, not because there were no images — for the words did performatively create images — nor because of a possible inadequacy to a truth/objectivity; but because these images are unbearable to see, are somewhat unseen even as one looks at them).

Notes

1 At the same time that these books on a still-living Hitler were being mentioned on TV, doubt should have been induced as to whether Saddam himself was alive, by for instance showing him on Iraqi TV meeting with the other members of the Revolutionary Council when it would have been quite clear that the tape was not new but had already been shown a week earlier (the ready-made is used by dictators all over the Third World).

2 A short while after inserting this common phrase in the paragraph (on two occasions, I almost discarded it), Thurgood Marshall retired/resigned from the Supreme Court.

3 One cannot use radio or film as a device to reveal certain facets of death, and then discard the formal attributes, the radiophonic or filmic, for as in modern science the measurement apparatus with which we observe a phenomenon that has to do with a realm that does not admit of negation, the unconscious/sum-over-histories of subatomic particles, affects the phenomenon studied, inflects it (in this respect science shows itself to be close to art, a domain where the form [in quantum physics, the measurement apparatus] influences the content). Using film to try to fathom death, the facets of death one will discover will be constitutionally filmic; studying the manifestation of dying before dying through radio will reveal reality as radiophonic.

A radio-functioning of the world is not restricted to schizophrenia, but is encountered in other altered states: the songs and music heard in certain cases of temporal-lobe seizure (for examples of the latter see chapter 15 in Oliver Sacks' *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*), etc. Comparing both *experiential responses* induced by electrical stimulation of the brain ("the times that are summoned most frequently are briefly these: the times of watching or hearing the action and speech of others, and times of hearing music." Wilder

Penfield & Phanor Perot, "The brain's record of visual and auditory experience: a final summary and discussion," *Brain* 1963: 687) and music-inducing seizures (recent car radio systems allow the sound coming from the radio to seem to be occurring in the environment/context the listener chooses, for instance a church or a concert hall or Hot House. This facet of the aura, of suddenly feeling oneself in a different [aural or other] environment, or of perceiving the sounds as having a different quality, may soon be a regular feature of radio listening) to radio is not an occulting form of analogical thinking. On the contrary, it helps us to try to disentangle radio from an analogy, made by no one, stemming from the prior existence of this biological "radio" — an analogy that condemns radio to try to achieve effects that pertain to the latter "radio," since, as was pointed out by Marshall McLuhan, a new medium is often used in the beginning as merely a more competent version of an older one, i.e., misunderstood as to its specificity (the earlier form has its own specificity as well: in a seizure one may actually relive an experience...).

4 Responding to a question asked within his radio program "To Have Done with the Judgment of God" as to the purpose of broadcasting such a work, Artaud lists several reasons. Since certain interjections and objections to some of the reasons he advances are said by voices inside his head he includes them in the numbered listing (this strange two-way communication [of Artaud with his voices (number 3 is one of these, accusing him of "saying some very bizarre things")] inside the one-way use of a medium which many [Brecht, Enzensberger] demanded be two-way), while the discussion that continues past reason number 8 is not given any further numbers since it is carried on with voices *outside* his head.

5 Quoted in Andrew McGhie and James Chapman, "Disorders of Attention and Perception in Early

Schizophrenia, " *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 34 (1961): 105.

6 Radio was invented not so much to receive as to make it possible to interrupt (the programs are constantly interrupted by special announcements [where you may be hearing about what is happening to you; when disoriented and anxious don't ask (yourself) whether by saying it loud or thinking it: "What's happening to me?"]); change channels (the schizophrenic undergoes autonomous thoughts, sounds and [inappropriate] affects that pass through him and which he is unable to influence, and which others persist in calling his own (even/especially the analyst, who has no floating attention but is always mesmerized by any lapsus...); it is this autonomy of much of what goes on in him that permits him to truly say that radio sounds, which he also does not control, and which have the same level of exteriority to him and the same level of autonomy, are also his (in fact they have less exteriority, since in cases where he is not totally fascinated by the radio sound (he was so taken by the sound of one instrument that he had to presage when it would cease, having then to literally leap like a trapezist to another sound (thus it had become agonizingly difficult for him to hear fast-paced music—exception: John Zorn's music, which he continued to adore (whereas in the majority of other kinds of music even when sharp cuts occur, one knows one is dealing with an imperceptible fading, Zorn's *Torture Garden* and *Naked City* train one to feel that the sound has suddenly stopped even in the rare instances when it seems to be quickly fading. Zorn's music averts the nostalgia embedded in any continuation of a process, whether toward its end, or this side, from its beginning. This music that begins and ends in the middle allows non-linearity (and not merely as a mode of access to information—true non-linearity will not be attained just by having digital

access to information, since the blocks themselves may still contain a fading, offsetting the non-linearity of the mode of access). If following a clean cut with no desire for and no projection of further reconnection, the same piece resumes, the two pieces link in the listener without any interruption, making this music in abrupt blocks a music of continuity; what interrupts two pieces between which another piece is inserted is not the inserted piece, but the more or less perceptible fading at the end of the first and at the beginning of the second. It is a music that is both very *relachée*, that you can leave at any point—in part because the saturation of sounds, the screaming, etc., leave no margin for any addition in the form of the listener's associations; and very linked since, although taped linearly, in the analog mode, it allows non-linear linkage between sounds. Zorn's music deploys a different sort of resonance, one that is the result of this conjunction of a clear-cut stopping of the sound—which allows the listener not to lose it (it is the time of fading that is the interjected time that makes us forget)—and non-linear continuity))—we see him in a short Jalal Toufic video as part of the circus, standing there listening to the music) he can still change channels, whereas the thoughts are much more difficult, if not impossible to block)); go off the air, i.e. stop the endless flux, in a form and manner other than thought-blocking.

7 In *Lessons of Darkness*, Herzog betrayed those in "the land of silence and darkness," the Iraqi army units in Kuwait, whose radars were blinded, and who could not see the American army, equipped with night-vision devices, attacking them at night. Were Herzog to defend himself against this criticism by indicating that in his film *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971) he was interested only in one specific kind of blind-deaf, I would answer that having said that he would like to have the rights

of distribution of his films because he may one day want to join them into one film ("I feel that I'm close to the center of things," interview with Werner Herzog by Lawrence O'Toole, *Film Comment* November-December (1979), he should have titled the film: *The Land of the Deaf and Blind*. A cautionary word to the 32-year old Hal Hartley who, as of 1993, has finished seven and a half hours of film and who professed in an interview (*Release Print* Dec/Jan (1992-93): 19) that he would like to join in one long film all he would have shot by the time he stopped filming, a figure he puts at 45 hours: be sober with your titles. Robert Wilson, who also said he considers joining all his pieces together, can be less careful with his titles since he professes that words as mainly carriers of meaning do not count very much for him.

8 The unbearable can certainly accommodate laughter (the bursts of laughter that would take hold of the audience during Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home*), but not sentimentalization or rationalization.

9 More than 7% of people in jail have severe mental disorders (*Chicago Tribune* 10 Sep. 1992). Around three in ten prisons in the US hold seriously mentally ill people who have not been charged with a crime (the percentage is 81 in Kentucky).

10 According to The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimate for 1987, there were six hundred thousand homeless in the U.S., of whom the percentage of seriously mentally ill (schizophrenics and those with manic-depressive psychosis, etc.) was, according to studies by The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) completed in 1986, 60% in Louisville, 56% in St Louis, 45% in San Francisco and Salt Lake City, 25% in New York (the average is ≈30%).

11 This section incites the deployment of certain facets of radio. These incitations and prescriptions were written while having in mind a more or less

modest reception of this book. Should the book have a wider readership and influence, this quantitative change may transform itself into a qualitative one, i.e. a qualification. It is in this sense that I have a certain audience in mind.

12 Glenn Zorpette, "War Games," *Los Angeles Times* 7 October 1991.

13 Certainly the filmmaker or the character (most often a male one) can objectify this subjectivity (feminist film criticism has done a good job tracking this operation); obviously, they do not for that matter reach the objective.

14 Despite the title of the film, in *Hiroshima mon amour* Duras does not establish an equivalency of the two traumas, the love story that ended in the death of the young French woman's German lover in Nevers, and Hiroshima: while the Japanese man asserts to the French woman that she has seen nothing in Hiroshima despite what she witnessed in the newsreels on and the museum in Hiroshima; when she addresses the Japanese man in the second person while reenacting the last hours of her love affair with the German in Nevers — up to and including his death — at no point does she then say to him: "You have seen nothing in Nevers."

15 Sometimes the performative of Duras — which does not reside only in the description she proffers but also in the question "You see?" — makes Depardieu actually see; sometimes he sees only when he performatively answers "Yes." Since this vision on Depardieu's part is not imaginative, he, like Delphine Seyrig in *India Song*, although for a different legitimate reason, does not have to embody, enact through acting, this act of vision. That "aucune répétition du texte" took place undercut any occasion for Depardieu to rehearse the text, and, being an actor, to playact that he is actually seeing in a quasi-hypnotic mode in his mind's/imagination's eye the events Duras is reading.