

Nietzsche in b flat: attuning to the ‘pataphysics of data

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A proposal for Tuning Speculation II: Auralneirics and Imaginary Networked Futures

There is a story about how Nietzsche, near the end of his life and on the edge of madness—having written about prophets and supermen and fools—liked to sit at the piano in his mother’s house for days on end, playing the same note over and over and over.¹ Strangely, nobody ever mentions what the note might have been, or why he felt so compelled to repeatedly push that particular key. Maybe it reminded him of something he knew or something he forgot—or maybe something he had heard but that the rest of us wouldn’t know until more than 100 years later. Like the scientific claim that the universe harmonizes in b flat—and that if we tune our instruments just right we can perceive the dynamic hum of the cosmos, oscillating in data-perfect pitch.²

This paper speculates on the idea of synchronizing the philosophical ear with the oscillations of data—using the story of Nietzsche as a guide to probe the repetitive gestures that emerge as hallmarks of digital interactivity: from likes and follows to refresh rates and notification frequencies, from the reversible flows of information to the fascination with social networks, biometric-enabled devices, and notifications of virtual interactivity. At stake in the exploration is the possibility of attuning to our data habits—not in deference to the dictates of information culture but by linking data to the artistic imagination and insisting on anecdotes of encounter as drivers for philosophical speculation.

Bio: Ted Hiebert is an interdisciplinary artist and theorist whose work examines aspects of technology and digital culture with a particular focus on the absurd, the paradoxical and the imaginary. His artworks have been shown at venues such as VIVO Media Arts (Vancouver), Center on Contemporary Art (Seattle), Plug-in Institute of Contemporary Art (Winnipeg), the Xi’an Academy of Fine Art (China) and Goodman Art Centre (Singapore). Hiebert’s theoretical writings have appeared in journals such as *The Psychoanalytic Review*, *Technoetic Arts*, *Performance Research* and *CTheory*, among others. He is the author of *In Praise of Nonsense: Aesthetics, Uncertainty and Postmodern Identity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *CTheory*, and an Assistant Professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences at the University of Washington Bothell.
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¹ Arthur Kroker, *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

² Dennis Overbye, “Music of the Heavens Turns Out to Sound a Lot Like a B Flat.” *The New York Times*. September 28, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/16/science/music-of-the-heavens-turns-out-to-sound-a-lot-like-a-b-flat.html>