

Mystical Auscultation
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[abstract for Tuning Speculation II]

The ears of mortals are filled with this sound, but they are unable to hear it.
– Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis*

In Adam's voice before he fell there was the sound of every harmony and the sweetness of the whole art in music.
– Hildegard of Bingen, "Letter to the prelates of Mainz"

There we hear without any sound and see without matter.
– Meister Eckhart, Sermon 76

As if echoing in the space between the unhearable sound which fills the body and the incorporeal hearing that takes place without sound, the chest of Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224) was known to produce astonishing harmonies in the following manner:

Sometimes while she was sitting with them, she would speak of Christ and suddenly and unexpectedly she would be ravished in the spirit and her body would roll and whirl around like a hoop. She whirled around with such extreme violence that the individual limbs of her body could not be distinguished. When she had whirled around for a long time in this manner, it seemed as if she became weakened by the violence of her rolling and all her limbs grew quiet [*quiescebat*]. Then a wondrous harmony sounded [*sonabat*] between her throat and her breast [*pectus*] which no mortal man could understand nor could it be imitated by an artificial instrument. Her song had not only the pliancy and tones of music but also the words—if thus I might call them—sounded together [*concrepabant*] incomprehensibly. The voice or spiritual breath, however, did not come out of her mouth or nose, but a harmony of the angelic voice resounded [*resonabat*] only from between the breast and the throat. (Thomas de Cantimpré, *Life of Christina the Astonishing*, III.35)

My paper, wishing to become a stethoscope placed upon Christina's breast or speculative ear listening for the very voice of her heart, will seek to develop an imaginative hermeneutics of auscultation proper to the interface between mystical vision and the body as instrument of impossible hearing/sound. In light of the express concerns of the workshop, the instrumental complex of Christina's ecstatic body—broadcasting the divine beyond-within the continuum between words and music—will serve as a tuning fork by

which to speculate the ‘networked aural future’ of sounding the unsoundable and hearing what cannot be heard. What are the implications and possibilities of listening to Christina’s violently harmonic body—still echoing through its own silence—as a process-map for mediated life? How are its dialectical stages (speaking, spinning, stillness, sounding) generalizable to intelligent action in the midst of this multifarious and misguided world? These questions will be addressed, not to repurpose mystical aims for contemporary ephemeral ends, but in order to fulfill their original truth. ‘Intelligent action’ thus here means that which fulfills mystical desire, the “desire to be everything” (Bataille). As Meher Baba says, “All action except that which is intelligently designed to attain God-realisation, creates a binding for consciousness. It is not only an expression of accumulated ignorance, but a further addition to that accumulated ignorance” (*Discourses*, I. 112). The question, then, is how listening to the inaudible sounding of Christina’s body provides a model for *musical* action in a mystical sense, according the correlative idea of music as that which alone satisfies: “Only music provides definite answers” (Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, 80). Just as Christina’s ecstatic vocality grows in the ground of listening to her own speaking of God, so musically intelligent action is that of a divine self-listener, an auto-auscultatory agent who is anagogically attuned via self-alienation to the supreme counterfactual: the fact that one is, in the atemporal already of the *now*, inseparable from eternal reality. To help imagine further specific artistic forms of such intelligently active mystical auscultation, comparisons will be drawn to the contemplative practice of black metal theory and the silence-producing writing of Clarice Lispector: “Now it is an instant. Here is another now. And another. My effort: to bring now the future to here . . . Hear me, hear my silence. What I say is never what I say but something else . . . Read the energy that is in my silence. Ah I fear God and his silence” (*Agua Viva*).