

Murmur

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Certificate Of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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I am, of course, responsible for any and all mistakes, misrepresentations and omissions.

Note: The sections of this thesis addressing digital sound has been developed from work I completed for my Honours thesis which has since been published in another form in my paper 'Digital Sound: On Technology, Infidelity & Potentiality'.

Once long ago Narcissus was fascinated by seeing himself. In a smooth and calm water, either which was not moving, or which flowed unified and untroubled. Mirror of the waters, morose masturbation of the subject, repetition and death. Narcissus drowned in his reproduction, in his double and his mime, when his face met the image of his face. Drowning, smothering, in adequation. Let that water, then, be murky or rough, so that the face and the body cannot be seen in the reflection of the waters (Serres 2000, p.155).

- Michel Serres

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Abstract

Murmur is an effort to learn from sound. Here I examine the study of sound from early explanations of sound based on the metaphor of a wave on the surface of a body of water, to research into its existence as a physical phenomenon during the Enlightenment, the invention of phonography and the resultant commodification of sound, the *auditory turn* and beyond. Establishing a history of sound based on the many voices that comprise the murmur of sound itself, I critique the myths, each dominated by particular ideas, images and technologies, that have shaped the individual characteristics attributed to sound today. I analyse the influence of tropes such as the image of a stone thrown into water as a model for the passage of sound through a medium, the notion that any sound is reducible to individual frequencies and the suggestion that sound recordings can offer fidelity to an *original* source. I listen to the cacophony. I offer an account of sound that approaches it as a multiplicity that is individuated in a variety of ways. I hear sound as murmur.