More than anything my thanks and love go to Kathryn, Sylvan, Carver, Jim, and Aunt Mary. — Jack Ryan

The Lost Chord
A solo exhibition by Jack Ryan, from April 11 to May 20, 2017. The exhibition was curated by Blake Shell.

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The Art Gym at Marylhurst University is nationally recognized as being at the forefront of contemporary art in the Pacific Northwest. It is available in print and online. Both publications, and public engagement.

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JACK RYAN CONSTRUCTS NEW REALITIES within his work, layering information into forms that overlap and interlace. He connects congruent, and at times disparate, ways of understanding the world within his art, mining the realms of philosophy, sonic and optical theory, poetry, cognitive theory, and popular culture.

As an interdisciplinary artist, Ryan’s primary material is sound. Thinking of it as a tangible material helps me to better grasp how he works with it. He bends and molds it. He pulls sound from objects and spaces; he creates compositions. He speaks of “tuning” his work, whether adjusting sound itself or his ideas around it. He folds sound into systems, metaphors, processes, and pathways, using it as a means to explore the intangibles of human experience. These intangibles are then interpreted, manipulated, and reconfigured into physical form and again into sound.

Ryan presents these layers of information loosely, allowing the audience to move in and out of his world. Each viewer brings their own meanings to the objects and symbols. When I speak to the visual formalism of his work, Ryan dismisses that aspect. He says perhaps he hasn’t gotten away from it entirely. I say perhaps he shouldn’t aspire to that goal. His interest lies in combining sculpture, light, sound, drawings, and instruments into sensory experiences, then observing their effects.
THE LOST CHORD/
EAR FLUORESCENT
2017
Fluorescent light fixture,
archival inkjet print
2 × 12 × 12 inches
April 11—May 20, 2017 | ART GYM | Marylhurst University
Curated by BLAKE SHELL
SOUTHEAST VIEW

4:21 Clock
Custom Left Hemisphere Pedestal: Speaker, Soup Can/Audio Reflection, Paul Thek’s Tonsils and Bertolt Brecht’s Tonsils, Conch Loop, Burner (Polygon)

Custom Right Hemisphere Pedestal: Helmet Conch/Platter, Assorted Images, Mammoth Tooth, Keepsakes
MAMMOTH TOOTH
(DETAIL)
2017
Transducer, amplifier, 30,000-year-old woolly mammoth tooth, electronics, 00:01:00 beta/theta tone trance loop
3.5 × 8.5 × 4.75 inches
I PINPOINT THE ROOM in a geography I am left to imagine. I am writing from the city of Montréal, some 2,800 miles away from Marylhurst University, but both just north of the 45th parallel, a mere six minutes of latitude apart.

This wide mental arc reminds me that the conventions of modern time rely on the coordination of distant signals. Questions of travel are always, also, questions of time. In a room in the Pacific Northwest, the exhibits in *The Lost Chord* pulse with binaries. Sound, light, materials, suggestions in consciousness are carefully arranged into patterns, like shapes and symbols on a map. To every room there is a tone, sometimes a tune.

Facts enough to draw a mental map, and welcome the world into place.

*Holocene Island*

NORTHWEST OF THE ROOM sits Wrangel Island in its nook of time. The International Date Line, half a world away from the prime meridian, wraps along the eastward shore of the island. A little farther off, the terrestrial night edges into the coming day, and the hour turns around.

A mere two thousand years ago, mammoths still roamed the island. They knew nothing of modern time zones and the great tuning of time that was to come: telegraph wires stretched across the surface of the earth, allowing for the synchronization of clocks and signals, shipping lines and train schedules, the flow of commerce and empire...

The mammoths’ woolly ancestors came up from Africa three million years ago, thundering blindly out of the Pleistocene. A smaller-sized variety still roamed the island when the Pharaohs were raising pyramids in Egypt, when Stonehenge was erected and the scribes of Sumer were learning their craft. They had settled very near the place where the Bering land bridge melted back into water. Although the exact reason for their extinction is unknown, their drowned fossils testify to a watery departure, as though they had harbored a memory of ancient, hopeful crossings.

The realities of former worlds have a tendency to sink into the soil and scatter into objects. Mammoths’ molars survive their bearers by centuries.1 They are used to date specimens and are found in great numbers all around the island. In this day and age, a mammoth tooth can be acquired at a reasonable price on the Internet through perfectly legal means. In the room at Marylhurst one

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1 *Mammoth*, as an adjective, was first applied to a momentous wheel of cheese offered to US President Thomas Jefferson. Cheese is something usually deemed rather average-sized. The mammoths of Wrangel Island, in comparison to their ancestors, were also very small, and eventually grew as minute as teeth.
of these molars is wired to a transducer pulsing with tonal music. This Wrangel relic is one of many conduits used to tune the room.

I think of it as one component in a system of resonances extending far beyond the exhibition venue, in both inner and outer space. For example, starting from the tooth, I could infer that the conches, placed at right angles to each other and seeping with sea sounds, have something to do with Wrangel sitting at the meeting point of the Arctic and Pacific fronts. This situation causes the fog-shrouded island to be wracked by circular winds, often curling into full-blown cyclones. One is reminded that the conventions of time must always answer to the vagaries of the weather.

There is also weather inside. The plaster clock, its red second hand running around an eternal 4h21—the suspended minute of a 4h20, a sativa fix, in Northwest parlance—is an image of time pushing against its own boundaries. Wrangel bends the timeline. And mammoths, like cows and horses, had perfect teeth for crushing weeds...

Whatever other miracles it may effect, sound, like time, travels through objects. This room plays songs for the inner ear. The images of the exhibition allow me to move through them as through a metaphorical coordinate system. I could have started from anywhere, and come into the same tune.

Equator Sound

**The Equator** bounds the circumference of the world, as the horizon of our perceptions deploys around the nowhere of our minds. Heinrich Wilhelm Dove was a student of the weather who charted the counterclockwise and clockwise movement of cyclones over the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. He is also the discoverer of the binaural effect, which would be put to various uses by experimental psychologists and musicians of the following centuries. Two tones played one to each ear, beating at nearby frequencies, combine in the inner ear to create a phantom third. This is said to have a soothing effect on our thoughts, and to contribute to our sense of direction, by allowing us to pinpoint where a sound originates. Dove leaves us with an image of cyclones turning along the equator line like sounds combining in consciousness, signals near and far, large and small, crisscrossing, interfering, as the world tunes itself.

It should also be noted that sativa, recently legalized in the Northwest, grows best along the equator. *The Lost Chord* is redolent with references to its stupefying properties. It is a mammoth plant that can reach up to six meters in height. The artist has no clinical background. However, he is very aware that smoking sativa can induce a state of relaxation. And that oversmoking it can trigger mind storms: paranoid or schizophrenic episodes. It is an early darling of the Holocene. In Latin, its name means “cultivated.” The ancients owe the rope of their ships, the thread of their clothes, and the paper of their first Bibles to it... Though it is its early, holy fruit, sativa, for some, is the perfect cure for the malaise of civilization.

Things might well turn along dividing lines, other realities are born in their wake. In the room are suspended wind chimes. The instrument was used to record a variation on Russian composer Alexander Scriabin’s Prometheus chord, a scale of mystic tones meant to apprehend the mind of God.

Its brittle music is one of the wavelengths oscillating through the artefacts. Sound travels, and transforms, through our thoughts. *The Lost Chord* resonates with signals from nowhere, fading transmissions, intimations of the distant weather of sound, of which we are the carriers.
**4:21 CLOCK**
2016
Clock, plaster, second hand moving animation, electric motor, cardboard, battery
13.5 × 14 × 2.75 inches

**BURNER (CRYSTAL)**
2017
Machined steel, rare mystic rock, crystals, cast concrete, sativa incense
3.5 × 5.75 × 7.5 inches
Example of a complete quartal voicing of the mystic chord in Scriabin’s Piano Sonata no.5, op.53.

Jack Ryan recording Mystic Tone Trance Loop, Eugene, Oregon, winter 2017.

**MYSTIC CHORD WIND CHIME**

2017

Six machined-steel chime pipes tuned to C, F♯, B♭, E, A, D; wind catcher; cord; stainless steel ring; hardware

96 x 32 x 18 inches
Two poets of note: Carl Adamshick & Laura B. Hughes, Baltic birch, maple, steel, electronics, Sony CRT monitor, media player, controller box, paddles, net. Cinematography and editing by Ian Clark.
Signal Shore

Due east, we come upon FFU (station Française Fixe de Ushant) in Le Conquet, at the westernmost tip of Brittany. On January 31, 1997, at 23h46, it sent out its last Morse transmission. A transcription of it is framed in the room at Marylhurst:

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This is our final cry on 500 MHz before eternal silence. STOP.

These Gallic operators in their lonely aeries knew that extinction calls for a dramatic flourish. I can’t help but think that the mammoths’ main recourse, as testimony to their drowning into the noise of time, was to leave their tusks and teeth behind. Each epoch embodies a new species of erasure. During the Cold War, the Russian military established a radar station on the southern tip of the mammoths’ Holocene retreat. It would be silenced around the same time as FFU, with the fading of Morse code as a method of nautical communication. STOP.

Nothing is eternal, not even silence.

The Lost Chord resounds with instances of stopped time—time contained by clocks, conches, the childish telephones of tin cans, the dreamy effluvia of sativa buds... Time is cast in cement, like fossils encased in clay... The exhibits on display are as many talismans in which sound, transduced into things, signals the phantom power of codes unknown entering our consciousness, and intent on delicately turning the room inside out, and us in it.

America, let us not forget, harbors a long tradition of lonely experiments conducted in closed rooms. One may summon images of Thoreau or the Unabomber, but must also remember that, in secret locations all over the United States, scientists conducted experiments on the nature of mind.

The spirit of two remarkable women hovers over the exhibition. An old-fashioned TV set frames neoliberal heroine Ayn Rand, who has been painted into a corner by an off-screen Dan Rather. Her haunted gaze, scanning the edges of her field of vision, sets off the blinking of a two-bulbed lamp. If a mammoth can be pulled out of its tooth, maybe an embarrassing episode in the history of ideas can be explained away by a look?

The ping-pong table and paddles, also linked to a lamp blinking in beat to the replay of a videotaped confrontation, are a reminder that the game of binaries takes on many forms, not all equally playful. But there is hope in the details. Ayn’s ping-pongish eye movements echo the bilateral reprocessing technique known as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), pioneered by Dr. Francine Shapiro to help victims of trauma. The potency of EMDR might have something to do with the restful properties of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, that dream state in which we unconsciously replay the day’s materials in order to release some of their emotional content. Dr. Shapiro’s method has proven very effective in deflecting the traumatic memories of some of the victims of abuse of power, namely, rape survivors and war veterans, many among them amputees.

I will end on a final resonance with the open notebook, reminiscent of the journals where the lonely operators scribbled incoming code. In rooms north of the 49th parallel (they are not homes, rather stations), lines of writing course through me like lines of code. I welcome the transmission, enter an associative state. Time, through writing, flows into place. I am able to report on the weather of sound, answer questions of travel. To every room, there is a geography, and to every geography, there is a politics.
BIO MUSIC FLOW LOOP
(DETAIL)
2017
Silkscreen ink on paper
33 x 25 inches

**JAN TUMLIR:** To prepare for our conversation, I was rereading some of your proposals for public works, and it occurred to me that your interest in sound, which is long-standing, comes from an aesthetic as well as a scientific perspective, and maybe that relates to your background in mental health.

**JACK RYAN:** Yes, absolutely. My interest in the aesthetics of sound parallels a lot of the comments you made in the introduction to your upcoming book about sound and monochrome painting, *Colorless, Atonal*. I believe you quoted Walter Pater: “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” This certainly figures into my formative experiences as a young person; I was shaped not only by my contact with the music and sound community, but also by my mental health job, where I was exposed to the clinical.

Escaping the mimetic was instrumental in my exploration of abstraction. I wanted to move beyond the observable and the knowable. I’m naturally bound to the image, but as a creatively restless artist, I explore avenues that go against my natural inclination, and so am drawn to explore new materials and media. I prefer to take myself away from what I know, to locations that I’m unfamiliar with.

I think this might be connected to my experiences working in that mental health hospital in Berkeley. There, I was exposed to the clinical, as mentioned, but also to experiences that lie beneath the surface, experiences that were unknown, traumas that were impossible to understand. Of course, this exposure to the unknown is manifest in the challenges facing those patients.

That’s what I mean by a restless nature. If I’m not uncomfortable or unfamiliar with what I’m doing, I think I value it less. Sound has become a way for me to explore new avenues in spaces lying outside my expertise. This takes me away from the known world to something unknown. If you look at the movement into abstraction in the visual world, it’s a movement into the unknown.
Regarding the Pater quote, I was thinking about this notion that sound is not representational, but presentational. So it never gives you an already made image or idea, but rather it produces a different image or idea in every listener. Going back to the scientific side of your interest, you mention working with the physically affective aspects of sound. You speak of specific audio frequencies that might produce identical psychophysiological results in their listeners, which would suggest that there might be something in sound that we all experience in common. Yet there is this whole other world that is not part of the aesthetic world, where sound is employed in various processes of human testing, for good and ill. That seems to be part of your interest as well, and it’s in the background of a number of works in the show.

That is an astute question, and it leads me into some of the scientific or cognitive qualities of sound that I like to pair with more traditional strategies. I’m a formalist, but I also try to get away from myself. We’re both enthusiasts; this is what leads me to continue making work, just as it has led you to carefully dissect and take apart what you’re looking at, or what you think is resonant in our culture. So art is essentially a poetic experience. When we go into a venue, a gallery or museum, and we see something artful and are affected by it, we are elevated by the poetics of the experience. I have this happen to me all the time; that’s why my work aspires to function on that level. My interest in exploring the scientific and cognitive is, in a way, a cynical gesture toward the arts and how they function. I’m looking for ways to skip over subjectivity from the viewer or listener, who either gets it or doesn’t, but who may be elevated either way. For some, a painting by Velázquez elevates them and brings them to other spaces. In this context, art is liberating. The liberal arts elevate us from our humanity, or the experience of “just” being human.

Or we’re simply liberating ourselves from a socialized experience, right? And we are recovering some part of our humanity in playfulness.

Yes, and if the cognitive aspect skips over our subjectivity, and if everyone can come into the space and experience a frequency offset or a binaural tone, or as Maryanne Amacher would call it, an auto-acoustic resonant tone, or a third tone, it can cognitively shift the way your brain is functioning—this interests me too. Sounds can create a dream state, in theory, or a state of highly functioning awareness. I love the idea that a group of people can enter a room and, as a group, can experience a situation that is elevating.

I am very interested in this idea of the third tone, in that it might constitute, to some extent, a synthesis, or marriage of opposites, whether we are discussing these widely disparate frequencies or the cognitive left- and right-brain functions.
AYN RAND LAMP
2012–15
CRT monitor, custom electronics, steel, wood, vcr player, 00:02:59 kinescope loop
But what you are suggesting is that everyone who goes into that art venue is experiencing the same thing in the same way. You’ve talked about art in terms of an experiential “tuning,” in this regard—tuning not just an individual, but a collective audience. There is, on one hand, a utopian aspect to this, and then, on the other hand, a potentially sinister aspect. Here, your use of the word “cynical” is striking, because there is a very generous, almost user-friendly aspect to your work, but it also comes shrouded with intimations of control.

I think that is there.

I am thinking of your use of beta and theta frequencies to produce the third tone—which is something that obviously happens in the minds of listeners—through panning and cross-fading, which you discuss in your proposals for public works, and which might be described as your signature moves. The audience is like a test subject—it is being experimented on—and this idea is made manifest, even in a way represented, in several of your works. I’m thinking specifically of the Ayn Rand Lamp (2012–15), where you employ this found footage of a televised interview with Rand in which she appears visibly fraught. This has certain political implications that we can trace to her writings, in regard to the formation of a neoliberal subject; and all of that is in the artwork as well—perhaps not explicitly, but these are things that you’re bringing to the table. For instance, I want to align the nervous movement of her eyes with the ideology she wanted to advance, an ideology that is both socially indifferent and paranoid, both laissez-faire and coercive. So this is an artwork where movement itself must be regarded as a free aesthetic phenomenon, while also pointing to the idea of subjective manipulation.

Certainly. In this piece, a lamp blinks on either left or right, corresponding to the direction of her eye movements. Incidentally, the interviewer in this piece of footage taken from the sixties is Dan Rather, the former news anchor who has become a voice in current political discourse. Ayn Rand does look sinister!

She is being challenged, and she looks cagey. There is an anxious look in her eyes; it reveals her difficulty in processing the interviewer’s questions. Seen as a head in the TV box, she looks like she’s trying to find a way out of this trap she’s in.

Yes, she’s been trapped. She’s been trapped by Dan Rather.

[Laughter.]

I don’t broadcast her voice in the piece. I use her voice in the programming software to turn the lights on and off, like a physical medium. Her voice becomes this on/off switch. The process of looking left and right has to do with connecting brain hemispheres; she’s connecting the left and right hemispheres, and connecting
memory with logic. She’s also self-soothing. Connecting these two brain hemispheres has the quality of relaxing the subject; so she is both relaxing herself and accessing her vast knowledge, her memory of that knowledge, to logically answer these very challenging questions. She is navigating a difficult landscape, and she’s accessing her memory and trying to present this information in a unified way, and she’s doing a good job of it. This process of moving your eyes left and right is used in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR).

These processes of synthesizing widely disparate sound sources, or managing cognitive dissonance, are employed in the production of art, sound art, and/or noise music—in all kinds of avant-garde composition, to some extent. But these processes have also been subjected to all kinds of government testing and have been employed as a means of individual as well as crowd control. I’m thinking here of the use of ultrasound to disperse crowds, or the use of high- or low-pitched frequencies for purposes of torture. But even in the more therapeutic approaches to sound, there is something sinister. Sounds that have a soothing effect, that function to calm people or to treat them—here we might think of the use of New Age music in the dentist’s office to relax you before you go in for torture. [Laughter.]

So there are these instrumental potentials in sound that are not only physically affective, but cognitively intrusive, and art has also played a part in developing them. And sometimes artists come back to these sounds that have been, in a sense, hijacked by power, and put them to the opposite use to produce an emancipatory experience. For example, a band like Psychic TV will reroute the use of so-called brown noise—a subsonic frequency with ostensible bowel-loosening properties that conspiracy theorists are especially keen on—to the out-of-control, to foment a collective delirium. What I’m getting at is that there’s always this dialogical back-and-forth between the aesthetic sphere and the political sphere when it comes to sound. And this is also brought up in your works, which are playing on those oppositions, seeking to synthesize them somehow.

Some of these early sound artists that we’ve been talking about off-mike, like Manford Eaton, Iannis Xenakis, Alvin Lucier, and John Cage, were present during a moment when these kinds of questions around both the sinister and emancipatory were being considered. You introduced me to Eaton through Branden Joseph’s article that discussed Eaton’s publication of a small book titled *Bio-Music* (1971), where he considers the programmatic aspects of sound. There seems to be some indication of Eaton collaborating with, or at least being approached by, the CIA during the earliest stages of their pursuit of “no touch” torture, using sound as a tool to provoke distress in a subject.
Reaching back to my background in mental health, right after my undergraduate experience I spent time in Berkeley at one of the last hospitals still using shock therapy to treat schizophrenia, depression, and other mental disorders. In a process like EMDR, patients are under the guidance of a highly trained navigator to help them both recall their traumas and connect that memory center with the logic memory center. This is done through back-and-forth eye movements, or sounds, or even knee-tapping. Anytime you’re dealing with techniques to de-install troubling memories, you’re also dealing with the potential to install information. A technique like EMDR—which is very useful and successful in treating PTSD—also renders the subject highly susceptible to influence, and this is where the sinister comes into play. This is where these early sound artists departed from other groups with more sinister interests.

By the way, this telephone voice-recording service that we’re using was developed so that someone can’t surreptitiously record you without your knowing. This maybe points to our current state of emergency concerning espionage and whatnot. It inserts a sinister technical backdrop to our conversation.

[Laughing.] Yes, not a laughing matter.

This brings up other aspects of sound that you’re touching on, particularly in your still-life sculptures, as you call them, where you are not actually amplifying or broadcasting sound, but rather indicating that potential, somehow, by its absence. With Speaker (2017), for instance, you’re presenting the audience with the absence of sound—that is almost what we see in this thing—and yet there is an insistence that this cast-concrete speaker is nevertheless a resonant object. It is something meant to be not only looked at, but also listened to, even in the absence of any sound that one could immediately hear. This is corroborated by the entire setup, which contains all sorts of working sonic devices: pickups, transducers, amps, and so on. All of this technical paraphernalia suggests to me that everything in the room is somehow implicated in the production of the all-over aural ambience—what’s called the “room tone.”

On the other end of the “big sounds” we’ve been discussing, there are these “small sounds”—I’m using the language of Cage here—that require a greater effort to hear on the part of the audience. In this regard, you bring up the idea of self-tuning. A sensory recalibration is required to capture these sounds, and this relates to your thoughts on aesthetic experience as poetic elevation. But even in this more benign realm of small sounds, we can make out a coercive element. For instance, my friend Euan McDonald recently wrote a paper on loitering, and there he looks into the fact that 7-Eleven stores have been known to broadcast into their parking lots a frequen-
cy of sound that only teenagers can hear. These sounds are disagreeable to them, and so deter loitering outside the store, but since nobody outside that targeted age range can hear these sounds, it won’t discourage their better, older customers.

I also think about how white noise is something that’s pumped into offices, and even though it’s not heard—or precisely because it’s not heard, not consciously processed—it creates an ambience that is somehow more appealing and perhaps less disquieting (an interesting word) than that of an actually silent work space. So, yes, these are things I am thinking about in relation to these objects of yours. They can all fit into the category of sound sculpture, which inevitably opens onto the category of sound installation—the entire room is being “tuned,” and this carries all sorts of implications.

I was recently giving a large-format lecture, and I often start off these lectures with a sound test where I broadcast all the audible tones, and then some. I use an oscillator I built in Processing, a flexible software sketchbook for learning how to code within the context of the visual arts. I ask the audience to put their hands in the air when they hear a tone and put their hands down when they can’t hear it anymore.

I start at the so-called brown tone, which is around 7 Hz, just as a provocative gesture, because the brown tone isn’t heard in the ear, it’s felt in the body. As you said earlier, the brown tone has a kind of mystic infamy related to how, when, and where it has been used historically for subversive purposes. A frequency of 9 Hz can be dangerous for the heart, so I carefully avoid that. I slowly begin increasing the sound frequency, starting at 7 Hz and moving toward 20,000 Hz. The audible range of sound is typically described as 20 Hz to 20,000 Hz. At 20 Hz there still aren’t any hands up, partly because it is at the bottom threshold of human hearing, but also because this is below the broadcast range of most speaker systems. At 50 Hz, hands start to go up; by 80 Hz, most of the hands are up in the air. I’ll turn the sound on and off to keep the audience honest. When I reach about 12,000 Hz, most of the hands of the attendees over the age of fifty go down. By the time I reach 15,000 Hz, I lose thirty-year-olds. By 18,000 Hz, most of the eighteen-year-olds drop their hands too, except for a few women. The women are the last to go; they have the best ears for those high registers.

I enjoy clinical exercises in sound that are driven by results, but I distrust myself when my work moves only in the direction of the cognitive. Introducing speculation into my practice comes out best when I focus on the haptic, a sense of touch. I’ve been making work for this exhibition with cast concrete because of its obstinacy.

The cast-concrete speaker really stands out because, as a sculpture, it speaks directly to silence. Precisely because of the material you chose and all of the qualities you’re imbuing it with, it greets us as a mute sculptural presence. But then that
SPEAKER
2017
Cast concrete
11.5 x 4 x 3 inches
**Conch Loop**
2017
Helmet conch, pink conch, steel
10.25 x 16 x 16.5 inches

**Bio Music Flow Loop**
2017
Silkscreen ink on paper
33 x 25 inches
work also gives us an image of loudness, and this makes me think, for instance, of Cage, and how he drew noise out of silence. The invocation to listen attentively can also be made out, maybe in a more metaphorical sense, but also in a real sense, in the conch-shell piece (Conch Loop, 2017). This piece informs the loudspeaker because, in it, the effects of sounding are being manifestly related to listening.

The conchs, to me, are like an imagined drawing or a flowchart, suggesting a looping conversation between the two shells, an unknown process.

The drawing aspect is something you’ve also materialized in the support structure of the two conch shells, correct? It looks like a diagram of some sort.

Yes, though I’ve used quarter-inch steel. I looked at museum armatures, these specialized armatures built by preparators, or special art handlers, to hold precious objects. The armatures typically hold Fabergé eggs, or a piece of jewelry, in order to display something, and at the same time the armature has to disappear. I’ve always been fascinated by these armatures, which I consider sculptures.

One of my framed prints in this exhibition, Bio Music Flow Loop (2017), is taken from one of the illustrations in Eaton’s book Bio-Music, which is maybe what you are referring to. It outlines the process of how music can be introduced to a test subject, be adjusted or tuned, and how the data can be reintroduced back to the subject after being adjusted. A determination can again be made to see if the adjustment can produce the desired response. This process, presented as an illustration in his text Bio-Music, is both sinister and fascinating.

Yes, I’m looking at Eaton’s diagram, a very simple diagram. Your work reproduces that diagram, and I see how it overlaps with the display structure of the conch-shell armature, as well as a number of other display structures in the exhibition. The composition of the Ayn Rand Lamp piece also suggests a diagram—it is an audio-visual looping device. This is perhaps echoed more generally in the placement of objects throughout the exhibition—that is, in the overarching conceit of the installation.

Obviously, the audio and the visual constitute widely disparate phenomenal and sensory realms. Here, again, I am drawn to your use of the terms “cross-fading” and “panning”—perhaps these are also ways of alternating between, and synthesizing, sound and image. And perhaps these are also ways to manifestly draw the audience into the process.

Sound design can activate audiences; for instance, some of the data on the efficacy of sound design has been explored on children
NOISE BIO MUSIC LAMP
2017
Cold-hammered steel, welded steel, concrete, electronics, white noise random generator controller box, dispensary packaging
with special needs. How can certain design systems more clearly convey information into a subject’s memory and cognition? These kinds of ideas say something about the power of sound to affect somebody cognitively and emotionally.

If you think about sound’s ability to affect and uplift a culture, you can talk about Gregorian chants, trance music, Native American chants, even reggae music.

What you’re suggesting is that certain, maybe all, musical forms answer in part to a biological need—let’s say, a need for energy, or a need for relaxation—and certain combinations of sounds that have been tested over time, and are now part of our tradition, actively produce these desired results on a consistent basis. So this is why we have kept these particular combinations of sounds, why they’ve survived. Here, again, it would seem that what counts is that it works the same way on everyone, every time. And if it can do so, that may be because the experience is primarily physical, not so much a matter of interpretation or judgment. We don’t have to qualify the experience as good or bad in a connoisseurial sense, or as being in any way meaningful; rather, it is simply what these sounds do to us.

But here again we come to a crossroads—I can’t seem to get off this point! It is utopic that these combinations of sounds, these various forms of music, do the same things, equally, to all of us, because they answer to biological needs that we all share. And yet, for the very same reasons, they also are powerful tools of control. Moreover, even if we consider sound strictly from the standpoint of art, the control element is there. On a purely aesthetic level, what one senses in a sculpture or a painting is that the artist did something to something else. You were talking about your investment in the haptic, in regard to these concrete castings you’re working on, and in them we see precisely the work of your hand on the material. With sound, however, there’s always a sense that the aesthetic experience is somehow invasive, physically and mentally invasive. Sculptures and paintings aren’t that way, because artists deal with them at arm’s length, so to speak, and then for the audience they tend to take shape as alternate worlds. But with sound there’s a sense that something gains access, is entering you, and that’s a very different kind of aesthetic experience.

What is it about sound that gives it such easy access, such influence beyond our control?

Beyond our control and yet controlling. There is a control element always in play. Again, we don’t feel this way about paintings or sculptures, certainly not to the same extent—this sense that they’re invading us, whether to produce alertness, anxiety, or excessive relaxation. [Laughter.] There
is the sense that sound has not been shaped so much as it is shaping me, or shaping the listener.

Speculating again, can we see how popular culture has embraced some types of audio media?

This is Marshall McLuhan’s thesis concerning sound. In the new age of media, he suggested that the old, more distancing modes of visual communication could not hold. The culture had become immersive; it was better explained by recourse to the acoustic spectrum.

Sure, but the visual world is still our primary tool for navigating. This wasn’t always the case. At one time, sound and smell gave us a more nuanced understanding of our environment.

The visual world is a very linear world, a world of single perspectives—that is, a world of straight lines, and therein lies the extent of the information that a visual human can gather. It’s very Western, accessing the world from a single location. I wonder if this fact has desensitized our world, built a barrier around it, or reduced it, created filters that keep the visual world from installing itself into our cognition as you are suggesting sound does.

We are very sophisticated about our visual intake, but not so much in regard to sound. It seems much more mysterious, probably only because we don’t spend much time analyzing it. This is played out in art school. Here, we are prepared to dissect and study every type of image, but are seemingly dumbfounded when it comes to articulating the experience of a sound work. That’s interesting, and also opens this door to new possibilities. In aesthetic terms, sound is refreshing because you feel it—it is about feeling, which is the first concern of aesthetics—and yet these feelings haven’t been linguistically codified. We have all this room to shape the language used to describe those feelings, so there’s sort of a free space when it comes to trying to analyze or theorize what’s going on there. But being so immediately affective, sound also has a side of built-in un-freedom, and that also awaits articulation. Sound is doing something to you; it’s making you into something; it’s forcing you to take some kind of position.

I like those aspects of sound. Writing about it remains a challenge. There is, of course, writing by musicologists, and then there are writings that are more scientifically oriented, but the more general aesthetic element is what interests me when it comes to my own writing, because this is still an open space. You have to reach into yourself to find the correct wording.

We do have a developed language in music to talk about things like sonatas and symphonies. We use words like “andante,” “allegro,” or “cadenza”—but it feels like that language hasn't developed much.
It feels medieval.

Yes, this is the technical language of musicology, and then there’s that other technical language that relates to science, to fields like physics or psychology—or psychophysics—and to more instrumental forms of understanding. All the various functions and uses of sound that we’ve been discussing lean on that language. Words like “binaural,” “frequency offset,” “biofeedback,” and “EMDR” reach into that technical tool kit, but when we’re talking about what the music does to you, the analysis and interpretation of how it makes you feel—that language has yet to develop.

I was recently working with a group of contemporary musicians. During my collaboration with these new-music composers, as we were talking about how our collaboration was going and we were evaluating and listening, we were literally looking at wave forms. Here I was sitting in this room talking with these professional composers and performers, and we’re looking at the flat-screen TV, in front of the master control panel for mixing the sound, and we’re discussing the wave form and accessing it as a tool as much as the actual sounds. It was a way to discuss structure that was apparent to all of us, but only after visually confirming the data. The parts of sound somehow not apparent became apparent, or confirmed, because we had a wave form. It would be like not knowing if your heart was beating, or not being quite sure, unless you had an EKG in front of you showing you the heartbeats. It seems pretty funny now, though it didn’t seem that way at the time. It was as if the wave form confirmed that we had heard something. So in the practice of sound composition there is a reliance on the visual world that is surprising.

It’s revealing. I suppose we do need an image of some sort. Even without the technology, our descriptions of sounds and music tend to be imagistic, although this was exactly what Cage and his colleagues wanted to get past. To listen to “sounds in themselves” was precisely not to relate them causally to their various sources or to depict them with any kind of metaphor.

I’d like to bring up one last thing in this regard. We’ve already touched on the way that the innovations of the avant-gardes are sometimes usurped by political powers for means of control, but there is also the other danger of an excessive tempering by popular culture. This can be seen as another, perhaps opposite, dialectic at play in your practice, and there, too, you’re interested in performing this panning or cross-fading motion. This comes up for me in the wind-chime sculpture (Mystic Chord Wind Chime, 2017), which operates on this underlying logic of conversion, turning avant-gard-ism into a popular form. In a way, you might be tempering the work of Scriabin for a New Age intake. The wind chimes have
obvious New Age associations, which, in my opinion, are here being treated lightly, humorously, though not dismissively. The various bio-music tests that we’ve discussed were going on around the time of the New Age movement, and I’m also interested in the historical panning and cross-fading happening there. Scriabin’s Prometheus chord, with all its utopian thrust, is brought into the dystopian realm of the United States in the seventies, which becomes a kind of layover point for the experience that we then have, immanently, in the gallery. In a way, this is funny, but not only funny.

Sure, I think there’s some humor in there. I’m always tickled and interested in finding humor in the work. I think it exists in this work, but I try to avoid the ironic or sarcastic.

I live in this part of the Pacific Northwest that has elements of New Age culture everywhere. I think it’s both horrible and wonderful. Some people take it very seriously. I think there are elements of courage in their search; at the same time, I see it as quite horrible. I hope I use it in a nonjudgmental way. It’s a part of my aesthetic experience here, and so it filters into my work. Scriabin’s interest, which was very utopic, might have been viewed as quite humorous, and may have had no importance to many of his contemporaries.

To return to this idea of synthesis, collage, and cross-fading, I like to access time and culture in the projects involved in this exhibition. So I’ll take a chord from late-modernist Russia, and simultaneously access the sound experiments and precedents of the sixties and seventies. Or reaching back further, to thirty thousand years ago, I’ll use a mammoth tooth *(Mammoth Tooth, 2017)*, for instance. I also try to make my work childlike, as well as shamanistic—I think both things can coexist. I think the wind chime functions on this level. It sources time, histories, but sometimes I like to think that a wind chime is just a wind chime. [Laughter.]

Sometimes the wind chime is just that, but in the context of art it also has historical connotations. You talk about the Prometheus chord arising in a moment of social fervor, but the seventies wind chime has to be seen as a radical reduction of that fervor, the tempering of the socially antagonistic elements within the utopian formulation. That said, your movements of panning and cross-fading are in themselves also operating on another level, in the opposite direction—they are two-way movements.

I want to add an anecdotal detail to this. I think it’s a contemporary fact that a lot of people who were aficionados of black metal and Japanese noise music have started collecting New Age records. There is a trend of New Age music collecting within these most extreme segments of musical fandom. You can see the popularity of the form if you go to record stores, where these records, formerly confined to the
SPLIT COMPOSITION
2017
Graphite, ebony, colored pencil on paper
33 x 25 inches
bargain bin, have begun escalating in price. There is a new connoisseurship growing around them.

At the same time, this interest speaks to the marriage of opposites that we’ve been talking about. In order to appre-ciate this New Age music again, you might have had to go through a noise-music stage. This amounts to a kind of inver-sion of Cage’s observation about noise emerging from silence. Either way, though, there seems to be a fundamental equivalency between these opposite poles of experience.

We share an interest in noise bands. Now that I’m back in the Northwest, I’m learning that many of the bands that now exist in Los Angeles, New York, and Europe actually started here.

Yes, bands like Earth and Sunn O))). Within the realms of noise, they’re approaching the ambient, and this may be why we’re attracted to them. It’s Brian Eno, but at a much louder register.

Some of the noise bands that utilize these intense registers want you to experience that sound in the body.

And that physicality, that most extreme onslaught on the body, often produces the opposite effect in the listener—total relaxation.

Like a Reggae Sunsplash festival?

[Laughing.] This is a nice, at once upbeat and potentially sinister idea.

[Laughing.] Maybe we should end there?

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SOUP CAN/ AUDIO REFLECTION 2017

Composition: Mystic Tone Trance Loop, soup can, electronics, speaker, amplifier, welded steel, solder, custom sound design using Kyma graphical modular software sound-design environment accelerated by the software-reconfigurable Capybara multiprocessor sound computation engine. Recorded sound generated using Mystic Chord Wind Chime in studio with Chi Wang. Electronic composition authored by Chi Wang and Jack Ryan; engineered by Chi Wang.
DIVIDED HEAD
2015
Archival inkjet and cut paper
16.5 × 9.5 inches
Isami Ching: Man on Ladder

Speaker

Burner
CUSTOM RIGHT
HEMISPHERE PEDESTAL
(Detail)
2017
Welded steel tube.
View showing Mammoth Tooth,
Assorted Images,
Helmet Conch/Platter.
JACK RYAN ONCE TOLD ME that the phrase “What’s the frequency, Kenneth?” came from the utterances of a psychopath who attacked news anchor Dan Rather on a street in New York City in 1986. I knew the words only from a lyric in an R.E.M. song; Michael Stipe poetics, I thought. I was wrong. The words hadn’t emerged from the enigmatic imagination of a songwriter; instead, they were the rantings of a man who thought he was being controlled by television waves.

Desperate to find the frequency that would override the media voices occupying his head, William Tager attacked Rather, kicking and shouting at him, “Kenneth, what is the frequency?” Tager fled the assault, only to shoot and kill an NBC technician eight years later. The forensic psychiatrist who interviewed Tager said Tager “believed that messages were being broadcast directly to him on the evening news.”¹

In recounting this tale to me, Ryan was positing the power of invisible energy waves. In the case of Tager, madness, popular media, and folklore rendered the influence of these invisible forces tragic and clichéd. But what I would come to understand from Ryan’s work is that vibrations, frequencies, and their infinite registers are foundational realities that can expand our imagination and the temporal and spatial conditions of everyday life.

The contemporary philosopher Markus Gabriel writes that “There is simply no rule or world formula that describes everything. This is not contingent on the fact that we have not yet found it, but on the fact that it cannot exist at all.”² For Gabriel, this is not a problem but a source of great creativity. “Everything that we know we know through a sense, which has to include the sense of thinking.”³ And it is our senses, Gabriel argues, that allow us to transect the ungraspable infinite. I am invoking Gabriel’s theory because I believe his thesis is also at the core of Ryan’s art-making. Gabriel’s philosophical thought experiment theorizes that the world, this all-inclusive being, cannot exist because it cannot be found in the world itself. Its totality is too abstract to seize. Gabriel writes, “It is in principle too big for any thought.”⁴ He continues, “There is no super-object to which we must surrender in our lifetime. Instead, we are enmeshed in infinite possibilities which draw the infinite close to us.”⁵

More simply, this type of thinking is defined as new realism, a philosophical conceit with a double thesis: “[F]irst, we can know things in themselves and,
second...things and facts in themselves do not belong to a single domain of objects.” Enter Ryan's exhibition The Lost Chord. Ryan's juxtapositions of sensory stimuli, multitemporal transitions, and the presentation of miscellaneous objects philosophically advances what is celebrated within contemporary art as post-Internet and affective art practices. For example, the choreographing of echoes and stutters in The Lost Chord disrupts our comprehension of linear time, instead offering motifs of microtemporalities. The arrangement of quartz crystals, conch shells, and mammoth teeth; the metal castings of everyday objects; the untethered ends of insulated copper wire; bleached corals and tin cans; found print material; a simulacra of a clock—all of these objects coalesce into something more than strange props in an oblique, inscrutable theater. True, The Lost Chord is made up of fragments culled from rigorous and enigmatic cultural research and then carefully organized, but it is also more philosophically complex than that. It is an interconnected offering of transductions, a commingling of works in which physical and metaphysical connections are created, rerouted, and suspended.

Transducer is another term for a sensor: an object that receives stimuli. In Ryan's work, every object is a sensor and every sensor is also a source of stimuli. His compositions are a host of physical objects that produce energies (light, motion, and sound). These combinations of energies are translated into knowable forms such as music, ideas, humor, sculpture, experiments, field tests, and performances. Moreover, the congregation of these forms in the exhibition produces fantastical classifications and unforeseen circulations of power. As Stanley Cavell suggests, "Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction of the worth of reality is established; to forgo fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world." The Lost Chord puts us in touch with multiple realities, realities not necessarily shaped by spatiotemporal conditions or narrative logic. Nor is Ryan's exhibition a mere illustration of a psychofantastic dream. Instead his works are a synthesis of knowing and unknowing, proposition and fact, manifestations and impressions.

There are several visual cues that Ryan repeatedly employs in The Lost Chord. They are key to the understanding of the infinite shifts that take place in this exhibition. Signifiers such as the tuning fork, the wall clock, and light switches are foundational guides to navigating Ryan's rhizomatic trajectories. They are common elements of measure and control held within fields of knowable methodologies (symbolism, myth, and dialectical systems), as well as the indeterminate and abstract fields of discourse offered up in Ryan's compositions. I often turn to Deleuze and Guattari's strategies for this sort of methodological and creative rerouting. Writing about Kafka's work, they say, “We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse.” And this is how we need to enter and traverse Ryan’s exhibition: imagine the vibration of a prehistoric artifact, encounter the genre tradition of still life, confront the ethics of Ayn Rand, examine the poetic potential of Morse code, set into motion oversize wind chimes, believe in the illusion of linear perspective.

Using Kafka’s work as an example of subverting language from within, Deleuze and Guattari critically celebrated the revolutionary potential of a “minor”

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6 Ibid., 234.
KEEPSAKES  
2017
Various keepsakes on cast-concrete platter

SWITCHES  
2016
Balsa wood, Sculpey
$4 \times 3 \times 1$ inches
**Helmet Conch/Platter**  
2017  
Helmet conch, cast-concrete platter

**Assorted Images**  
2017  
Magazine images and postcards. Arrangement varies.

**Mammoth Tooth**  
2017  
Transducer, amplifier, 30,000-year-old woolly mammoth tooth, electronics, 00:01:00 beta/theta tone trance loop

**Keepsakes**  
2017  
Various keepsakes on cast-concrete platter. Arrangement varies.
literature over a literature of masters. Looking to expand conventional interpretations of cultural output, they quote Kafka’s observation that “art is a mirror which goes ‘fast’ like a watch—sometimes.” But Ryan’s *The Lost Chord* reminds us that both time and the mirror are up for grabs, receiving and producing frequencies of physical energy and metaphysical meaning. Ryan demands, incessantly, that we consider frequencies of interpretation, even beyond the radical work of Deleuze and Guattari. He establishes interconnection between the familiar, exotic, handmade, and manufactured things that make up his artwork. Philosophically negating the existence of an all-encompassing *everything*, Ryan poetically reorients our understanding of the world by offering up new and mesmerizing conceptions of everything else.

9 Ibid., xxiv.
JACK RYAN is an interdisciplinary artist who explores trance and contemporary culture through the conduits of sonic theory, sculpture, and optics.

In 2016 Ryan presented projects at the University of California, San Diego, as well as at venues in Nashville, TN; Indianapolis, IN; Connecticut, New Jersey; and Chicago, IL. His collaboration with performer and composer Chi Wang was included in the 2016 Portland Biennial, curated by Michelle Grabner. In 2015 he was awarded a Hallie Ford Fellowship.

Ryan’s work has been exhibited at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, DC); La Maison Laurentine (Aubepierre-sur-Aube, France); Ausstellungsräum Klingental (Basel, Switzerland); the Palace of Fine Arts, Ministry of Culture (Cairo, Egypt); the Dublin Electronic Arts Festival (Ireland); the American University Museum (Washington, DC); Maryland Institute College of Art (Baltimore); the Phillips Collection (Washington, DC); and Syracuse University (New York). Ryan has twice attended the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Alberta, Canada) as a fellow, and has attended a residency at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program (Woodside, CA), supported by the Ford Family Foundation.

From 2014 to 2016, Ryan directed Pacific Sky Exhibitions in Eugene, OR, a two-year partnership focused on bringing artists and writers together for cooperative presentations and published works. He is a member and co-director of Ditch Projects in Springfield, OR. Along with the other members of Ditch Projects, Ryan received a 2015 grant from the Precipice Fund, administered with lead support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Calligram Foundation/Allie Furlotti, as part of their Regional Regranting Program.

DANIEL CANTY is a writer, director, etc. His work circulates between literature, cinema, the visual arts, theater, and design. His directorial debut was an online adaptation of Alan Lightman’s Einstein’s Dreams (1999). He has recently published L’été opalescent (2016), the second part of an auto-science-fiction cycle begun with Bucky Ball (2014). Mappemonde (2016) is an autofictive essay delving into the suburban sensibility in literature. VVV (2015) is a geopoetic atlas about a trilogy of North American journeys in poetic vehicles piloted by artist Patrick Beaulieu. The United States of Wind (2014), a travelogue inspired by the same adventures, and Canty’s novel, Wigrum (2011), have been translated into English by poet Oana Avasilichioaei. He is currently writing and directing the online serial Costumes nationaux (costumesnationaux.com). He studied literature in Montréal, publishing in Vancouver, and film in New York. In 2014, he was awarded a residency at the Studio of Québec in London (UK). He currently lives in Montréal, Québec. He is involved in many projects.

JAN TUMLIR is an arts writer, teacher, and curator who lives in Los Angeles. He is a founding editor of the art journal X-TRA, and a regular contributor to Artforum. He has written catalog essays for such artists as Bas Jan Ader, Uta Barth, John Divola, Cyprien Gaillard, Allen Ruppersberg, and James Welling. His books include: LA Artland, a survey of contemporary art in Los Angeles co-written with Chris Kraus and Jane McPadden (Black Dog Publishing, 2005); Hyenas Are..., a monograph on the work of Matthew Brannon (Mousse, 2011); and The Magic Circle: On the Beatles, Pop Art, Art-Rock and Records (Onomatopée, 2015). In addition to serving as an MFA advisor at Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, Tumlir has taught at Washington University in St. Louis as a Wallace Herndon Smith Distinguished Scholar. Past teaching appointments have brought him to ucla,usc, CalArts, and Otis College of Art and Design. Tumlir’s latest curatorial project, Some Lifestyle Options, was built around the work of Judy Fiskin and exhibited at Richard Telles Fine Art in 2016.

MICHELLE GRABNER is the Crown Family Professor of Art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she is an artist, a writer, and a curator. Her writing has been published in Artforum, Modern Painters, Frieze, Art Press, and Art Agenda, among others. Grabner also runs two exhibition spaces, the Suburban and the Poor Farm, with her husband, artist Brad Killam. She co-curated the 2014 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and in 2016 she curated the Portland Biennial. Along with Jens Hoffmann, Grabner is co-artistic director of the 2018 FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art.