

# New Age Doom

**“It is on this point – what is the time of relativity? - that Bergson argues we need to be more Einsteinian than Einstein.”**

(Keith Ansell Pearson, *Geminal Life*, p.31)

Where relativity gets really interesting is precisely at the juncture that Henri Bergson accuses Einstein of not being relative enough, still conforming to all manner of imposed measurements, call them basic underlying scientific conceits, that derive their relativity from systems that we make up. Bergson argued that time is better understood as a metaphysical procession of all manner of *duration* that overlaps, intersects, interpenetrates, etc. This is the backdrop within which I would like to locate Thomas Bégin's new sound installation work, directly in this slippery territory that marks out the limit of a scientific conceit, in this case Larson feedback, but one that also crosses over boundaries and defies being fixed by principles or concepts.

Bergson, again, speaking much more plainly of the impossible, positions the notion of duration such that there can be no imposition of measurement whereby time is captured or generalized. We live by the clock, no denying, but we are compelled to do so as a necessary abstract construction of consciousness. These measurements that segment our waking life have no applicability to the unconscious, no applicability to desire. And yet there remains a time outside of our heads, a time of desire, and a time of the unconscious. Such a time may not be measurable because it is so relative as to occupy a heterogeneous duration, penetrated by all manner of singularities, and one that is always in a state of becoming. Nevertheless, we are left with the contour of our desire to reckon with on a conscious level and it does seem to occupy some kind of complex, infinitely variable time.

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Below this paragraph was how I initially began to write about Bégin's new work. Before getting into this descriptive mode of writing let me just say that the matter at hand must be contended with philosophically, the present work demands this respect. Look to the paragraphs following the next to return to the high stakes that have been wagered with regards to the present project, and the subsequent development of a lively, critical relation to its own quasi-scientific premise.

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Approaching Thomas Bégin's new installation work *Larsen surf-mixing plan model* one encounters an unfamiliar surround-sound system that features an asymmetrical configuration of string lines drawn between the cones of modified, wall-mounted speakers and the space approximately adjacent, thereby roughly attached to the opposite wall. In total six speakers encircle a grouping of three centrally placed electric guitars. The brightly colored lines intersect the entire dimension of the gallery and thereby double as drawing elements, such that the central grouping of electric guitars takes on a hive-like quality. Onto these neon pink and yellow lines, which cut between two electric guitars held table-like on a floor mounted C-

stand and an electric base suspended parallel from the ceiling, an array of elastic bands and clip wires connect to the guitar strings proper. Bear in mind, once again, that the assembly taken as a whole enjoys an intuitive arrangement, one that is begging to be adjusted and tinkered with. Finally the triad of electric guitars and corresponding six speakers are plugged into three guitar amplifiers, constituting the traditional arrangement of guitar-amplifier-speaker. Good ol' Rock 'n' Roll.

What becomes distinctive in Bégin's project is the strange and unpredictable character that is imposed on the life of a signal, as carried out by the intervening lines. The process of feedback is thus complexified into a lush, musical, evocative mode of expression. At times the resonances generated through this tweak-able, walk-in musical instrument take on the gravitas of an om circle, yet remain somewhat mischievous in the ironic implication of the moral authority that attends such gravitas. Hence Thomas dreamt up the term "New Age Doom": musically, phonically, an undeniable force, but not one without humor for all of the incessant ways that we "possess" such a raw force with an alleged moral authority. This dynamic goes some way to account for laughter as a very prevalent, yet somewhat unconscious response to the Larsen rig. Any giggles produced by this encounter are derived from a critique of implication above and *beyond* explication. What is unruly in the situation is precisely that this sound can not be possessed, nor can the molecular forces which bring this sound into the world. As if to bear out the un-possessibility of this equation the artist confided in me that any "acquisition" of the present work would likely be little more than a set of instructions and a shopping list.

In fact the complex, evolving open system, such as it is, speaks to Bergson's challenge on the subject of relativity. There is an over-turning of science that is necessary to engage in Bégin's model, one that rests with a higher order of relativity, a more complex notion of spacio-temporal existence. The catalytic element is desire, this is what lends force to the proceedings. The sound is compulsive, physical and undeniable, and as such it embodies a critique of its moral inscription. At the same time the work exists in a raw sense, always returning in many different, un-anticipatable guises and feelings. The affirmation that this work and by extension this mode of expression exists, in the elemental context of sound and feedback, is tantamount to a critical affirmation of creativity and of existence itself. Hence this work also enjoys an intuition, and it is in this dimension that it's bizarre duration is fully yet repeatedly and always differently realized.

In other words, its bloody sexy. This is not a sexy that points to the artist per se, this is a sexy that is implicated by way of engagement-- *whomsoever that may be*. The system itself is complex enough and socially determined enough that it actually becomes sexy in and of itself. Conceived from this vantage point, the *New Age Doom* is a doom for containment. In this sense the *New Age Doom* is always border-line nervous breakdown, and the lapses of sound, like death, foretell of revolutionary change. Likewise we know of the erupting potential of feedback, and at times it feels as if a wild animal might get loose in the room. These latent possibilities, which provide dynamic tensions that course through the work, are as situated in a process of *individuation* as are we. It is in this sense that the evolving open system, fraught with its own neurosis, engaged in humor and a self-critique-- without betraying its elemental power, also comes into being as a living system, in the very manner that sound and art are so ineffably hewn into the fabric of existence. The lines between the guitars breathe, and a force of desire circulates around and through this expression, ultimately pointing up the doomed aspect of what might be termed a worldly property of that which is knowable (and perversely

implicating the wellsprings of absurdity that emanate from new aged over-determinations). Finally, it is at this juncture that the installation must be given over to the most visceral and relative of experiential domains, that of *play*.