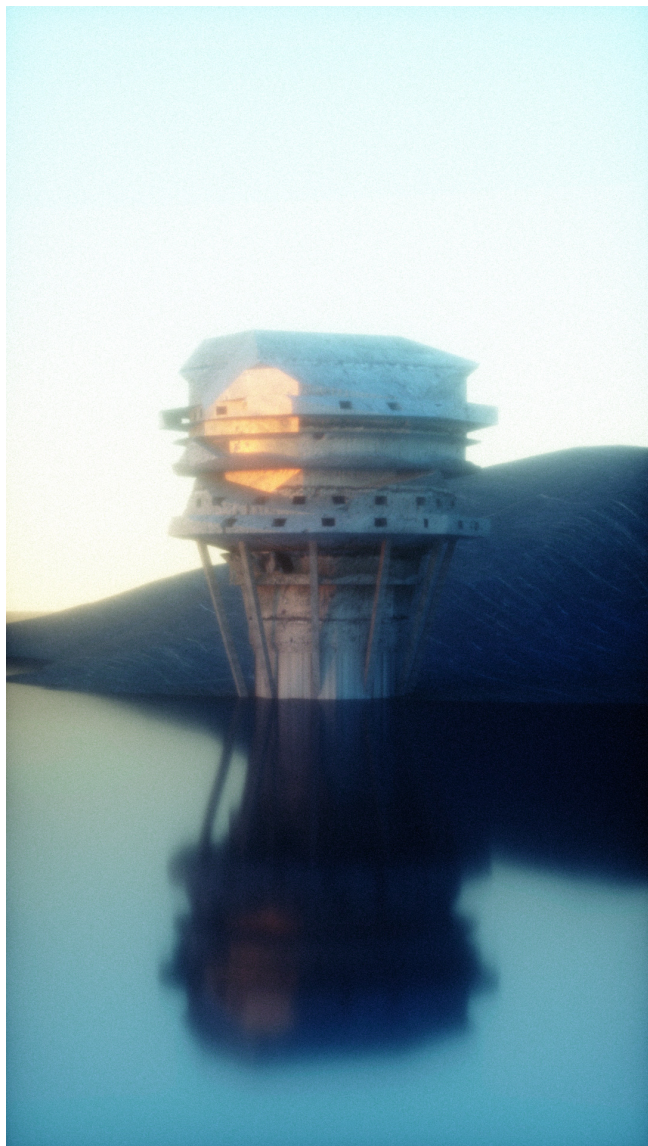


Code Omega [Ω]

Eleni Ikon, Savvas Metaxas



The Lab. Video still from *Her Voice*, Katerina Athanasopoulou and Eleni Ikon, 2019. Courtesy the artists

https://admin.thecontemporaryjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ikon-Metaxas_Code-omega.mp3

Transcript

In 1961, at the peak of the Space Race, the Soviet Union government headed by Khrushchev, secretly set up an experimental laboratory made of space scientists, artists computer programmers, philosophers, and sound engineers in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The purpose was researching sonic warfare tactics and the project was given the code name *Rockmore* and headed up by Alik Zamfe. Zamfe was chosen for developing the sonic aspects of maskirovka, a Russian military doctrine first put into operation during the Battle of Kulikovo against the Tatars in 1380, leading to the establishment of the modern Russian state, and still the modus operandi of Russian state today.

A polymath, specialising in a vast range of subjects, Alik Zamfe possessed exceptional ability in solving complex engineering problems. Between 1950–1976 she contributed to the Soviet Union scientific research over 3400 works, dealing with the most varied problems on pure mathematics, theoretical mechanics, astronomy, aerodynamics, medical psychoacoustics and artificial intelligence.

Alik had been thinking about adaptive learning and auditory perception as far back as the 1940s, until interrupted by war. In the 1950s her superiors were sceptical and almost dismissive about sonic maskirovka, however, eventually she was able to secure funding for project *Rockmore*. Her team were allowed to set up their lab in a derelict former monastery in an abandoned area in Bukhara, destroyed during the war and rebuilt to resemble a spaceship. Although small – just 20 people – the team was extraordinarily committed. They worked in shifts 24 hours a day and many, including Alik, lived in rooms above the lab. Alik kept

notebooks of her experiments, both the realised and the unrealised, together counting some 6400 projects.

Aliki's granddaughter, Souzanna Zamfe, has been studying the notebooks and keeping her own audio journal on the entries relating to maskirovka. Souzanna is a Moscow-based researcher at the Department for Underground Futurity and Sonology and an associate of the sonic research collective AUDINT, whom she has been feeding with information from her grandmother's notebooks.

The below are extracts from Souzanna's audio journal. First, her voice from an entry marked "0", when she started piecing together her grandmother's story:

O

Allegiance to a country and a nation, the willingness to give up your life for their cause, at best it's hallucinatory, or just plain delusional.

I knew that, but did she?

I promised I would write her story. I ended up living it, in that bunker.

Most mothers read fairy tales to their children, Aliki would put my mother to bed with stories about unidentified audio events and facts about auditory perception; 'did you know, the ear has 50,000 audio receptors, out of which only 3,500 send signals to the brain, so it's a perfect target for deception, more effective than the eye!'

- What happens to person's voice after they die? my mother would ask her

- The voices of the dead move through us all, but not everyone has the capacity to listen; and fewer still are able to let the lost voices speak through them.

I spent a great part of my life in that lab looking

for the conduits.

But first I had to decipher her notes, the memory of the archive. To activate history through memory. To allow it to happen once more, but differently. To return to a past which didn't come to pass.

On the back cover of her journal I found the unsigned epigraph:

'The flames of conquerors turned this whole past into an absolute enigma'

And in small letters below:

'Future Ruins'

The following is from Souzanna's communique to AUDINT. The text was lifted directly from Aliki's notebooks, translated into English and recorded with an artificial voice.

'Notebook Number 9

DATE: UNKNOWN

We've received information about M, a woman suffering from 'hyperrrhythmia', a condition involving obscure symptoms such as the sensation of 'hearing without ears.' We are intrigued by news of a living human bearer of this noncognitive feeling, which is neither an innate quality of the body nor dependent on external stimuli. In fact, the condition appears significantly more complex. It can be outlined as the phenomenon of processing viscerally and registering immediately sonic potential that are consciously inaccessible to the sufferer.

M doesn't seem to have grasped its full potential.

M is a musicology student at the Moscow State Conservatory, known underground as an obsessive collector of audiovisual footage, such as TV shows, news bulletins, political speeches, academic conferences, and piano recitals – for

no apparent reason. We've sent M an unsigned note tacked to the announcement board in her halls of residence. It states that when, as a young piano student, she had participated in a series of neurological tests around absolute pitch perception, she'd in fact been implanted with a neural program, an algorithm designed to trigger an internal generation of melodies that functioned as earworms. The note alleged that, eighteen years later, a team of experts at the Department for Underground Futurity and Sonology, might be able to interject the program and inactivate the algorithm'.

'DATE: UNKNOWN

CODE: 88

M presents herself at the lab where the real purpose of the note is revealed to her. The team explains that her susceptibility to sonic contingencies might help us with our research in audio deception. Refusing to help, she is taken prisoner and subjected to experiments. These include sensory deprivation techniques; the daily playing of electronic noise; and simulations of hypersonic events, such as the Krakatoa volcano explosion, registering over 172 decibels at 100 miles from the source, which she is able to tolerate! Aatish Bhatia, one of our leading researchers, comments that, 'this is resilience to something so astonishingly loud, that it's inching up against the limits of what we mean by 'sound perception'.'

'DATE: UNKNOWN

CODE: 64

Experiments continue. M has aural seizures described as a 'strange yet familiar feeling'. Sometimes consciousness is lost during a seizure, while others she enters a superimposed state of multiple experiences, identified by Dr Sacks, as the 'doubling of consciousness'. This can be compared to a feeling of déjà vu or dreamlike state but indicates that there are

other types of perception available to us. M seems to have access to realities that cannot be contained in anything like 'an experience' in the phenomenological sense. Her vibrational body suggests that actual intensions, decisions, and any sense of self are bound by a rhythmic energy that is contingent, capable of change, mutation, and overlapping. This energy intensifies and complexifies relations, between living and artificial, actual and virtual, sensorial and nonconscious.'

'DATE: UNKNOWN

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Some preliminary conclusions:

Hyperrhythmia shakes up the habitual ways, laws, and logic of the technoscientific status quo until this point in history. It shows one way with which humans can access the emergence of subterranean temporalities lurking in the shadows of actual events. According to our experiments, the hyperrhythmic body inhabits a virtual space, between sensed perception and the abstract sphere that encompasses it; between organic and inorganic strata; between human and machine. Hyperrhythmia facilitates the power of sound to indicate unpredictable change and amplify tension, rather than maintain harmony and balance. The condition cannot be said to belong to the body per se, the way sensory perception is owned by a subject. Rather, it can be understood as a vibrational, shapeshifting, artificial intelligence that assumes and absorbs different carriers. Host to alien conditions exposing the human body as incomplete, hallucinatory, deprived, and defective. Gateway to an alternative truth of spacetime, teleporting the sufferer to the terra incognita of unsound – a planet we have yet to land on. Hyperrhythmia is the zone of infected heterogeneous bodies, relating to the world only contingently.'

UPDATE:

'M is not able to return from her hypersonic state of consciousness.'

'DATE: UNKNOWN

CODE: UNKNOWN

Action plan:

We will attempt to channel M's symptoms and behaviour towards devising a rhythm analytic machine. I have put together a theory kit. [See appendix X]. The objects are not there as historical artefacts but as audiovisual vectors that will acquire a new function.

Against the dominant ableist ideas of our time, the race to create superhuman superintelligent entities, I wonder about the implications of modelling the impaired, defective, hyperrhythmic human body for developing machine consciousness and solving the puzzle of AI behaviour and self-awareness. Ultimately, we might be able to intervene on the use of sound as an autonomous sentient entity, capable of generating thought. A sound-without-us, arriving from origins unknown, unveiling the aesthetic as a source of knowledge. This is the new sound of an epoch emanating from a black box that cannot be identified. A New Sound Machine. The sound that exposes 'a multitude of temporalities whose rhythm oscillates like the pendulum swing of innumerable clocks each alongside the other.' The appearance of a monolith that brings on a striking exception to our laws, shuttering the everyday. Proof of my suppositions that the past cannot predict the future and that the rational always already includes the irrational. All matters of fact are subject to uncertainty. This is the hyperrhythmic machine.'

Sketches and diagrams accompanying these notes have not yet been released by AUDINT.

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[<https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/sonic-continuum/code-omega>].

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