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Sounds playing sounds: answering colonial silences by a recursive acousmatic in Anri Sala's *The Last Resort* (2017)

In *The Last Resort*, originally installed by Kaldor Public Art Projects in Sydney in October 2017, Anri Sala imagines an intangible metonym for the European Enlightenment—the *Adagio* from Mozart's Clarinet Concerto—suffering a very tangible buffeting by wind while traveling to the Australian continent in a bottle. Thirty-eight altered snare drums precariously suspended from the ceiling of the Observatory Hill Rotunda each contain two loudspeaker parts: one of which plays a version of Mozart's *Adagio* disrupted by Sala and his collaborators, while the other emits booming infrasonic frequencies that, in the manner of a gale force wind of their own, cause the drumsticks affixed to each drum's rim to ricochet off the drum's membrane. In this manner the drums appear to play themselves, a self-play that presents a flavor of the acousmatic, or that confounding “sound unseen” that obscures its cause. Sala's dose of humor, however, consists of presenting the drums and nothing else. We see *nothing but* the drum's self-play. Does this entail that we *do* see the cause of the drum's playing? Sala offers, cryptically, that we watch the drums play the drumsticks rather than the other way around.¹ There is another kind of inversion, though, in the acousmatic status of the two principal sounds: by witnessing the sticks striking, playing the membranes we accept the drums' uncanny self-play and question instead

¹ Public Q&A with Anri Sala, Kaldor Public Art Projects: <https://vimeo.com/255504410>.

what could possibly animate the playback of the *Adagio*—a refusal of the sound recording’s automatic claim on faithful, impartial sound transmission that hasn’t been challenged since the phonograph’s novelty wore off, that is, since the terrier who stares quizzically down the bell of the phonograph in *His Master’s Voice* (the painting reproduced in ubiquitous commercial logos for audio firms) learned to accept sounds unseen. By encouraging self-playing drums to be taken at face value while troubling the *Adagio* instead, Sala presents the Enlightenment as an uncanny acousmatic problem (from the Greek: “a thing heard”) whose source, or self-certifying authority must be questioned anew, a colonial master whose voice must be unlearned, dissociated from itself, and unseen.²

Sala’s presentation of nothing but the altered snare drums is etched more starkly in the March 2018 installation of *The Last Resort* at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. The Sydney-specificity of *The Last Resort* becomes there instead a reference, another coordinate on the imagined, intangible journey of a metonym for the Enlightenment traveling this time back to the North Atlantic. The *plein air* of the Rotunda is exchanged for the severe, clinical brightness of white light boxes on carpet. Sydney’s skyline is exchanged for white walls, a black ceiling, and a narrow corner window. The wind that passes through the Rotunda, in competition with the imagined winds buffeting the concerto—in Peter Szendy’s words, “the singular encounter—*each time unique, yes*—between the aeolographic rewriting of Mozart and *this very* wind,

² For more on acousmatic sound and its role in philosophy from Pythagoreans to Lacanians, see Brian Kane’s *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

*here and now...*³ is exchanged for the unvarying climate-controlled interior of the gallery. The principal variation in the environment is merely the sound that emanates from the film *If and Only If* installed in the next room.

The problem of installing one of Sala's site-specific works in a more neutral location is nothing new. Anri Sala's two decades of works since *Intervista (Finding the Words)* (1998) harness sound's potential to reveal not its maker (e.g. a DJ, or an orchestra) but rather the acoustic potential of politically charged spaces, such as the American surveillance complex in West Berlin featured in *Answer Me* (2008) and the German Pavilion in Venice featured in *Ravel Ravel Unravel* (2013). Each of those works incorporated film of the sound filling the space into the work itself, film that would persist in any rescreening elsewhere. Indeed, the anechoic chamber wherein *Ravel Ravel* is screened is a synthetic space that can be remanufactured. In that work, Sala's premise is to expose the faulty assumption of the anechoic chamber: that echoes can be nullified, that synchrony and silence are possible. Synchrony would be equivalent to silence, the work argues. If time and space are each other's keepers in Sala's works, as Natalie Bell suggests,⁴ this is most ably articulated by sound, which requires a spatial medium in which to travel. Since the speed of sound is unvarying, its time dimension could be alternatively expressed in space alone, as echolocation. Sala's rebellious placement of asynchrony inside the very space designed to nullify asynchrony demonstrates the impossibility of a non-place. Natalie Bell credits sound

³ Peter Szendy, "Aeolian Reflections (Mozart Exposed to the Winds)," in *Anri Sala: The Last Resort* (Exhibition Catalog) (Kaldor Public Art Project 33, 2017), 19.

⁴ Natalie Bell, "Eluding Language, Escaping Time" in *Anri Sala: Answer Me* (Exhibition Catalog) (New Museum, 2016), 63.

with this feat: “Curiously outside of time, or possibly only with the time of *Ravel Ravel*, this non-place is a strange utopia, or atopia, generated through the experience of sound.”⁵ The sound of *Ravel Ravel* articulates both a non-place and a specific place: the non-place of the anechoic chamber than can be readily manufactured and undermined on demand, and the German pavilion whose specific political resonances are called into focus by Sala’s choice to place therein French music commissioned by a German of Jewish descent.

But given the two radically contrasting sites where *The Last Resort* was installed, it is not immediately obvious that Sala produces a non-space that can be replicated on demand nor a specific space with particular political resonances, despite the work’s consistent, careful occupation with the first colonial voyages to the Australian continent and the site of their first landings. The work’s lack of video also forecloses the recursive references that *Answer Me* and *Ravel Ravel Unravel* carried with them into future installations by video (for instance, the sound and projection of the DJ in *Unravel* filling the German Pavilion likewise filling the halls of the New Museum). The sterile quality of the installation in New York questions the centrality of the aleatoric or haeccentric potential for *nowness* provided by the winds in Sydney, to which Szendy drew our attention. To put it broadly, given Sala’s interest in using sound to articulate a space, the absence of video and the lack of an analogue for the Sydney Rotunda in New York raise the question of exactly what space is produced by the installation and exactly how drums alone may articulate it. Consider Sala’s remarks on what motivated the extreme close-ups of the saxophonist’s mouth where it meets his

⁵ Ibid.

instrument's mouthpiece in *Long Sorrow*: "It's like catching sounds as they become music. ... The instruments themselves do not interest me."⁶ The drums cannot be the subjects of *The Last Resort* despite them constituting its sole tangible components.

I suggest this question can be resolved by attending to the way sounds "catch" in the work. Sala is interested in the drums as "visual speakers" that expose through their choreography a visual translation of sound, rather than as mere instruments.⁷ It is as if the drums are mouthpieces occupying the site upon which a vibration on the cusp of becoming a sound manages to "catch." But for whom could these drums act as mouthpieces? This catching, I will argue, constitutes its own acousmatic, i.e. unseen sound totally independent of the *seen* sound that the drums offer to our eyes and ears. Instead of drums playing drums, we have sounds playing other sounds. Sala's use of sound in *The Last Resort* is a deeper abstraction of his recent investigations of sound, to be sure, but it is not a wholesale departure from them. In fact, the deeper abstraction coupled with stark minimalism puts it in close company with earlier works such as *Làk-kat*, in which Bell exonerates an apparent visual poverty on account of the poetry of its insistent abstraction: "...the camera's repeated cuts to a fluorescent tube light, an alien-like presence in the darkness of the space, is less an allegorical vignette than a candid opening of visual and auditory perspectives. If the visual content is frustratingly banal or oblique, it is because Sala is prompting us not simply to look, but also to listen and to visualize sound as it is released into space."⁸

⁶ From "Conversation with Raphaela Platow" in *Anri Sala: purchase not by moonlight* (Exhibition Catalog) (Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, 2008), 38.

⁷ Public Q&A with Anri Sala, Kaldor Public Art Projects: <https://vimeo.com/255504410>.

⁸ Bell, 58.

THE FIVE SOUNDS of *THE LAST RESORT* and THE RELATIVISM OF RUPTURE

In *The Last Resort*, the drums do not literally play themselves. More precisely, the drums, having been outfitted with loudspeakers, set their own playing in motion. Until the infrasonic rumbles cease and the drumsticks come to rest, the drum's "playing" at any given moment is solely determined by the smooth decay of gravity. What this hearing omits, though, is the possibility that at any point this decay could be interrupted by a new, sharper impulse from the loudspeaker parts. More specifically, the motion of the sticks expresses a complex interaction between the present moment's factor of decay of the *until then* sharpest sonic impulse and each subsequent *new* impulse provided by the continuous sound signal—an unrelenting stream of potential impulses that may or may not catch, as it were, into the *now* sharpest impulse and thus set in motion a *new* pattern of decaying ricochets for the continuous signal to contend with. There is a type of anticipatory recursion occurring here. Whereas one can otherwise imagine the up-and-down bobbing, yet still on the whole decaying stream of ricochets that would ensue from only *one* impulse from the speakers, here we have a *continuous stream* of infrasonic audio producing an *infinite* series of impulses that in *each present moment* compete to exceed the previously decaying residue of whatever older impulse was sharpest. In other words, we have an anticipatory recursive sounding always competing with the residual traces of its prior motions. In light of the historical resonances of the work, we could say the drums continually compete to exceed and reconfigure—not to erase—the colonial history that cannot be unsounded.

This complex interaction of two sound waves—the continuous sound wave of the infrasonic frequencies competing with the wave-like motion of the drumsticks bobbing back and forth, itself a decaying sound wave, erratically changing course whenever a new impulse manages to “catch”—constitutes a sound wave as well, which is to say this interaction of two sounds is a third sound itself. This third sound is generated by the interaction of the first sound—the infrasonic frequencies—with the second sound—the drum ricochets—which are themselves only a historical trace of the sharpest impulses of the first sound. Whether or not this third sound spikes sharply enough to erratically change the course of the second sound—the drumsticks—is how Sala introduces ruptures into the continuous flow of time to generate a whiplash of histories. Every present moment carries the possibility of disrupting the last version of history—the last decaying ricochet of drumsticks—and yet, when this happens, whatever new history is thereby produced remains unalterable, irretrievable, merely automatic, owing to gravity.

This third sounding created by the simultaneous interaction of two others is a familiar way of generating sounds synthetically in audio theory. In the fields of signal processing and sound synthesis, this method of combining waveforms is called “additive synthesis.” The reverse is called “spectral analysis,” that is, the procedure whereby a complex, aperiodic sound wave can be analyzed into a prescribed combination of simpler, periodic waves at various strengths that may independently recreate the complex totality. It is as though Sala has taken the complex histories and legacies of the European Enlightenment and performed thereon a spectral analysis into thirty-eight deceptively simple components. (Sala, on that complex history: “I had at

the back of my mind the rift and the ensuing contradiction between the departure point of some remarkable principles of the Enlightenment—such as tolerance and a non-judgmental acceptance of the other—and their fallouts on arrival, exacerbating prejudices, which in turn caused untold devastation and loss.”⁹ Like the reconstitution of a sound from its spectral analysis, these two simple ideas combine at varying strengths to produce the contradictory totality that is modernity.) The viewer, then, performs the “additive synthesis” necessary to perceive the components of the installation as a totality. But this additively synthesized sound is not *heard* in the installation in a traditional sense. This unheard sound *plays* the sounds we do hear: the drumsticks striking the drumheads. We hear the sound played by the sound, but the sound doing the playing—the sound consisting of the negotiation between a continuous stream of impulses competing to overtake the traces of its own history—is heard in a less literal sense, only synthesized by the viewer in the mind’s ear by taking in the soundings of the installation as a whole.

In sum, the first sound, consisting of infrasonic impulses, is inaudible. The second sound, consisting of drumsticks, is audible but merely the trace of the history of the first sound, a history that is irretrievable and unalterable. The third sound—the complex negotiation wherein these first two sounds compete, where new impulses may or may not “catch,” or the only condition of possibility by which the history traced by the second sound can rupture—is not audible in the way that the drumsticks are literally audible, but its additive synthesis is audible by attending to the total effect of ruptures distributed across the installation. The chaotic effect of so many drums

⁹ Sala, “The Last Resort” (Exhibition Catalog), 8.

visiting discontinuities upon the continuous flow of time passing through their loudspeaker parts is, in totality, an expression of this otherwise inaudible third sound. Sala has managed to present a sound that *should not be audible* by generating a mass of intersecting ruptures. He expresses what the Enlightenment cannot theorize about itself: the lacunae in its categories, the colonial silence undergirding modernity.

The fourth sound of the work consists of the motoric whirring from the loudspeaker parts that is only incidental to the frequencies it emits. This escaped kinetic energy is an excess that could not be harnessed for useful work to drive the loudspeaker's membrane. It is residue that indexes the heavy effort these mechanical parts must undertake to drive loudspeakers not specifically designed to reverberate at infrasonic frequencies. I hear this fourth sound as a limb "reaching into" the installation to drive the loudspeakers as an analogue to the DJ in *Unravel* whose hand makes a mechanical intervention to drive the turntable, and as an analogue to the lovingly filmed dangling hands at the outset of *Ravel Ravel*, preparing to intervene in the traumatic legacy of Paul Wittgenstein's lost hand.

Sala's occupation with sound throughout his career has to do in large part with its potential to rupture. Natalie Bell relates how Sala's understanding of a "relativism of rupture" clarifies the stakes of a non-narrative portrayal of histories:

Rupture is the dizzying realization of discontinuity—the moment when the ongoing present suddenly becomes an irretrievable past, distinct but unreachable. For Sala, his personal understanding of rupture's valences—"rupture in meaning, rupture in syntax, rupture in narrative, rupture in beliefs"—goes back to his experience of Albania in the 1990s, when political and cultural changes were so rapid that they inflected everyday life with a sense of temporal fast-forwarding that made the recent past appear premodern. It also instilled a sense of the relativism of rupture. As Sala has said, "In order to see your rupture is not everybody's rupture, you have to step inside someone else's continuity."¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

The fifth sound of *The Last Resort*, Mozart's *Adagio*, is that "someone else's continuity" into which the viewer is invited to step. Viewers at the Goodman Gallery are provided with a legend indicating which regions of speakers correspond to which instrument families, enabling one to walk under and through the sound and space of an orchestra as it plays, quite literally stepping through would have been Mozart's continuity had Sala not recomposed it. (Despite creating sound from many individual points of space, orchestras are normally heard only from some stationary point in a concert hall.) It is only that Sala refuses to allow the source material to speak in anything like continuity.

By choosing Mozart's last major instrumental piece (one he never heard), Sala deploys the paradigmatic example of Viennese classicism, that brief period of classical music most tightly engineered for symmetry, balance, and teleological unfolding. By focusing on the *Adagio* of this concerto in particular, he capitalizes on the inherent contradiction of the "slow movement" in classical symphonic form: while still subscribing to Viennese classicism's requisite notions of symmetry and balance, the "slow movement" must strike a contrast with the symphony's other deliberately rhetorical or argumentative movements (such as the Rondo or sonata-*allegro* opening) by instead projecting an effortless lyricism. It must disguise its own careful engineering by donning the cloak of organicism, classical music's founding ideology. It harbors pretensions to universality, as if the inspired genius who composed it were merely taking divine dictation in the manner of the many images of Pope Gregory I writing as a bird whispers into his ear.

On the contrary, there is no *a priori* basis from which the conventions of Viennese classicism can be derived. In disrupting the score of the *Adagio* by overriding its tempi with those corresponding to the winds transcribed by James Bell in his roughly contemporaneous *A voyage to Australia*, by inserting pauses, and by marring the coordination between soloist and orchestra, Sala robs Viennese classicism of its ideological underpinning and exposes the deliberate composing (literally “putting together”) that must be done to string notes into phrases, into sections, into movements. The most jarring moment can be heard when the clarinet soloist reaches its final solo of the movement. In this passage the clarinet begins with a high note and a partial descent. This is repeated in the next measure (a standard way of building static tension) before a sinewy, chromatic turning figure in the third measure embellishes and prepares the final descent to the first degree of the scale, which is finally attained at the downbeat of the fourth measure. Sala’s recomposition, however, forces the orchestra to “forget” to repeat the material from the first measure and reaches harmonic finality one measure too soon, i.e. on the downbeat of the third measure. During the second measure, we hear the orchestra change chords while the soloist has not, and so we anticipate the train wreck to come. The gloriously executed crash occurs when the sinewy clarinet turn coincides in the next measure with the orchestra’s limp gesture of closure. When the clarinet finally concludes, the orchestra is doing nothing of interest, merely prolonging the tonic it found too early. (Kaldor Public Art Projects chose to feature this very moment in its 22-second promotional video, which can be viewed [here](#).) It is also convenient for Sala’s purposes to have chosen the Clarinet concerto—the organology of the clarinet (or in Mozart’s particular

case, the basset horn or basset clarinet) having only in the 1770s just reached the point where its intonation was tenable enough to project an ideal of grace through the dulcet tones of its *chalumeau* register. The “lateness” of Mozart’s final instrumental work coincides with the “infancy” of the modern clarinet, as if—to flesh out the myth—Mozart’s final significant act was to baptize the modern clarinet.

Detecting repetition in one part and the lack of it in another is what listeners who do not know the conventions of this music can still quickly perform in order to determine that something has gone seriously wrong. In this brief clip, the orchestra is essentially responding with nonsense to the clarinetist just as the sound of the drums respond to the musical components with non-sense altogether. (One humorous exception comes when the drums coordinate themselves and play even eighth notes in unison in contrast to their usual distributed cacophony as if to sarcastically underline an important cadential moment in the *Adagio*.)

Sala says of the drummer in *Answer Me* that by drumming he communicates vibrantly through a “violence that he is doing to himself.”¹¹ In *The Last Resort*, the listener’s capability to adduce ruptures ensures the hearing of sounds being subjected to violence. But notice how the aggressor, which is to say the *self*, has shifted. *The Last Resort* follows Sala’s use of sound in *Answer Me* as nonsense and self-inflicted violence, however, on account of the lack of a subject like a man to visit harm upon himself, here the sounds visit violence upon themselves, which provides yet another reason to read the sounds as being played by sounds rather than by drums.

¹¹ Christine Macel, “Odds and Ends”, *ibid.*, 148.

Hearing the five sounds of *The Last Resort* in a way that theorizes the relativity of rupture and challenges the continuity of the other reaches a good portion of Sala's motivations for choosing some canonical work of Viennese classicism to undermine. But why would it be important to undermine classicism in the first place? (The twentieth century took care of that by itself.) Indeed, in some places Sala speaks of Mozart's *Adagio* as something particularly important to undermine, rather than as a generic metonym for the Enlightenment. Whereas one can imagine him deemphasizing the choice of the particular source as he does here, speaking of his use of "a piece" (Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony) in *1935 Days Without Red*: "... we wanted people without musical training to be able to suspect when something went wrong with its tempo and to be able to sense the impact of the geopolitical condition and its dangers on the music's structure; hence the necessity to rely on a piece of classical music,"¹² Sala speaks instead of *The Last Resort* as a way of imagining what *would happen to Mozart's concerto* if it drifted to the Australian continent in a bottle. But why would we care what happened to a concerto? How does this choice ensure the listener can sense the impact of the geopolitical condition?

DECOLONIAL RESOUNDINGS DIRECTED TOWARD MODERNITY'S SILENCES

The thought experiment of sending Mozart's *Adagio* across the ocean matters because the concerto functions not merely as a metonym for the Enlightenment, but also as a metonym for the historically contingent concept of the Musical Work itself, or

¹² Anri Sala and Massimiliano Gioni, "Guided by Voices, Lured by Sounds: An Interview" in *Anri Sala: Answer Me* (Exhibition Catalog) (New Museum, 2016), 93.

what philosopher Lydia Goehr theorizes as the *Werktreue*.¹³ It is a distinctly Western and distinctly Enlightenment concept. The musicologist Gavin Steingo points out that even the score, that revered object standing in place of a text for something distinctly non-textual, stands for something greater: “in reality, the score is only one part of a much larger story, which must also include issues such as compositional (or authorial) control, the possibility of repeatability, the notion of permanence, and the emergence of aesthetic autonomy as a core European ideology.”¹⁴ (These issues are no less relevant for artists working in time-based media in recent decades.) When we speak of the emergence of the *Werktreue*, the historical moment in which the musical score acquired a superior position to (or conceptual priority over) a musical performance, then we are letting the “score” stand in for this greater constellation of issues. We can follow Sala in caring about what would happen to the Mozart concerto because it *already stands in for the Werktreue*.

Sala has been concerned with these issues since his first turn to video art as a student in Tirana. He explains that when choosing Edi Muka to supervise his diploma project in video, Muka

introduced certain ideas that back then were unheard of in Albania and that most of the academic establishment was not familiar with. He spoke of Walter Benjamin, for example, and his concepts about the technical reproducibility of art, the authenticity of an artwork, and how such positions echoed with the radical social and political changes that Albanian society had recently undertaken, as well as the significance within such a context of my choice of medium.¹⁵

¹³ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Gavin Steingo, “The Musical Work Reconsidered, In Hindsight” in *Current Musicology* 97 (Spring 2014: 81-112), 82.

¹⁵ Anri Sala and Massimiliano Gioni, 80.

By working in video, Sala was participating in an ontological reconfiguration of the art-historical equivalent to Goehr's *Werktreue*. Consider the proposal Steingo offers in order to transcend the sterile debates over when exactly *Werktreue* took hold in Western music (e.g. "Beethoven certainly wrote musical works, but did Bach? Did Monteverdi? Did Palestrina?"¹⁶). After a carefully presented analogy with the theory of the posterior recognition of conventional money, i.e. *symbols*, as *primary* stores of value to which material stores of value such as gold *attest*, rather than vice versa, as was once the case—which I will not summarize further here—Steingo proposes that this posterior recognition is unlocatable in time because it is ontologically undecidable, a point that will help us read the decolonial resoundings in *The Last Resort*. I quote Steingo at length:

In a manner structurally identical to money, it is theoretically impossible to determine when the shift from material practice (performance) supported by symbol (score) shifted to symbol (score) supported by material practice (performance). Indeed, I would argue that locating this shift is not only theoretically impossible but also ontologically undecidable. In other words, it is not simply that "we" as humans, because we have insufficient reasoning abilities, are unable to determine the shift. Instead, the shift itself is theoretically non-locatable because it did not ever "happen" as such. The best we can say is that the change has already taken place at some prior moment, but we cannot ever locate that moment in time.¹⁷

In *The Last Resort* I read the corruption of Mozart's *Adagio* as Sala's playful effort to stage that otherwise theoretically unstageable moment. He throws the concerto into the ocean and affords us the unique opportunity to witness the Enlightenment's struggle to speak about which it is structurally configured to stay

¹⁶ Steingo, 83.

¹⁷ Steingo, 88.

silent. It is a violence the Enlightenment inflicts on itself by pronouncing only nonsense, in a manner following the drummer in *Answer Me*. In that work, after all, Sala was using drumming to communicate silence in sound. Inspired by a note from Antonioni in which the director expressed the desire to linger on the expressive silences in the conversation of a couple verging on separation, Sala set out to imagine “how awkward silences would sound in a place of extreme loudness, under the influence of extreme loudness, under the influence of the overwhelming echo of a geodesic dome.”¹⁸ Turning up the volume on silence, incidentally, is also a thread pursued in experimental music composition: in so-called “no-input mixer” pieces, one connects a mixer’s output to its input and amplifies nothing more than the ambient energy of the environment into a crescendo that can be sculpted and filtered at the composer’s will. In *The Last Resort* Sala stages a scene in which self-motivated sounds reply to Mozart’s *Adagio*—a paradigmatic example of *sense making* in music—with nonsense, or at least nonsense when regarded under the dominant epistemic configuration.

Modernity’s silence about its epistemic configuration is what animates Walter Dignolo’s decolonial (and not merely postcolonial) theory. Since post- would just be another temporal coordinate on an axis configured on the terms of the inseparable premises of modernity and colonialism, we must give up looking for when colonialism did or might end. It did not ever “happen” as such, to borrow Steingo’s formulation, in the reigning epistemic paradigm. Dignolo bids us to reject modernity’s effort to theorize its own history of domination and respond to that silence otherwise:

¹⁸ Sala and Gioni, 88.

Why [think] decolonially? Because one of the basic hypotheses of decolonial thinking is that knowledge in the modern world was and is a fundamental aspect of coloniality. In other words, knowledge is not just something that accounts for (describes, narrates, explains, interprets) and allows the knower to sit outside the observed domain and, from above, be able to observe imperial domination and colonial societies, ignoring or disguising the fact that *knowledge itself is an integral part of imperial processes of appropriation*. ... Beyond the issues I am raising, my arguments are built on the silence of modernity.¹⁹ (emphasis in the original)

Sala injects inappropriate silences into Mozart's score, and he suspends it from the ceiling, letting the Enlightenment survey *from above* all that it has mastered (for instance, the Australian continent "down under"), facetiously letting it perform exactly what Mignolo reasons impossible. This critique is redoubled when the drums perform alone during extended passages when the *Adagio* is not being played. The drums, in offering no meaningful reply to the *Adagio*, and refusing to acknowledge whether it is present or not, drive its significance to nil. Modernity, thrown into the water, offers only silence about its own theoretical position, to which the other four sounds of Sala's installation reply with their own anticipatory recursive acousmatic, or unseen sound. Now it becomes clear why that sound that plays itself is never seen in the work: it is unarticulable in the dramatic scene Sala stages. Although the drums surely reply with their own sense, in the prevailing narrative framework provided by the *Adagio*, we hear only nonsense. It is up to the viewer to additively synthesize the thirty-eight drums into a commentary upon the silences or lacunae in modernity's categories.

KANT'S GEOGRAPHY FLOATING BESIDE MOZART'S ADAGIO

¹⁹ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), 205-206.

I conclude with a fortuitous convergence between Mignolo and Szendy, who each refer to Kant's *Geography* in the course of mapping the (risibly) wide-ranging assumed authority of the European Enlightenment. Szendy offers the following regarding the Sydney installation and the breezes impinging on it each time the viewer returns:

Each time, the score lands, thus rewritten, there where Mozart never set foot, no more than Kant, his contemporary, who in his *Physical Geography* made however several references to what he still called New Holland and to its 'very wild inhabitants' ... Need we smile at these notations? Need we be outraged by them, worried about them, even today? Both, certainly. The fact remains that, to reach the other side of the world of the Enlightenment, Mozart's music, and Kant's philosophy or geography, had the wind in their sails.²⁰

Mignolo diagnoses in Kant's *Geography* a conceptual shift from space to time in circumscribing the colonial Other:

"Linnaeus and Kant were living and acting during the historical period in which Western thinking was moving from 'barbarians in space' to 'primitives in time' ... starting the primacy of time over space in closing the borders of Western history and civilization."²¹

I like to imagine Sala undoing Kant's reconfiguration of space into time by throwing his *Geography* into the ocean (space) and so marring its time and teleology (letting it bob back and forth) beside the Mozart score. The other side of *the world of the Enlightenment*—the darker one, to follow Mignolo—not the other side of *the world*, the literal Australian continent, is the land to which Sala directs his *Adagio* in a bottle. In that other side of the Enlightenment, Sala replies to its constitutive silences by amplifying them in new sonic forms. Apparently unmotivated or acousmatic sounds

²⁰ Szendy, "Aeolian Reflections," 19.

²¹ Mignolo, 200.

turn out to be motivating themselves, performing a violence upon the larger ideologies for which they stand as metonyms. Throughout, I have been concerned to read *The Last Resort*, despite (or better, in virtue of) its thorough abstractions, as part of Sala's overall project to articulate through sound a syntax of space that commandeers or corrupts narrative by confronting language's gale force of normativity with a wind of its own: a sound that is anti-theoretical, unknowing, and still becoming. A sound on the verge of "catching."