Introduction

▲Fig. 1 (previous page)
The earwitness, mark 1

> "We are challenged to solve two difficult problems when we build architecture in a simulated city. One is how we can create a work of architecture as entity while goods as entities are losing their significance, and another is how we can build architecture that endures time while local communities are nullified, and the network of communications via media appears and disappears instantly…
>
> For the first problem, we are required to solve the question of how to make fictional or video-image-like architecture; for the second problem, we need to learn how to make ephemeral or temporary architecture. I do not mean that architecture should be replaced with video images or that temporary buildings should be used. We should rather build fictional and ephemeral architecture as a permanent entity."
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> Toyo Ito (in Taylor 1997:236)

Architecture currently finds itself in a difficult and unfamiliar position: having always held the esteemed position of providing the theatre for human interaction and embodying the physical manifestation of a prevalent paradigm, it now finds itself burdened by its own materiality and unable to keep pace in a new era of immediacy and connectivity. In the traditional sense of enclosing and demarcating a certain programme, architecture has become awkward in respect to the way contemporary life is conducted.

The experience of the city, however, has always depended more on the 'soft' than the 'hard'. Indeed "...the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture." (Raban 1974:2). It is a place where we loose and find ourselves continuously – often waiting for us to imprint ourselves and our identity upon it, whilst never feigning to neutrality itself. It is often the 'imaginary', existing in text, photographs, paintings and song – the spaces of perception and interpretation – that maintain, or provide, experiential importance and memory.

The Earwitness endeavours to explore the fictions and fragments inherent in the experience of the city through probing the effects of technological media, audio culture and architecture. Sound and the city, the spaces these sounds occupy, and possibilities of how these spaces can be inhabited form the basis of a parasitic insertion within the existing built fabric. It hosts a set of curious confrontations between the field of the real and imaginary through a collection of quasi-cultural artefacts. These artefacts range from object to installation to event and engage the auditory aspects of the city – questioning the role of design in an immersive world in which freak mutations and mistakes are the norm, perhaps even the key, to success.

Project Brief

Working within the Pretoria CBD the thesis follows a process of critical investigation and exploration that aims to reveal methods with which architectural-acoustic installations can promote user engagement, with and awareness of, the city.

Research Questions

- How do we relate to the each other and the city through sound?
- How is sound art approached from an architectural/ spatial perspective?
- What would be the most appropriate architectural strategy with which to respond to the open field of sound?
- What is the connection between object (fast), environment (slow) and sound (resonant)?
- Can an augmented object provide the basis for the re-use of abandoned and forgotten inner city spaces?
- Is it possible to inhabit the lost spaces of the city through acoustic-architectural installations?

►Fig. 2-3 (following spreads)
Spaces speak, are you listening?
Digital Collage of buildings on Vermeulen Street, Pretoria CBD.

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**spaces speak,
are you listening?**