

Nestor Krüger's *Monophonic*: bringing down the walls

Included with Nestor Krüger's exhibition mailer from Goodwater: an additional and obviously related sheet, listing—FOR SALE—one Tannoy fifteen-inch Monitor Gold dual-concentric speaker with crossover and cabinet—all for \$2,000. It also told me, supposing that I might be interested in such an item, to call John at 647.406.5052. Of course, I was somewhat perplexed given that the announcement proper—or what I took to be the announcement proper—appeared overshadowed by the shill for the speaker and cabinet. Moreover, adding to my confusion was the fact that what appeared to be the title of Krüger's exhibition—"MAILER"—could have been construed as a "performative," that what I held in my hands—a mailer that, at once, tautologically declared itself as such—was *itself* the exhibition. So you can understand my bewilderment over what came down to the contradictory draw of a double call: on the one hand, a call that announced the "taking-place" of a non-event, since I had, perhaps, already received it, already had it in hand and, on the other, a call to call John—John Goodman no doubt—about a certain piece of hardware that might be found at the Goodwater gallery and that might have something to do with the exhibition that had, perhaps, just taken place.

A few days later, on my way an appointment in the east end, I happened to pass by the Goodwater gallery. Having not yet visited the new space on Queen I wasn't sure of its precise location. As I rode by, a quick scan of the storefronts just east of Parliament proved fruitless. However, one boarded-up façade did catch my eye. Or so I thought, because it didn't register at that precise moment. It was only later—a few seconds at most—that it struck me as odd simply because, at the time, my sole reason to be passing by Goodwater was to have some reproductions made at a nearby printing facility. Now there would be nothing extraordinary about this trip save for the fact that what I was having reproduced was a rendering of an earlier proposal of my own, something I was, only recently, compelled to return to: an exterior façade of a gallery whose windows were, in effect, muzzled. This sign, then, the one that I thought I might have missed, that I might have in passing only imagined, a fabulous coincidence that, as far as I was concerned, was too good to be true, now possessed the logic—and the *topos*—of the dispatch. From the moment I opened the mailer, the mailer that, not by chance, bore the title "Mailer" (an appellation that could refer not only to the thing that it is but also to the sender, the one who, or the thing—the addressing or mailing machine—that posted the missive and its callings), I found myself already—ineluctably, symptomatically—on its trajectory, its projection, as it were.¹

Sure enough, on the following weekend, when I arrived in front of what I believed to be the correct address, my expectations were confirmed: not only were the windows of the gallery covered in raw,

construction-grade plywood but the main entrance door appeared to have been replaced or simply concealed by the same material. There were no obvious signs as to whether or not this was the correct address, and the overall impression one got of the façade was of something temporarily off limits to the public. Indeed, a sign reading “Authorized Personnel Only” would not have been out of place; rather, the only inscription to greet one’s arrival was a hastily scrawled piece of graffiti that read, “ass hole in hear” (sic).²

Setting my perturbations aside, I chanced to venture inside and immediately found myself in a dark chamber or vestibule, at any rate, in a narrow space not much wider or higher than the door I had just come through. The only source of light was a fluorescent tube mounted diagonally on the spring-loaded door that had automatically closed behind me. As my eyes adjusted to the low light level, it now became apparent that this corridor extended almost the full length of the gallery interior. Moving further along its confines toward what I thought must be another door allowing access to the exhibition space proper, I was met by a wall or wave of sound. I’m not sure that such figures best describe the experience. Suffice it to say that this mass of sound was felt as much as heard. Emanating from speaker at the far end of the corridor—our Tannoy, fifteen-inch Monitor Gold advertised on the posted supplement—this sound-matter, vibration or pulse—seemed to be without measure, that the only thing containing it was the corridor, the sound-box or resonator understood as either an extrusion formed by the radical displacement of the front door or, inversely, as a projection of extension of the speaker cabinet.³ In effect, then, one was reduced to waiting for the note to take the measure of itself (the point at which it exhausted itself and silence, if only momentarily, returned), in a space that is nothing more than an extension of the threshold: an interim or intermediary annex, a detachable appendix. Now the term “annex” can refer to a territory, specifically to the incorporation of one territory or domain into another. Which introduces into the proceedings, here, the issue of property, of certain proprietary rights. One could say that Krüger’s apparatus, his annex (that which is added to something at the end), is the last, the terminal point or destination of a series of relays beginning with the poster, the mailer bearing the title *Mailer* that could also be called a placard. As you may well know the word “placard” can also refer to a small tag bearing an owner’s name. It follows that Krüger has thus sent, has destined, his tag—a proxy for his signature—in order to set it to work in (or as) the space temporarily annexed as his “own” from the Goodwater gallery.

So, having taken up the two-in-one call, having made my way to the point where I am suspended on the threshold (inside but not quite inside 234 Queen Street East), I can only wait for it: not simple for the sound, the monodic blast, in this case, of a single trumpet—as one might, before the wall of Jericho—but

its address.⁴ Here, in the *passing* of a divided/displaced partition, one must await a likewise divided address: the destiny—albeit a destiny that has no proper destination—of sound.

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Notes

1. On the Goodwater website, the exhibition is titled *Monophonic*. There, all of the text has been reversed out of a black rectangle set in what appears to be a field or ground derived from a sheet of construction-grade plywood. As well, this text block has been inverted, as if reflected in a mirror. The reason for the inversion is simple: the Goodwater shingle, which includes information on the current exhibition, had been applied to the window glazing during the installation of Krüger's show. Late in the proceedings, when a decision was made to cover the windows with plywood, the shingle/announcement was of course obscured. Rather than relocating the sign, Krüger and Goodman seized the opportunity to capitalize on the unanticipated negation of the names of both the gallery and the exhibiting artist, as well as the dates of the exhibition and its proper title. Thus, the image on the website merely reproduces the "reversed" shingle as seen from inside the gallery.

2. On the anal zone and its relation to privatization and sublimation, see Guy Hocquenghem, "Family, Capitalism, Anus," *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1977, pp 149–158. Right from the start, before one could set a foot in the door, the homonymic displacement—"hear" for the deictic "here"—alerted the viewer to the issue of the ear (the labyrinth that includes the cochlea of the internal ear) and thus to the question of how the work might stand or fall to/before a certain notion of the audition.

3. The speaker/cabinet assembly was mounted on a track so that it could be pushed out into the gallery space proper, allowing viewers to examine the "exterior" of the construction. Once on the other side of this rolling plug, one was confronted with a more or less empty space. Aside from the rather sparse gallery furnishings, the only other stuff on view was the neatly stacked off-cuts from the construction of the corridor, a set of steel security bars (removed, I suppose, from the front window), the original front door, and three rolls of industrial carpet. Apparently, at one point Krüger had intended to insulate the exterior surfaces of the structure with the carpet in an attempt to damp down (restrict, contain, muzzle, delay), to some degree, the projected address of each sound-event.

4. The actual instrument employed was a bass trombone. Krüger had engaged Paul O'Brien to play one sustained note from as far down the diatonic scale as possible, the result sounding much like a fog horn. I should make it clear that the monodic blast from the trombone that I focus on here was only one of any number of sound-effects or sound-interludes projected into the corridor. As Krüger explained to me, he had left it up to Goodman to "play whatever he liked" over the course of the exhibition. If I have restricted my interest to the one sound—that of the "trumpet"—it was not only to acknowledge the material conditions of this particular address as having been "undivided" or "monophonic" but to draw attention to what might be at stake in such a presentation: an assault on the walls of the hall as well as on the "walls" of the ear, that is to say, the body that attends to the event. A question, then, of partitions and their collapse; hence, the reference to the wall of Jericho: "So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." *Joshua*, 6:20.