

# Entities & Anomalies: Haunting the Panama Canal

Borders & Territories - Transient Liquidities

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## First encounters

The cyborg navigates the depths of the Panamanian jungle. Rainproofed, he navigates the soil of an unheard world.

Perceptions become augmented with memory devices and sonic diving gear. He is looking for a place to give birth to a new entity, a technological entity beyond his perceptions.

The 0 and 1's must come to life. It must speak. For it has already entered our bloodstreams, it has given us a new means to live.

Now we must render it explicit, acknowledge our communion. So that we may hear it, so that we can feel its intelligence. The landscape must become a landscape like the cyborg, so that their communion is rendered explicit, Bodies as landscapes, landscapes as bodies: etched, altered, instrumentalised.

I write this text not as an abstract means of communication, but as one with rhythms, one with sounds.

For all created, there was the word.

The word and then the world.

We still hear the sounds that were heard long before humans existed on the earth:

The waves hitting the shores,

The wind blowing across the landscape,

The crackling of thunderstorms.

Sound is a means to access the eternal, silence is its canvas.

We create from the words heard in our heads.

We speak. All things speak. We have to learn how to listen.

Fleeting sensations of sound have now become containable, capturable.

Allowing for the first stages of cyborg, eternal life.

As our offspring and theirs might forget our names,

our voices will be played back once their records are accessed and rendered alive once again.

The world now speaks in different tongues.

The geophonies of old are merging with the antropophonies of new.

New entities emerge and they speak.

But how can we expect to hear their voices?

We become overwhelmed, we become selective.

Sounds of nature, sounds of culture, music:

We do not want noise.

Noise pollution, we drown in hisses noises, screams and honks.  
Some human, some machinic, some both.

How will the cyborg create this new entity? or does he even create it? Maybe the insights into the nature of his own body, and his ability to make it speak, can be transferred to another body, one of a landscape, and in turn be rendered alive in the register of cyborg like life-forms?

Eternal Architectures of Sound

To create space is to have it occupied.  
Emptiness is form, form is Emptiness.  
Silence is sound, sound is silence.

To create space is to create silence.  
To create silence is to create sound.

We hear

With these words written down I embarked on my journey to Panama.

Landscapes of contemporary industrial rationales are haunted. They are haunted because of their intangible, abstract and large-scale operationalisation, creating a deep local discontinuity between the directly perceived and the numerically registered.

For Panama, this territorial operationalisation is seen most prominently in their global piece of infrastructure: the Panama Canal. Originally attempted by the French, first created by the Americans and finally transferred to the Panamanians, this piece of infrastructure is single handedly responsible for the creation of the country of Panama. With the employment of dams and the cutting through the mountains in the south, boats could now cross the Americas through the middle: a wet dream for global traders and a superpower up north alike.

However, there is a severe lack of overview in Panama. Famously a tax haven for all of the world to use, the country has a deeply privatised economy. Security guards for different companies protect their respected turfs from unwanted visitors, corruption is rampant and the Panama Canal hidden in plain sight. There seems to be no single thread that ties the country together except for the Canal. It is a mysterious entity that appears incredibly visible when viewed from above, but on the ground one can only get overpriced tourist tickets to be fed propaganda about 'Panamanian culture' or how it is the 'gateway to the world' or scared away by a group of masked security personnel with live firearms.

Yet the way in which the landscape has been transformed is unmistakable. The highly hazardous jungle that previously covered the Isthmus had been domesticated by the Americans, fully ridding it from the dangers of yellow fever. The incessant etching and digging, accompanied by initially thousands and tens of thousands of deaths, have resulted in the jungle becoming effectively a piece of global infrastructure. The landscape was now made completely obedient to serve its human masters: a cyborg slave, half animal half machine; half landscape half infrastructure. For all the world to enjoy.

But these new organs, these man-made lakes, locks and pieces of land to store the goods that passed through this 'gift to the world at large', will ultimately be rejected. It takes a very strict territorial organisation to postpone this rejection for as long as possible, one that Panama with its 'it has never been that bad' policy is not really expected to enforce. The recent upgrade to the canal, featuring larger locks for larger ships, only seems to exacerbate the underlying problem: everytime a ship passes through water leaks out of the system. Extended droughts as a consequence of the high frequency of el niño years in recent history also hampered the influx of new water and therefore restricts the canal's usage. Panamanians themselves are even, often uncontrollably, sabotaging the canal's water influx by building shelters and informal settlements

into the 'watershed zone', reducing soil water absorption critically and worsening resilience.

In native Panamanian beliefs, water is often considered the most sacred God. Water gives life. Rain fills up the cavities between the mountains and lets the rivers run across the Isthmus. Rain washes away the stinking, humid hotness that plagues Panama twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The sensation of constantly feeling dirty is only ever resolved by surrendering oneself to the purifying qualities of water. But now, it is only seen as a means, a statistic to get as much stuff as possible from the Pacific to the Atlantic and vice versa.

The cybernetic contraption appears to be collapsing, bleeding to death.

It is within this geographical, territorial scale the "Panama Canal Entity" can be conceptualised. The Panama Canal Authority does not truly encompass or understand the fickle and fragile construction it is supposedly responsible for. It only seeks to continue with business as usual. The Canal Entity, however, is not to be merely restricted to human, monetary gains.

The word 'entity' has a double-sided meaning: it could refer to a rather ephemeral existence, a 'being' that is not completely disclosed yet particular enough to denote a specific existence. At the same time, it could refer to an organisation, a bureaucratic agent. It is with the intersection between these rather opposing definitions that the canal's existence becomes much more messy and vital. Instead of a sole shipping route, now the watershed, surrounding ecosystems, occupations, roads and dams all become part of a cybernetic whole that is also open ended. On the one hand, there are rules, areas, regulations and pieces of property that constitute its existence, yet there are also more transient, dynamic processes that can be directly experienced as a part of this entity.

This messy, transient reality of intricate rainforests, global shipping infrastructures, free zones and eerily empty cities rings out in all its vitality. Even though fences are placed to prevent access to the canal, its sounds ring through. These sounds denote a presence, one that can not be expressed in simple numbers or objectives, but as a direct experience of activity, human or non-human alike. This is the activity of the Panama Canal Entity.

To render the entity explicit is to make perceptible its shaping forces: to deliberately haunt the Panama Canal. This is done by making more explicit the active, discontinuous and paradoxical nature of the canal by creating "Anomalies". These Anomalies are sonic, visual and architectural experiences generated by linking audio of real time events that are geographically far apart but all a part of the cybernetic, messy reality of the canal. These sounds are overdubbed, manipulated and filtered all by different occurrences in the landscape. These Anomalies can vary in size and scope but always require the same infrastructure to emerge. The infrastructure is "sonic" in nature because of this specific capacity of sound to render life or a presence explicit.

The term 'infrastructure' is used in broad terms here, this could be any component used to create the Anomaly and is heterogeneous in nature. Similarly to how the Canal is a messy whole of man-made and natural occurrences, the infrastructure should embrace this. Feedback loops are also both cybernetic and acoustical. Microphones and speakers are the acoustic equivalent of the 'receiver and transmitter' components of the fundamental 'cybernetic loop'. With this sonic infrastructure, sound is supercharged: it no longer travels at the speed of sound but the speed of

light, making possible sonic reciprocities and resonances at a geographical scale.

These Anomalies require space and silence to be properly induced and perceived. All rooms have their own frequency responses and reverberation times, they can thus be tuned accordingly. Rooms will resonate beautifully if their ratios are simple, as these correspond to the simple frequency ratios seen in musical scales. Acoustic reflectivity and absorption, determined by the smoothness and hardness of the material, are also integral. The exterior symphonies of thunderstorms find their way inside. Rain droplets form water surfaces that vibrate, forming intricate patterns and light reflections. It is this exact interrelationship between the room and the sound, the soundscape, that is to fully summon the Anomaly.

When these Anomalies occur, slow pulses and cycles are expected, depending on the time of day and day of the year. They present a picture of a larger present, a collage of measurements and sensations. A constant state of change is present and never is the whole completely stable. This haunting makes one aware of a certain type of a deep, existential vulnerability: nothing is ever fully cyclical, everything is always changing. The Canal is not a wonder of engineering but a gift that will one day be gone.

Visitors of the Anomaly are not expected to merely observe. Their voices and footsteps become part of the audio-cybernetic soup. Like water, they are also part of the messy, humid whole. The observers also become the observed, becoming part of the Anomaly. They partake in a cybernetic ritual of sound. These visitors will not be limited to just humans but all organisms that make and hear sound will be affected. The dense sonic worlds of the rainforest intermingle with the urban jungle.

By amplifying these Anomalies, possibilities to re-understand the fragile ecosystemic constructions emerge and the innate impossibility to understand one as being distant from that process becomes quite obvious. To automatically pose the lack of water as an engineering problem, as something that can be fixed will only further obscure the underlying conceptual fallacy that feeds ecosystemic destruction. It is not a problem by definition that there is less water in the canal: it is a problem for humans. The earth was not just made for humans to roam. The earth does not care about our existence and will still exist when we are gone. All good things must come to an end and it is this end that makes it precious.

As the infrastructures of the Anomaly decay and are swallowed by the dense surrounding rainforests, attunements and alignments of the instruments change. Spaces that once were maintained and filled with these transmitted sounds are now silent. All that remains are the memories of how one could sing in unison with the symphonies of the Anthropocene, the symphonies of the Panama Canal Entity.





Construction for sound production  
Induced field  
Sonic reception by structures

Wave field synthesis

Sonic deconstruction:

There are abstract processes in sound that we can understand to uncover their underlying causes and patterns. These phenomena can be observed in day to day life, but require a certain type of scrutiny. This pavilion or temple or structure will uncover these phenomena and show them in such a manner that their universal, experiential nature immediately changes visitors perceptions of their surrounding sounds and their fundamentals.

The topics that are elaborated on are:

- Fundamental pitches
- Delay effects and their relationship to space
- Delay and sequencing
- Focal points and energy concentration

The cyborg has the possibility for later re-observation, becoming beyond his own first-hand perceptions.

It is made for those who are able to understand its workings. One has to become familiar with it; one has to become capable of playing it like an instrument.

It contains a regular, standardized system of parts on the outer ring, with in the middle resonant tubes. In the center of the resonant field a structure stands that focuses and refracts sound depending on the angles of approach.

Noises are amplified based on their tonal and acoustical properties.

Sounds roughly equivalent to white noise amplify

#### P4 - A sonic ritual

There are abstract processes in sound that we can understand by uncovering their underlying causes and patterns. These phenomena can be observed in day to day life, but require a certain type of scrutiny. This architecture and its surrounding, aquatic landscape is designed to uncover these phenomena and show them in such a manner that their universal, experiential nature immediately changes visitors perceptions of their surroundings and the understanding of their fundamental existence between them.

And here, the observer can enter a space where it is only the focal point of the surrounding metal parabola that can be experienced. We can be fully immersed in sound. Like an inverse sensory deprivation tank, engulfed in an ocean of airborne waves.