Sonic Ventures in Post-Truth Surrealism: Raudelunas, the Rev. Fred Lane, and LSD: Huxley’s Last Trip

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**Abstract:** In the arena of contemporary music and performance, truthiness—a fuzzy-edged concept linking “truth” and “post-truth”—provides a malleable framework for examining how musicians and musical communities are confronting, reacting to, or embodying belief systems grounded in deception. Does the notion of authenticity embrace deliberate falsifications? In an attempt to answer such questions, I will offer examples of performers, writers, and artists cavorting along the truthiness bridge.

How are musicians, composers, and sound artists responding to the era of post-truth?

In my keynote address for the 2017 Totally Huge New Music Festival, I confronted this complex and provocative theme with still further questions: What can we musicians, composers and sound artists do to confront strategic propagation of misinformation—when “alternative facts” are promulgated by those who stand to profit; when news is branded as fake whenever the factual realities cause discomfort; and when belief is conflated with truth, elevating the former and diminishing the latter? What positive influences might music contribute, in dire times like these? And how can we, with our music, our sound art, and our approaches to creation and performance, survive and thrive through this era?

After establishing a framework to look at what we might mean by truth and post-truth, I will attempt to answer the broader questions posed above. My investigations will be illuminated by personal experiences, as well as examples of performers, writers, composers, philosophers, entertainers, and creative collectives, exploring the uneasy terrain between truth and falsity. I will touch upon well-known and more obscure movements from the distant and not-so-distant past that responded to their respective political, cultural, and social environments by embracing the irrational. For instance, the Raudelunas collective, in which I participated, spawned intense activity among those of us who came of age in the 1970s, living in the Deep South of the U.S.A. We wholeheartedly embraced absurdist and Surrealist music-making that forever shaped us artistically and philosophically. I will also highlight two composers’ projects. Ted Hearne’s oratorio, *The Source*, is an elegant and confrontational mining of Chelsea Manning and the Wikileaks saga. My own operatic treatment of a controversial subject, *LSD: Huxley’s Last Trip*, tracks the use and abuse of early psychedelics in American history. Finally, two large-scale endeavours representing direct responses to ongoing global deceptions—the Estonian Singing Revolution, and sonic...
Disciplines such as acoustic ecology—demonstrate overt and covert political strategies related to sound.²

Democritus, the ancient Greek philosopher widely considered to be the father of modern science, asserted: “Of truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well.” Some twenty-four centuries later, in 1895, French painter Jean Léon Gérôme gave us *The Nurturer Truth Lies in a Well, Having Been Killed by Liars and Actors*. The following year he painted a similar work, *Truth Coming Out of Her Well to Chastise Mankind*. Both paintings were commentaries on the political suppression of truth (sound familiar?) that provoked the twelve-year Dreyfus affair at the turn of the twentieth century.³

![Fig. 1: Truth Coming Out of Her Well (La Vérité sortant du puits), by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1896), oil on canvas, original canvas held at Musée Anne de Beaujeu. Image public domain from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_Coming_Out_of_Her_Well#/media/File:Jean_L%C3%A9on_Gerome_1896_La_V%C3%A9rit%C3%A9_sortant_du_puits.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_Coming_Out_of_Her_Well#/media/File:Jean_L%C3%A9on_Gerome_1896_La_V%C3%A9rit%C3%A9_sortant_du_puits.JPG)

Truth, armed with a small whip, means business—no joking around here!

Today, Gérôme’s Truth would either beat a hasty retreat back to her well or find a more effective way to chastise human beings. Meanwhile, our own contemporary spokesperson for truth, the American comedian and talk show personality Stephen Colbert, popularized the term “truthiness” to refer to statements that feel true but are actually false.⁴ At the 2006 White House Correspondents’ Dinner, when George W. Bush was the U.S. President, Colbert’s introductory remarks included: “Every night on my show, the Colbert Report, I speak straight from the gut, OK? I give people the truth, unfiltered by rational argument. I call it the ‘No Fact Zone.’”⁵ In 2016, post-truth was named the Oxford English Dictionary word of the year. Colbert took exception, claiming that it was a rip-off his 2006 word of the year, “truthiness.”⁶
Here are two musical examples related to this notion of truthiness. I invite you to determine which of the two 60-second excerpts is a notated composition by a well-known composer, and which is completely improvised.

Audiovisual link 2: click here.
Audiovisual link 3: click here.

Notice any similarities between the two selections? What about an impression of randomness? An apparent lack of structure? A sense of chaos?

Audiovisual link 1: 02:20 – 02:30; here.

Now for the reveal: the first example, titled *Nasibus*, was a recording made by Craig Nutt and Nolan Hatcher, two members of our Raudelunas cohort. This was a loosely-knit group, not a self-identified collective, yet those who engaged in its activities shared common aesthetic values grounded in freedom of expression, egalitarianism, Surrealism, and a spirit of exploration that extended to all art forms. Nutt and Hatcher performed *Nasibus* on a variety of keyboards—a virginal, several pianos, a harpsichord, a clavichord. Neither had any training or experience whatsoever as a keyboard player (although each had spent years obsessively consuming recordings of contemporary music). The vinyl recording, recorded in 1979 and released in 1980, was christened *Dinosaur Time*.

Diplodocus, a dinosaur from the end of the Jurassic period, became a symbol of various Raudelunas projects. Our unofficial “mascot” was invoked to counter the prevailing religious proselytizing that dominated the American Deep South, especially intrusive door-to-door attempts to convert sinners to Christianity. Our Raudelunas group printed “Come to Diplodocus” tracts, mimicking the “Come to Jesus” brochures that were handed out on the streets of Tuscaloosa, deposited in mailboxes, or slid under our doors by eager proselytizers. The Diplodocus brochures, wherever they were distributed, never failed to elicit confusion and expressions of bafflement.
The second audio excerpt was composed by Pierre Boulez in 1952. Over half a century later, *Structures 1a for Two Pianos* remains the most extreme example of total serialism, with nearly every parameter of the piece, including note durations and dynamics, pre-determined by serial procedures.

In the 1986 issue of the *Canadian University Music Review*, Boulez reflected on his intentions for this composition:
I wanted to eradicate from my vocabulary absolutely every trace of the conventional, whether it concerned figures and phrases, or development and form; I then wanted gradually, element after element, to win back the various stages of the compositional process, in such a manner that a perfectly new synthesis might arise, a synthesis that would not be corrupted from the very outset by foreign bodies—stylistic reminiscences in particular.11

The Dinosaur Time duo accomplished something quite similar to what Boulez was striving for: both the duo’s recording and the Boulez composition sound completely random. In other words, most listeners are not able to aurally ascertain the obsessive layers of structure in the Boulez, and there is no underlying structure in Nasibus. Both recordings also avoid any clichés, relics of nostalgia, or other types of extrinsic or identifiable stylistic intrusions. Boulez expresses how he intentionally wanted to prevent any such inferences by exerting maximum control over nearly every compositional parameter, whereas the amateur piano duo simply lacked training and technique. Once Boulez determined his parameters, he obsessively, almost automatically, composed Structures Ia in a lightning heat—a process with certain parallels to the fierce and fiendish duo improvisation on Dinosaur Time.

Does the notion of authenticity embrace or reject deliberate falsifications? In the mid-1970s, when the Dinosaur Time recording was issued, listeners may have been more prone to believe that the Boulez composition represented a kind of truth, compared to the less credible Dinosaur Time improvisations. We might ask, then, which of these two approaches to creating music is more authentic, and why? Might the more predictable answer to that question diminish the spirited improvisations on the Dinosaur Time recording, perhaps even casting these improvisations as deliberate falsifications? With their purely intuitive performances, the duo’s cultivated indifference echoes a journal entry made by a young Marcel Duchamp, when he questioned whether one could perhaps make works that are not works of art, paving the way for his notorious and influential readymades. Fountain, a porcelain urinal signed “R.Mutt,” is quite possibly the best known—the symbolic meaning of the toilet takes the conceptual challenges of his readymades to their most extreme (for information and an image, click here). With its tongue-in-cheek prediction and embrace of a common everyday tool, the snow-shovel-as-readymade is my personal favourite.

In his book Empty Words, composer John Cage (a devoted fan of Duchamp) makes the distinction between structure and process, apropos of the two musical examples presented above:

Many composers no longer make musical structures. Instead they set processes going. A structure is like a piece of furniture, whereas a process is like the weather. In the case of a table, the beginning and end of the whole and each of its parts are known. In the case of weather, though we notice changes in it, we have no clear knowledge of its beginning or ending. At a given moment, we are where we are. The now moment.12

Transitioning to our own “now moment,” we return to the hot-button word, “post-truth.” Oxford Dictionaries, as we have seen, announced “post-truth” as their 2016 international word of the year, vanquishing a politically charged field of candidates that included “adulting,” “alt-right,” “Brexiteer,” “glass cliff” and “woke.” The official definition of post-truth is: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Katherine Martin, head of U.S. Dictionaries at Oxford University Press, makes this handy differentiation between the Colbert-related term and the OED word of the year: “Truthiness is a humorous way of discussing a quality of specific claims,” she
said. “Post-truth is an adjective that is describing a much bigger thing. It’s saying that the truth is being regarded as mostly irrelevant.”

The 2017 “Post-Truth Issue,” published by the Chronicle of Higher Education, addressed topics such as Know-Nothing Nation; Fighting Fake; The Plots Against America; Facebook and Falsehood; and Google and the Misinformed Public. In this same issue, Daniel Rodgers, professor emeritus of history at Princeton University, published an essay, “When Truth Becomes a Commodity.” He asserts that we are not living in an era stripped of truths… au contraire, we find ourselves in a “political-cultural moment saturated with competing claims on truth, each insisting on its veracity,” and that the resulting “open marketplace of truths is not a happy state.” He posits that the 1960s represent the era in recent history when the essence of truth came under critical scrutiny via self-critical search and dialogue. Our present time is hardly characterized by such healthy means of reflection, but instead burdened and challenged with exaggerations, conspiracy theories, and—most pertinent to the subject at hand—with competing truth claims: anthropogenic global warming; the effect of globalization on the U.S. economy; the end of racism; fake news pretending to be factual news; and so on. All of these ideas are exacerbated, magnified, and multiplied because they can now spread instantaneously, throughout the world. Such emergent falsehoods could not, prior to the Internet, be so immediately and widely disseminated.

This superfluid situation, as Daniel Rodgers points out, creates a market not only based on revenue streams, but on individual desires—a “reconstitution of truths as market commodities,” truths hatched willy-nilly, zooming past one another in isolation and not tempered or examined in discourse or dialogue. The abandonment of the process of inquiry, then, has resulted in a disintegration of truth, and led to a time where former bastions of credibility are relentlessly questioned and attacked. Taking the notion of truths as market commodities to an extreme, Werner Twertzog—an often spot-on faux-Twitter account issuing aphorisms in the style of film director Werner Herzog—proclaims: “There is no ‘truth,’ only money.”

So, we find ourselves living in a world characterized by more extreme post-truths, where the definition of what is true and what is not is up to the beholder. Yet has that not always been the case? After all, truth is porous, along with knowledge and morality, all huddling under the roof of relativism—the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. Within this highly politicized and often Kafkaesque environment populated by a multiplicity of “truths,” what then is the role of art-making?

The poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, in his 2007 publication, Poetry as an Insurgent Art, unleashes a call to poetic activism, advocating using the power of poetry towards social change. Consider a few choice lines, probing what poetry could be and should be, for their relevance to our sonic world and how we might function in it as poets of sound:

I am signaling you through the flames…

What are poets for, in such an age?
What is the use of poetry?
The state of the world calls out for poetry to save it.
If you would be a poet, experiment with all manner of poetics, erotic broken grammars, ecstatic religions, heathen outpourings speaking in tongues, bombast public speech, automatic scribblings, Surrealist sensings, streams of consciousness, found sounds, rants and raves—to create your own underlying voice, your ur voice.

If you call yourself a poet, don’t just sit there. Poetry is not a sedentary occupation. Stand up and let them have it.

... If you would be a poet, speak new truths the world can’t deny.

Through art, create order out of the chaos of living.

Reinvent the idea of truth.

Reinvent the idea of beauty.

In the first light, wax poetic. In the night, wax tragic.

Listen to the lisp of leaves and the ripple of rain.¹⁷

Likewise, for French philosopher Alain Badiou, art is a matter of truth. Badiou’s succinct definition of the truth is: “the coming-to-be of that which is not yet.” However, his more expansive notion of “truth” comes in a distinctive, idiosyncratic package. In an essay published in the May, 2007 issue of Postmodern Culture, Robert Hughes writes:

truth, for Badiou, is the name of an exceptional event and a process that forces a break with the everyday course of knowledges and situations and consequently brings into being a “subject” where there was formerly just a human animal, a mere inhabitant of a given situation.¹⁸

In other words, there are two parts to this interpretation of truth-according-to-Badiou: a sudden initial flash, or event, perhaps an epiphany, linked to the ongoing fidelity of the subject who forms the site of that truth. The fidelity, marking the second moment of the truth, manifests as an ongoing commitment by the subject to place his or her situation in the context of that event, to forge a new way of being and acting in the situation. Badiou thinks of truth as productive, inventive, creative: as the “coming-to-be of that which is not yet.” Badiou’s event of truth implies that the subject who experiences the event will, as Hughes goes on to interpret, “continue to bear witness to this truth by engaging one’s life, one’s decisions, and one’s existence, in a continuing reinterpretation that is through this event and according to its truth.”

One of the best illustrations I can think of, corresponding to Badiou’s idea of truth, is the formation of Surrealism and, preceding and overlapping it, Dada. These early-to-mid-twentieth century artistic movements—Surrealism, Dada, Fluxus—emerged from artist-driven collectives aspiring to reshape the world and our perception of it. More recently, the Luther Blissett movement—where the name of an Italian football player became repurposed as a pseudonym for Italian cultural activists in an attack on conventional ideas of authorship and subjectivity—could be cited as an example of a collective responding to the world, with creative agendas that welcomed the irrational.¹⁹
How might ambiguous or intentionally faked authorship intersect with our conception of truth and post-truth? The appropriation of other artists’ work, by collaging, covering, or ready-making, thus avoiding the role of the personal, genuine, “true” artist, challenges the idea of the singular author. Other means of bypassing sole authorship include collective processes, such as the Surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse; or obscuring the true identity of the artist (the Residents are a prime example); or creating an intentionally artificial identity, like the Reverend Fred Lane. These basic techniques have been varied and crossbred any number of times, proving that the concept of sole authorship is nearly mythical. Indeed, independently created works of art are often, at some level, embroiled in collaboration and influence. Luther Blissett, for instance, could be seen as a blend of collective authorship and fake identity.

Fig. 5: From the One That Cut You, by Fred Lane; photograph Craig Nutt; album design T.R. Reed (aka Fred Lane); image courtesy of T.R. Reed ©.

The Reverend Fred Lane was a fictional personality brought to life by the disruptive and parodistic instincts of Alabamian Tim Reed. Differentiating the invented persona and the real person underneath was frequently impossible. Reed/Lane was nurtured by Raudelunas, the aforementioned outsider collective formed in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in the early 1970s, in which I participated. We invented the word “Raudelunas” as an absurdist familial signifier and we also fabricated more than one story about the word’s origins.
The group shown above, a precursor to Raudelunas, performed under the moniker Blue Denim Deals Without the Arms. From left to right the performers are Nolan Hatcher, Davey Williams, Mitchell Cashion, and Craig Nutt.

*Icepick to the Moon,* a newly released documentary directed by Skizz Cyzyk, illustrates the music, pranks, and personalities that blossomed within Raudelunas, with a special focus on the talents and gifts of the Reverend Fred Lane.
Here are several clips from the documentary:

Audiovisual link 4: Raudelunas as a cultural attack vehicle; click [here](#).
Audiovisual link 5: “anybody can play”….European mentors; click [here](#).
Audiovisual link 6: “if it could possibly offend someone then it must be good”
— LaDonna Smith; click [here](#).

Driven by a sense of endless adventure and discovery, whole-heartedly rejecting our extremely conservative surroundings (the rabid football and sorority/fraternity-driven collegiate culture prominent in the American South), the Raudelunas group banded together in a loosely knit cohort. We gathered to play music for hours, to make visual art, to write poetry and manifestos. Nearly a decade after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, we witnessed and encountered overt racism, blatant sexism, homophobia, and rampant corruption. Despite such dispiriting forms of oppression, our creative spirits remained intact as we engaged with one another in a self-created and unstructured environment of our own making.

We formed the Raudelunas Marching Vegetable Band in 1973 and acquired all necessary permissions for marching in the University of Alabama Homecoming Parade. The musicians constructed papier-mâché costumes of vegetables, fruits, even a Campbell’s Soup can, and some wore custom-made band jackets with the logo “Raudelunas Marching Vegetable Band.” We were a rag-tag bunch playing an assortment of instruments, including a Folgerphone—a wind instrument created from a Folger’s coffee can. I performed on a large troubadour harp while being pulled along the streets in in a red wagon. (Our theme, repeated ad infinitum, was an arrangement of “March of the Hobbits” from Don Cherry’s newly released recording, *Relativity Suite.*) When the
person hauling the harp wagon tired from the physical effort, exacerbated by humid Alabama heat, we happened to be in front of the house rented by Craig Nutt. Abandoning the parade, we all trudged up the small hill in front of the house and went inside to stow the harp and to rest. Nutt’s landlady was sitting on the porch of an adjacent house with her friends, taking in the parade. She was so mortified by the spectacle of marching vegetables that she soon evicted Nutt and his wife Linda, and subsequently had the house razed to the ground.

Figs 8 and 9: Still images of Raudelunas at the Alabama Homecoming Parade, Tuscaloosa; see links here and here.

Audiovisual link 7: Film footage of Raudelunas at the Alabama Homecoming Parade, Tuscaloosa; click link here.

In 1975, we mounted an art exhibition and full evening performance at the University of Alabama, promoted as the Raudelunas ‘Pataphysical Revue. The production featured Tim Reed’s alter ego, the Reverend Fred Lane, decked out in a tuxedo top, boxer shorts, band-aids, sunglasses, and a fedora. Crooning songs such as “My Kind of Town (Chicago Is)” and “Volare,” his parodistic delivery was enhanced and supported by the equally subversive band backing him, Ron Pate’s Debonairs. These demented arrangements of mid-twentieth century pop classics, associated with Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, formed the heart of the first release on Say Day-Bew Records.²⁴
Ed Baxter, in *The Wire* magazine’s “100 Records That Set the World on Fire … While No One Was Listening,” captured the essence of the performance and recording:

A document of a single evening in the university town of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, March 1975. Dominating proceedings is Fred Lane, towering alter ego of flautist and whirling sculptor Tim Reed, with a series of hilarious lateral jokes and weird monologues. This monumental work also features Anne LeBaron’s superb *Concerto for Active Frogs*. No other record has ever come as close to realising Alfred Jarry’s desire “to make the soul monstrous”—or even had the vision or invention to try. It’s all over the place. The sleeve notes describe it as “the best thing ever”—time has not damaged this audacious claim.²⁵

Audiovisual link 8: Recording of *Raudelunas’ Pataphysical Revue*; click [here](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/soundscripts/vol6/iss1/5).

The most committed musicians from the Raudelunas group, such as Davey Williams and LaDonna Smith, employed Surrealist methods like stream of consciousness and automatism in their musical, literary, and artistic pursuits. They inspired a consistent striving to create a kind of music where the performer and composer were one entity. Our music, along with other Raudelunas-created art, radically differentiated itself from anything being produced in the South at that time. Our eclectic influences ranged from country blues to Stockhausen, from iconic improviser Derek Bailey to train whistles screaming through the night, from found sound to howling wolves to sheer noise. The ultimate goal of our weekly improvisation sessions and of our live performances was a near psychic method of spontaneous composition. André Breton’s
definition of Surrealism from his 1924 “Manifesto of Surrealism” became a beacon for us, an informal mantra validating our explorations: “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express … the actual functioning of thought … in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”

Although I identify primarily as a composer, my initial association as an improvising harpist with Raudelunas has forged a spirit of experimentalism in my creative work. I am now completing an opera about the early history of a much-maligned psychedelic: LSD: Huxley’s Last Trip. The instrumentation for the opera includes several instruments built by Harry Partch, tuned to a 43-tone scale. They were selected for their potential to destabilize and expand a given harmonic language expressed by a chamber ensemble of “normal” instruments, as well as for their unique colours and sculptural qualities. The opera charts powerful historical ramifications—cultural, political, and spiritual—set into motion by Albert Hofmann’s discovery of LSD in 1943. Before jump-starting the counterculture movement, LSD was appropriated for nefarious uses by government agencies such as the CIA, and was ostracized, demonized, and feared. The panorama of dramatic events in the opera encompasses scientific discoveries, murders, CIA classified experiments, and meetings of minds among iconic figures such as Aldous Huxley, Albert Hofmann, Timothy Leary, and various CIA operatives. Despite a preponderance of male characters, a feminist spirit of guiding lights pervades: LSD, personified by a soprano trio of Love, Sex, and Death; Laura Huxley (wife of Aldous); and the idealistic and ultimately doomed Mary Pinchot Meyer, JFK’s last mistress.27 Meyer procures LSD from Timothy Leary and, in our operatic version of their relationship, shares it with JFK in his White House bedroom.

Audiovisual link 9: Trailer, LSD: Huxley’s Last Trip (formerly known as LSD: The Opera), click here

To recap: after establishing a framework for defining truth and post-truth within the context of this paper, I presented several examples of artists responding to the “truth” of their geopolitical environment. Some gravitated toward absurdist/Surrealist actions, some toward invented personas, and some toward historical/politically-driven works addressing subjects that remain controversial. Often these responses embraced the irrational as an identifying component of given artistic practices. Meanwhile, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and the philosopher Alain Badiou confirmed that art is a matter of truth.

To broaden this inquiry into how artists confront post-truth in an era where misinformation seems more ubiquitous than ever, I pose the following questions. What means of artistic activity were undertaken for a nation to achieve independence and begin to live its truth? Why did a composer/librettist team elect to recontextualize and recontextualize the actions of an infamous American activist and whistle-blower? By doing so, how might they have shed light on the truth of a complex situation? Why did another composer question the “truth” communicated by an inscription on fabric, in a now-classified military program; how did she use that inscription as a springboard for her composition? And how might an entire interdisciplinary field, studying the relationship between humans and their environment as mediated through sound, function as a bulwark against false claims (against the reality of anthropogenic climate change, for instance), while attempting to preserve existing natural soundscapes?
The Baltic republic of Estonia achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 during the “Singing Revolution,” when large groups of people managed to organize for independence under the guise of coming together to sing. In June 1988, an astonishing number of Estonians—around 100,000—gathered for five nights to sing protest songs until daybreak. Massed choral singing was the non-violent mechanism leading to Estonia’s independence, essentially accomplishing a revolution through music as the expressed truth of a people. “My Country is My Love” became the unofficial anthem during the Soviet occupation. Here is a brief sample of the anthem:

Audiovisual link 10: click [here](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/soundscripts/). In contrast, one composer’s interpretation of the fallout from an infamous whistle-blower’s leaks led to a remarkable and dramatic work of music and video. Ted Hearne, the American composer of *The Source*, created a modern-day oratorio from a patchwork of songs based on primary-source texts. The subject, U.S. Army Private Chelsea Manning, leaked hundreds of thousands of classified military documents to WikiLeaks in 2010. The collage-style text incorporates Manning’s words and sections of the classified material known as the Iraq War Logs and the Afghan War Diary. The music draws from auto-tuned recitatives, neo-soul ballads, icy string trios, and moments of cracked-out musical theatre. The protagonist and the events surrounding her are portrayed with a respectful ambiguity. A lengthy excerpt can be viewed:

Audiovisual link 11: click [here](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/soundscripts/). In his *New York Times* review, Zachary Woolf clarifies further:

Surrounding the audience are projected faces: eyes scrolling, lips pursing, tears occasionally falling, reflections of screens and video faintly visible in eyeglasses. We are looking at people looking at something — but what? It is only at the end, as we see some of the much debated, so-called “Collateral Murder” footage of a 2007 American attack that killed civilians in Baghdad, that we understand the projected faces were filmed watching that footage. Do the faces represent a jury, sitting in judgment? Stand-ins for us, an American public that can only watch helplessly as history passes by?

One of my own compositions which I performed at the Totally Huge New Music Festival, “I Am an American … My Government Will Reward You,” pits amplified and live-processed harp against an assault of sounds associated with combat (sirens, raw beating of chopper blades, a helicopter crash, shattering glass), with a screaming train hurtling forth. The inspiration for this piece was a blood chit—a rectangular piece of cloth with a reproduction of an American flag accompanied by a plea for help, translated into several regional languages. Most often the chit was sewn into the flight jacket of a pilot. A military service member lost in enemy territory could present this item to anyone who might provide assistance in the form of rescue, protection, and a return to safety. The message on the blood chit offers a rough description of the pilot’s predicament:

I am a citizen of the United States of America. I do not speak your language. Misfortune forces me to seek your assistance in obtaining food, shelter and protection. Please take me to someone who will provide for my safety and see that I am returned to my people. My government will reward you.
When a stack of these blood chits were given to me by a military officer, I found them intriguing but also disturbing. The guarantee of a reward sometimes turned out to be a false promise. There were instances where individuals and their families who attempted to assist downed American military personnel were tortured or killed.\(^\text{32}\) Due to our current political climate, I have revised and renamed the piece: “I Am an American … My Government WON’T Reward You.” For this newer version, I improvise over the recording of the original composition. By intuitively responding to the original recording, layers of similar materials emerge and intertwine in unpredictable ways.

I have shared several examples of how individual or group responses can question received truths. Furthermore, the field of acoustic ecology addresses sonic aspects of our earthly environment that are threatened or exploited. Acoustic ecology studies and documents sounds in our environment, with the intention of preserving natural soundscapes. This discipline embodies some of the most relevant work being done for resisting untruths—such as denials of anthropogenic global warming. The Listen(n) Project team, co-directed by Garth Paine and Sabine Feisst at Arizona State University, pursues questions about the role, function, and perception of sound to reach a deeper understanding of place, presence, belonging and sustainability issues. The team has already established one of the largest online databases of sound field recordings in the world, and plans to grow it further over the coming years through field recordings made by park communities and visitors. With the passage of time, the sound recordings will critically indicate changes in land use and species adaptation and point to the importance of the sonic environment for wildlife, as well as for our communal health. The Listen(n) team believes that through the power of sound—experienced on site and/or through innovative technologies—local and global communities can actively engage in a variety of creative placemaking projects and become environmental stewards.\(^\text{33}\)
In this account, I have shared some views of ways that we might consider notions of truth and post-truth, and of how responses by artists, musicians, and others to our current post-truth era (as well as pre-post-truth eras) have manifested. How do we move forward? Do we refer to the example of a collective such as Raudelunas, or Luther Blissett, with all the concomitant creative tendrils that emerged, to fashion our own alternative universes that will allow us to prosper artistically while fostering an ongoing sense of sonic adventure? I believe that we must become even more dedicated, passionate, and reactive to the ecological, social, political, and corporate environments around us. We could be inspired by Ferlinghetti’s call to arms, as poets of sound. We could trust that seemingly irrational actions may well lead to cohesiveness, offering an oasis for those who do not buy into the prevailing truth (as it did for Tuscaloosa’s Raudelunas group). We could make our own truths matter, according to Alain Badiou’s “event of truth,” despite being confronted and even bombarded from all directions with post-truths. Finally, far more work remains for ongoing investigations to reveal and share strategies used by artists of the present, as they confront this charged word, truth, and the spectrum linking it to the untruths of our post-truth era.

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Endnotes

All URLs accessed mid-2018.

1 There is currently no central archive of Raudelunas, but selected materials are documented on https://www.raudelunas.com/, https://art.ua.edu/news/raudelunas-exposition-2013/, http://www.fresh-dirt.us/raudelunas/ and several recordings have been reissued on various labels (see also below).


6 “The Oxford English Dictionary has named its word of the year for 2016 and it’s post-truth. Post-truth is clearly just a rip-off of my 2006 word of the year: ‘Truthiness (noun) – the belief in what you feel to be true, rather than what the facts will support.’ Now, check out the definition of post-truth: ‘…relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’ Oh, I personally believe I’m getting ripped off.” Stephen Colbert, “‘Post-Truth’ Is Just A Rip-Off of ‘Truthiness,’” The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, digital television episode (USA: Comedy Central: 18 Nov 2016), (6:00–6:35), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck0yqUoBY7M; see also http://www.cc.com/video-clips/63ite2/the-colbert-report-the-word—truthiness.

7 The word “nasibus” originates from a toast sung in French, where you move the glass to different parts of your body, including the nose.

8 The most active participants included Tim Reed (aka the Rev. Fred Lane), Davey Williams, LaDonna Smith, Craig Nutt, Roger Hagerty, Nolan Hatcher, Fletcher Paul Hayes, Gary Taylor, Janice Hathaway, Mitchell Cashion, and myself.


15 Lucia Paci aka Werner Twertzog (20 Oct 2017), https://twitter.com/WernerTwertzog
16 Ferlinghetti is here paraphrasing the famous exhortation of the sometime Surrealist Artaud that radical actors perform “like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames.” Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double (NY: Grove, 1958), p. 13
21 Fred Lane (Tim Reed) with Ron Pate (Craig Nutt) and his Debonairs, From the One That Cut You, vinyl LP (Alabama: Say Day-Bew, 1983).
22 See https://www.raudelunas.com/bddwota.html
29 Mark Doten compiled the libretto from military and diplomatic logs, adding some online chat-room discussions between Manning and the hacker who later turned her in to the authorities.
32 The blood chit program is now classified.