

# TAUBA AUERBACH ON SCIENCE

BY CARLO MCCORMICK & TAUBA AUERBACH

COMING OUT OF SAN FRANCISCO IN HER TWENTIES, A STANFORD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE, FORMER STUDENT OF MARGARET KILGALLEN AND SIGN PAINTER, TAUBA AUERBACH COULD NOT HELP BUT MAKE AN INDELIBLE IMPACT WITH HER WORK. HER EMINENT PREOCCUPATION WITH LANGUAGE HAS CONSISTENTLY PROVEN A METHODOICAL RIDDLE—AN EXPLICATION THAT ENGENDERS ITS OWN ENIGMA. MAKING A FINE ART OF PROXIMATE TRUTHS PREDICATED ON THE FAILURE OF LANGUAGE, ORAL AND WRITTEN, AUERBACH IS A CONCEPTUAL GRAPHIC ARTIST MAKING HER OWN TROPES OF SIGNS, SEMAPHORES, LETTER FONTS, WORDS, SYMBOLS AND DIGITAL BINARY CODES.

AUERBACH HAS BEEN DRAWN TO HER OWN INTUITIVE STUDY OF MATH AND SCIENCE AND IS CURRENTLY WORKING WITH A LOGICIAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE TO CREATE A SYMBOLIC LEXICON FOR HIS MATHEMATICAL EQUATIONS. WE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT HER SCIENTIFIC EYE HAS REGISTERED IN THE ART WORLD AROUND US, BUT OF COURSE WHEN YOU TALK WITH SOMEONE WHO IS ALL ABOUT THE CONFLATIONS, CONFUSIONS AND COMPLEXITIES OF COMMUNICATION, THE CONVERSATION ITSELF CAN MANIFEST ITS OWN AESTHETIC COMPRESSION. MAYBE WE SHOULD LET HER EXPLAIN.

“Last week, Carlo McCormick called me and we had a conversation wherein he asked me to talk about science and art. He took notes. Then he wrote out the conversation as though I were speaking and sent it back to me. It was like playing a game of telephone with myself. I was reading things and thinking, ‘I said something like that but not exactly that way, and I can’t remember how I actually said it.’ It was then my charge to edit what he wrote, which brings us to this moment and back to me and what I have to say on the matter. So I guess we have gone in sort of a circle.

Fittingly, this process of looping, something coming out of my mouth, being processed through Carlo and then coming back to me and coming out my mouth again now, is exactly what we talked about in our conversation. We spoke about Alvin Lucier having recorded himself speaking in a room (“I Am Sitting in a Room,” 1969) and then playing it back in the same room and rerecording it over and over for 45 minutes until it no longer even sounded like a human voice, let alone words. It only takes a small portion of the 45 minutes for this to happen. For me, this is the perfect example of someone taking a scientific, systematic approach to art-making. It’s simple, and it deals with the medium of recording itself, making it visible with all its biases and characteristics as the subject. The system of iterations allows for small incremental steps to ultimately measure a big distance between two points. And so there is a linear aspect to the piece, but also a cyclical or circular one.

Also on the subject of cycles, we talked about **XYLOR JANE**. Her work is all about numbers and math and calendars and probably a lot of other things that I am leaving out. One time I saw her give an acceptance speech for an award and she thanked the twin primes. Something special about her work is that though she uses the framework of a grid, she will often fill it in a spiral. Somehow, the spiral seems to have been trumped by the grid as a modernist structure, and Xylor is one of the only people who didn’t forget about it. Spirals are so often found in nature and contain ratios of such scientific importance, that I’m surprised they don’t come up in art more often. They too have both linear and cyclical qualities. This was something that the **BOREDOMS** used to their advantage during their 88 Boadrum performance. Because the 88 drummers were arranged in a spiral, drumming patterns could be started in the center, and travel along the line of drummers one by one until the whole mass was playing it together. The changes traveled radially outward through the concentric layers, but essentially it was a linear progression.

XYLOR JANE





BOREDOMS

In our conversation Carlo and I also talked about how I had an idea for a piece, made it, and then found out that **TOM FRIEDMAN** had already done it. The piece [Untitled, 1991] was two identically crumpled pieces of paper. For me, this was about taking something chaotic and random and being able to reproduce it. This calls into question the initial randomness of the event, and even randomness at all for that matter. And then I have to ask whether us both having the same idea is random. Tom Friedman and I are the crumpled piece of paper of this situation. By some turn of events, we folded the same way.

Of course, I have to end this piece by pointing out I am closing the circle of this conversation-with-Carlo, notes-by-Carlo, writing-by-Carlo, rewriting-by-Tauba. It's very different from how it started. Now, if you are reading it, it will exist in your mind in a slightly different way from how it exists here, and so the process of the mutation continues." ★



TAUBA AUERBACH

