

reference

Sounds can signify without being communicative.

There's a Jungian symbology of sound, just as there is a pictorial one.

The caw of a raven, a gunshot, the sighing of trees, footsteps, buzzing, a heavy breath.

Early instruments carry these associations at the surface: vulture-bone flutes and death whistles carved from obsidian consciously invoke the wind or human screams.

Evolution, shared experience and cultural heredity bury these complex associative networks deep – like an aural ideology, constraining (but enriching) cognitive and artistic possibility.

As sounds become abstracted, moving further away from the mimicking of nature or the attachment to circadian rhythms, it helps their meaning to become ambiguous and their sonic function to be questioned.

We can freely play with sound and its associations, ignoring the strictures of 'musicality'. A shrill sine wave on top of a guttural rumble can be as portentous as an atonal minor second or a field recording of distant thunder.

In this sense, distortion is a powerful aural effect because it's an artful deviation from verisimilitude or a comfortable shape. Overdriven vocals, stretched samples, pitched or detuned notes perform in that eerie space between figuration and abstraction.

Through conscious transformation, we expose the multiple possibilities of a sound. The pioneers of *musique concrète* took field recordings out of context and tested the limits of their associative meaning.

Going further, the sense of something pushed beyond its limits can be applied to a sound that doesn't have established or intuitive limits in the first place. Like when a synthesised drone carries white noise or an artificial thud is flanged. We recognise the sense of exertion and distortion, without knowing what 'raw' source has been distorted.

Or, more accurately, we sense distortion when there is no real distortion at all, but simply an original sound with morphological similarities to distorted ones. Abstract, artificial sounds can be rendered tangible by obtuse association with the concrete, like a shadow cast by a 3D wireframe.