



SOUND::GENDER::FEMINISM::ACTIVISM

RESEARCH EVENT 17 MAY 2012

Audio & Visual Artworks Program

Artworks: Audio

ANDRA MCARTNEY & SANDRA GABRIELE (CAN) 'Soundwalking at Night' - 10:42

Sandra Gabriele and Andra McCartney did a series of soundwalks at night as part of the Journées Sonores, canal de Lachine soundscape research project. We went into the urban areas surrounding this former industrial canal, locations that were being transformed into recreational spaces such as bike paths and linear parks. We took sound recording equipment, and walked through these areas repeatedly, listening and documenting, writing about our experiences, in order to register changes in the sonic ambiances of these places during a time of urban transformation. For McCartney, soundwalks have been the main focus of a research and artistic practice for the last two decades.

This particular series of soundwalks returns to mind repeatedly since it brought into sharp focus the sense of agency one can feel as a recordist using sound technologies, as well as how in certain situations—often in soundwalks at night—that sense can be fleeting or disrupted, and perhaps later reinstated. It is these shifts in recordist agency that are the focus of our discussion: through doing soundwalks at night and thinking about our experiences, we explore the dimensions of that feeling of authority, as well as its fractures and fissures, in relation to gender. In our analysis of this experience, we focus particularly on a recording that Sandra had made, and that includes an encounter where gendered practices operate at many levels. Unable to attend the conference, we submit a 10 minute sound piece that includes the recording in question, a framing of the issues that arise from this study in relation to sonic work in public space, and further reflections on the experience from a present-day conversation.

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Anja Kanngieser - Towards A Careful Listening

'The capacity of listening and empathy' write the Colectivo Situaciones is 'just as associated with models of femininity [as] the concrete activities historically reserved for women'. The ways we listen and speak to one another, how we relate to one another's experiences and struggles, are saturated with gendered stereotypes and behaviours. Feminised listening might be associated with care and attention, sympathy and affection. While these aspects get thematised in terms of care labour and service work, a gap appears in much discourse when it comes to our own daily ways of being and relating. Within capitalist critical contexts that seek to challenge gender normativity – within those collectives, social centres, meetings and collaborations – how we listen and speak to one another (the sonic qualities of our speech as well as the words spoken) articulate gender expectations. Unlike many other activities however, these expectations in speech and listening often go unnoticed or are silenced.

Drawing from reflections with feminist-identifying people involved in self-organised political practices, this audio text will look at how our perceptions of one another are influenced by the sonic qualities of the voice – tone, pitch, rhythm, silence, volume, and accent. It will ask: What is being articulated through these qualities of voice? How do we understand them and take care of what we hear? How do these qualities crucially affect our capacities to listen and respond in generous ways? What might we hope for when we speak and listen? In asking such questions what unfolds are on the one hand multilayered stories that help us to see relational topographies, and on the other, explorations of diversions and practices that invite us to imagine what mindful communications may entail.

Tripta Chandola - An 'Obscene' Calling

In the slums of Govindpuri, Delhi, India's capital city, it is the feminine body on which the *otherness* is doubly inscribed, both of the structural and everyday violence. One of the ways in which this *otherness* is reiterated, by the men of the community, by limiting the spaces available to these bodies to sonically perform themselves. Here, I will present how certain group of women challenge subvert and circumvent these hierarchies by claiming the sonic space through 'abuses'. These abuses, sexually explicit and violent towards the female body, are traditionally reckoned to be the classic masculine expression to reiterate the hierarchy. By implicating themselves in the violence directed towards the 'real' and 'imagined' body of self, the women create a disruptive and volatile space where gendered spaces, roles and identities necessitate re-framing.

I will complicate these reckonings by presenting the narratives of Baby, 40, and Bitiya, 25, two



women from Govindpuri, who have been at different times jilted by their lovers, who also refused to return the money they owed them. Their status as uneducated, slum-dwellers makes them hesitant to approach the authorities, namely the police. Thus they took matters in their own hands. Along with a few other women they congregated in front of their lover's residence and office. Once there they sonically disrupted and disturbed the space(s) – moral and social – by performing sexually explicit and violent abuses. It brought much 'shame' to the men, and subsequently they agreed to negotiations.

The idea I want to take forth in this presentation is that by claiming the violence traditionally directed at them, women do not assume a masculine persona but instead take charge of the *violence*. And the ability to make this claim sonically opens spaces to exert their identity otherwise restricted.

Johan Landgren - a semblance of order (on a motet possibly by Josquin des Prez) – 04:58

Imagine a world where identity is a shifting, shimmering thing.

Imagine a world without the express purpose of being understood.

The title of my work comes from a quote by anthropologist Mary Douglas:

"For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created." (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*)

Imagine a world where we can access the musical treasures of the past without the burdensome teleology of Music History.

Imagine a world where the voice is not neatly organized into categories, by gender and by musical role (soprano, alto, tenor, bass).

I found such a world in Renaissance vocal polyphony. This work is based on a motet by 15th century composer Josquin des Prez. Musicologist Susan McClary opened my eyes to the potential of polyphonic music to portray multiple simultaneous identities, combining into one complex meta-identity.



Imagine a world were Music Conservatoires become Music Progressivists.

Imagine a world where oral cavity, tongue, microphone, lungs, digital software, vocal folds, teeth, saliva conspire to create new forms, other sounds, impure identities.

Park McArthur – Epistle – 08:20

Engaging the private and published correspondence of cultural workers and social organizers from the 1780s-present, Epistle foregrounds the letter as an exceptional vessel of personal and historical material. This investigation into the sound of correspondence records, compiles, and mixes a selection of letters that draws out the different tones and textures of spatial and temporal grounds. Epistle's different voices (Mary Wollstonecraft, Martin Luther King Jr, Yayoi Kusama, Raden Adjeng Karini, among other) invite affective readings around questions of gender, social struggle, conflicts of representation, and personal authorship and agency.

Sarah Hardie – I'm Calling – 12:23

Sarah Hardie's practice acknowledges aspects of human experience which are always present, but rarely remarked upon. Within her work she considers loss and retrieval, and the actions of seeking and finding: imagining each individual as a lost star, singing through the dark.

The body of work (sound installation and performance) she made for Royal Scottish Academy 'New Contemporaries', 2012 (the documentation of which is shown here) is a discourse on the concept of the call and the related dichotomy of the im/possibility of intimacy with the other.

Her practice has been profoundly affected by her history of art research. She is currently reading for her postgraduate degree, focusing on Art and Psychoanalysis (looking particularly at contemporary art which explores issues of gender and war) under Juliet Mitchell and Mignon Nixon at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Seeing Mike Bartlett's Play, '13', performed recently (the final monologue from which is included in her work) she was struck by how this text seemed to unite both the huge issues she was grappling with theoretically and the ideas of calling and being lost she had been exploring through her artistic practice. They suddenly all came together here in this powerful and moving text.

She has written, directed, performed and quoted texts for this body of work, in which she sought to explore these issues further: uniting the personal with the political; the internal with the external; the individual with the collective; the lost star in a multitude of stars, calling out to be heard, against the drift of the universe.



Artworks: Video

Amy Cunningham – The Difference Machine (Extracts) (2012) – 10:00 video with sound

In 1944, a young Daphne Oram, who was later to become pioneer of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, worked at the Royal Albert Hall as a programme engineer. Her job was to ensure the continuity of the broadcast in the event of an air raid by synchronising gramophone recordings with the live music. This oscillation between engineer and composer, automated action and intuitive decision-making, was the starting point for 'On Standby' a work for voice and video. This work premiered at 'They Clapped Until She Bowed Once More' a concert on women composers held at St James's Piccadilly London, 2011. Shifting between recorded material and live voice, the work uses imagery and sound appropriated from contemporary mobile phone advertising to reframe the original consumerist narratives as a critical dialogue with the limitations and possibilities of mobile communication technology. In this context the singing voice functions both as an alluring presence and as a critical tool.

'On Standby' is part of 'The Difference Machine' a series of works for voice and video, which investigates the roles and cultural representations of women in the assimilation of technologies into culture. This presentation considers extracts from this series and explores how the singing voice in the context of visual art might be a vehicle to reveal, contradict or affirm some of the roles and representations of women composers, engineers, aviators and performers from Daphne Oram and Clara Rockmore to Amy Johnson and Laurie Anderson.

Anat Ben David – Politix of Sound – 05:26

The double status of the artist's presence and the recorded/effected voice, a visual speech, verbal text meeting the sound object, words and utterances played by the instrument; which is the human body- effected, creating a disturbance of voice from its origin, this is the haunted, it is the vocal-independent, gone astray, without a home, as the voice is released from the body origin, its infected- effected/recorded/ it becomes ethereal.

There is melodic, rhythmical and visual information; as well as, political potential, within the terrain of word delivered by sound. Politix Of Sound is exploring that, as well as, delivering main concepts behind my research.

Text for performance or Words for opera, form the basis of my activity and guide the writing of an opera; sounds, music, visuals and actions, will follow the functionality of the physical text – its



utterance.

I write these texts intuitively, using collage writing - a technic often related to writing of lyrics and some forms of poetry led by sound- rhythm (meter) or melody. I edit the text and learn it by heart, make it audible and work until the meaning of the words become secondary to their sound, I then, perform the text.

Anna Raimondo & Camila Mello - Untitled (silences and hesitations) – 10:32

Video documenting sound performances in public spaces.

During the time I presented "La regla de la música", a radio show examining music and feminism(s), I conducted over 30 interviews with female composers and musicians. Often, when asked about female influences, these women would hesitate to answer and a brief moment of silence would occur. I used some of these silences and hesitations as the source material for a 1 minute piece. Silence, over the language and its structure, could question or resist the dualism between genders. These particular silences in my work musically empower the other sounds in the piece (and of the environment) and conceptually emphasise the hesitations of the official historiography to include women in musical canons. I took this sound work, rendered on cassette-tape, and played it back to people in varying public spaces, as a noisy piece to make audible those loaded silences and hesitations. Through this listening, the public space has shifted into possible agora, a collective time, where some questions on the matter have sometimes resonated.

Performance by Anna Raimondo with the collaboration of Camila Mello (Video and editing) and Andrej Bako (Sound recording and mixing)

Bonnie Jones - WE'VE (let me run on ahead and see what the future looks like) 2012 | 11:21 |
United States | bw | silent | Improvised writing video, all text by Bonnie Jones

"We've" is a text video that explores writing and language as "acoustic", "aural" phenomena. The idea behind much of this work is how we might be able to perceive of language in the way that we perceive of music. How language might become porous, fluid, environmental in its delivery and reception. Can a poem function like a field recording? In that the recognizable is shifted in meaning and context and re-purposed in other ways? Can we "listen" to visual text and visual media? For CRISAP I will be presenting a portion of "We've", a modular art project that includes sound, visual text videos, performance, and writing. The project is designed to appear in many different formats and conditions and each instance of presentation takes the name "We've."



The "module" presented for CRiSAP will be an improvised writing text video that will be created specifically for the conference using text largely drawn from a longer prose poetry project by the same title. The original source text, written by me, explores contemporary, Asian, urban identity as a set of shifting and interlaced areas of perception linking history, memory, and the present in a non-linear experience. The video frames the writing of this prose poem as a performance and explores the specific themes of sound, body and language that occur throughout the text. The writing on these subjects was inspired by my studies of the Korean alphabet *hangul *whose consonants are meant to visually represent the shape of the sound in the mouth and throat.

GAYATHRI KHEMADASA - "Phoolan Devi Opera"

Born around 1962 to a poor family in Uttar Pradesh, Phoolan Devi rose to fame as the "Bandit Queen of India" in the early 1980's. She was celebrated as the incarnation of two Hindu goddesses, Durga and Kali, both experts at slaying demons. As a teenager, Devi was kidnapped by bandits hired by her village to punish her resistance to repeated rapes and land theft; she soon made herself leader of these bandits.

Gayathri Khemadasa was inspired to write an opera on Phoolan Devi's life after reading her haunting autobiography in 2008. Jeff Hush, a Shakespeare scholar from UC Berkeley and the University of Chicago, is writing the libretto. They met in Prague. Gayathri is currently a Fulbright scholar at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut; she and Jeff are producing the opera along with a small supporting team from around the world.

The opera aims not only to highlight the refusal of a woman to accept injustice, but also how one woman overcame her victimhood by fighting back against her tormentors—relatives, the police, leaders of her village, and her community, which pushed poor women to silence themselves. Phoolan Devi's story shouts of the dangers that many women face around the world today. The opera is not agit-prop; Gayathri's music is a beautiful fusion of Eastern and Western traditions, and the story brings in many of the poetic details about nature in Devi's autobiography.

An instrumental version of the opera has already been composed and performed by an ensemble at Dartmouth College and California State University, Long Beach as well as other venues in the US. A first performance of the opera takes place on May 12 at South Church in Middletown, CT.



Gianmarco Del Re - Iris Garrelfs live at Cafe Oto – 06:35

Taking personal biography as a starting point, Iris Garrelfs considers how digital technology can offer the possibility to escape gender stereotypes, rather than confirming them, thereby providing freedom to explore alternate sonic universes.

Sarah Hardie – I'm Calling – Documentation of Rehearsal at RSA – 09:09

– Documentation of Sound Installation at RSA – 11:59

Video - Documentation of her sound installation shown at the Royal Scottish Academy 'New Contemporaries', 2012, followed by documentation of a rehearsal for the live performance given on the opening night)

Sharon Gal – Gals With Guitars – 09:51 - 'collaborative composition and creative exchange in an all-female group.'

'Gals with Guitars' is a composition and performance for a group of female guitar players. It is based on a search for a collective sound, a group presence, and invites participation from women and girls with any playing abilities. The piece is part of a series of compositions exploring collaborative praxis and using an "open call".

In contrary to my other pieces, GwG is gender-specific, and grew out of my need for, and curiosity about, female companionship. I had not worked with a female-only group before, and was wondering about the difference in psycho-dynamics in comparison with mixed gender groups. I also wanted to examine my own role as a composer/leader and facilitator.

The composition is developed using simple instructions. Its complexity evolves through the different interpretations by the players. The process encourages individuals to immerse themselves within the sound while also emphasising their unique contribution to the group. The ensemble supports the players as they create their own parts. The performance itself crystallises the process and finalises it.

GwG was originally conceived for electric guitars, with a development stage taking eight hours. Four performances have taken place so far, both electric and acoustic, with different groups, and some players have taken part more than once. In particular, Sophie Cooper and Andie Brown have become permanent collaborators. The piece reclaims and presents the guitar via a female



perspective. The instrument becomes a metaphor for self empowerment - a symbol of transition and change.

Val Phoenix (Dir) - Ladyfest London 2008 UK (Mixed Media) – 03:56

- **Ruby Tuesday Rock Camp for Girls** 2009 UK (Mini DV) – 04:30

Over the last 21 years I have conducted interviews with women musicians, filmmakers and artists, asking a wide range of questions, but always coming back to the idea of: "What makes you do what you do?" Often the answer has been that, growing up as girls, they were silenced, abused or neglected and that they needed to find their voices as adults. Picking up a guitar, a mic or a pen allowed them to discover who they were and what they wanted to do.

The research stems from my long-term project, begun in San Francisco in 1993 and continuing until today, looking at an alternative canon of women's underground culture that encompasses music, art, writing and film. I was interested to note in the 1990s how the US Riot Grrrl scene looked to the 1970s UK punk scene for inspiration and since I have lived in London, since 1995, I have noted how the current alternative women's scene looks back both to the early punk scene and the Riot Grrrl movement in a never-ending chain of inspiration and evolution that has never been properly recognised by mainstream media. The interviews, running from 1990, when I started writing, up through 2012, number over 300.