

# **Resonant Sonic Specificity**

Rachel Devorah Wood Rome  
Hartford, Connecticut

Bachelor of Music, Queens College of The City University of New York, 2007  
Master of Arts, Mills College, 2013  
Master of Library and Information Science, San José State University, 2017

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## Abstract

Where listening is gendered as feminine, sound and silence enforce social power differentials. Spaces where women can be heard, sometimes even by themselves, are precious few.

This dissertation is a practice-led inquiry into context-specific sonic artworks that create spaces where women can be heard and differentials of social power can be revealed. Works that serve as reflective affirmation/amplification for the marginalized subjectivity of the artist (and their proxies) are described as resonant.

After situating the artist/author's practice in feminist theory and art epistemologies, she elucidates her original use of context-specific sonification (presenting a data set for conceptualization through sound – the aural equivalent of visualization) as a compositional technique to advance social justice discourse by critiquing her works *Overmorrow* (2014-2015) and *Revontulet* (2016-2017).

*Overmorrow* is a sonification of American gun violence data for percussion duo and video projection performance.

<http://racheldevorah.studio/works/overmorrow/>

*Revontulet* is a sonification of aurora data – both quantitative and qualitative – realized as a video, sculpture, and 6-channel audio installation made with SuperCollider.

<http://racheldevorah.studio/works/revontulet/>

## Dedication

*"I thought, 'If I have to work, why shouldn't she?'"* – Jerry Wood

*"He had a client who said he didn't want to go to court with a girl lawyer.*

*Lew told him, 'Maybe you should get yourself a new lawyer.'*

*His support was something upon which I could always rely."* – Anne Dranginis

To my family – who have prototyped feminist ideals at work and at home for generations

In loving memory of

Jerry Walter Wood (1934-2017)

Lewis Bernard Rome (1933-2015)

And in special honor of

Deborah Lynn Rome Szabo

Helen Ruth Ayers Clark Wood

whose studies can be heard in this one.

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## Preface

Hartford, Connecticut is deeply segregated from its suburbs in terms of race, class, and, accordingly, educational opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

In 1985 (the year before I was born), the Greater Hartford Public School system founded a desegregation magnet arts high school in a former funeral parlor in downtown Hartford: the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. According to legend, a school system administrator saw the 1980 film *Fame* (based on LaGuardia High School in New York City) and was inspired.

I grew up in one of the privileged Jewish inner-ring suburbs of Hartford, obsessed from infancy with making music (singing original songs, begging for piano lessons, et cetera). In 1996, my sister and only sibling, Sam, was hit by a car and killed crossing the main thoroughfare between my neighborhood and downtown Hartford. Music became more than an obsession to me after my sister's death – it was the mechanism with which I could process the trauma of my loss. It was my lifeline.

When it was time for me to go to high school, I went to the Academy. I was bused 30 minutes each way every day on the street my sister had been killed to make music with kids I would never have crossed paths with in my neighborhood. My classmates had different life experiences; cultural contexts;

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Kauffman, "In Hartford, 'Integrated' Schools Remain Highly Segregated," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), March 13, 2017.

ways of looking at the world.<sup>2</sup> Despite these differences, I felt at singularly at home in that community of people because we were developing our individual and collective subjectivities with our artistic practices. We were processing our individual experiences but also the collective trauma of segregation because art humanizes in a dehumanizing world.

This dissertation started there.

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<sup>2</sup> I estimate the Academy was roughly 1/3 Latinx, 1/3 black, 1/3 white, and 1/3 LGBTQ+ during my tenure.



## Introduction

Because listening is gendered as feminine in traditionally privileged Western society, spaces where women can be heard are precious few.<sup>1</sup> Female artists who create sonic art make spaces for themselves to be heard with their works. Such creative action expands not only the artist's individual agency; it may also make space for other women to be heard and lend them agency by proxy. I describe these creative actions that serve as reflective self-affirmation for the marginalized subjectivity of an artist as resonant. Because the formal techniques of context specificity enhance perspective alignment between the artist and their audience, context specificity enables the proxy benefits of resonance.

This dissertation is about sonic artworks that engage the poetics of their specific context to create spaces where women can be heard: feminist works of resonant sonic specificity. My approach to this line of inquiry is practice-led. I am a female feminist who makes context-specific sonic art and embarked on this research to attempt to answer for myself the following questions: why do certain artworks speak to some and not to others?; are there truly 'universal truths' of humanity that can be expressed in art?; do I make art for myself or for others?; can I/ should I make art about politics I am not a primary stakeholder in?; and

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<sup>1</sup> Transgender women are women.

why is silence a virtue of the femininity to which I have been enculturated? The provisional answers I have found are delineated here.

In the first chapter I will talk about the social ontology theory that has underpinned my practice: context specificity, feminism, sound, and their intersections in resonance. In the second chapter I will talk about two context-specific feminist sonic artworks that I have found to be generative by Carolee Schneeman and Sorrel Hays, *Interior Scroll* (1975-1977) and *Southern Voices* (1980-1982) respectively. In the third chapter I will talk about two of my own works: *Overmorrow* (2014-2015) and *Revontulet* (2016-2017), focusing on their techniques of context-specific sonification to reveal differentials of social power. The final chapter will describe the stakes I see in indexical systems of aesthetic meaning.

Suzanne G. Cusick writes in “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem” that:

One of the first intellectual rituals a person encounters on becoming a feminist is the ritual of self-identification...each of us speaks for sure only for herself, each of us from a unique situation born of multiple identities layered each on the other- class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and so forth. Further, it is understood that each of us speaks from a situation, that is partly defined by the relationship we have or seek to have with others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no.1 (Winter 1994): 8.

Feminism provides women necessary conditions for advents in individuation. When one becomes a feminist, they develop a framework for analyzing systems of social power. Such power is, as Miranda Fricker defines it, “a socially situated capacity to control others’ actions.”<sup>3</sup> The feminist uses the framework like a compass to navigate towards a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. The compass is relational and reflexive – it grows with the feminist. There is no steadfast destination in a feminist becoming, only a series of arrivals.

My series of feminist becomings are increasingly influenced by my increasing awareness of the issues surrounding intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term, describes intersectionality as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects,” and that, “[i]f you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion [such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, transphobia, xenophobia, etc.], you're likely to get hit by” “all these things.”<sup>4</sup> I attempt to put into practice here all that I am learning in real time and document my evolution away from the traditionally privileged Second Wave feminism of my

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<sup>3</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: The Power and Ethics of Knowing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>4</sup> “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” *Columbia Law School* online, last modified June 8, 2017, <http://www.law.columbia.edu/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>; Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The urgency of intersectionality,” *TEDwomen* 2016, last modified October 2016, <https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle-crenshaw-the-urgency-of-intersectionality#t-52669>

background.<sup>5</sup> I work towards intersectionality in my feminism because, as Ijeoma Oluo puts it addressing white women like me, “Without intersectionality, your feminism isn’t fighting for women – you’re just fighting to make yourself an oppressor” (@IjeomaOluo, February 1, 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> Those who can afford to do the unpaid labor of art and academia do, and the value systems of dominant culture reward academic and artistic work that reflects power back to itself. I have the privilege to be an artist academic because I come from a nouveau-riche family, and my family could become nouveau-riche because my grandfathers were white and white-passing (my paternal grandfather was a Jew named Lew). My father is a lawyer for the Mohegan nation and their casino in Connecticut; my mother is a Presbyterian minister in a small town on the North Carolina/Virginia border. They are divorced from each other and both live in their hometowns. I am one of those who could afford to do the unpaid labor of art and academia in large part because of my race/class background; who often knows how to code my work with power in order to be rewarded by dominant culture with more power. Aside from being white and nouveau-riche, I am cis-gendered; relatively tall and thin; conventionally attractive; non-disabled/healthy; married; partnered with a cis white man who has a PhD in astronomy; and recently, to boot, a homeowner. This dissertation is my educational privilege incarnate. Because of these privileges, the discrimination I experience often takes the form of traditionally privileged white men treating me as though I serve an essentialized role of lover, sister, or daughter in their life when I am none of those things to them. In the nauseating shorthand of 2018: I benefit from the ‘Ivanka Effect.’

## Chapter One

Resonant creative practices amplify and affirm marginalized subjectivities. With their work an artist makes a place in the world for themselves (and by proxy others like them) to be validated. In sound, this is a place to be heard. Context-specific formal practices enable the proxy benefits of resonance. There are particularly high stakes for female feminists to practice sonic specificity because looking and listening are gendered as masculine and feminine, respectively.

In this chapter I will narrate my arrival at these conclusions with discussions of context and sonic specificity; the double perceptual-gender dualism between masculinity/looking and femininity/listening; and, finally, resonant creative practice. A previous version of *Hear Her?* was published in *Parallax* in July 2017.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rachel Devorah, "Ocularcentrism, Androcentrism," *Parallax* 23, no.3, ed. James Lavender (July 2017): 305-317.



## Context

Rosalind Krauss writes in her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” that the logic of sculpture as a medium has historically been “inseparable from the logic of the monument.” Like a monument, a piece of sculpture “sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place.”<sup>7</sup> Because a monument is not quickly made or easily moved, its poetic meaning is literally grounded to the time and place of its creation. Krauss argues that before modernity and the anesthetized gallery, sculpture was similarly grounded to its context – the meaning or use of the place where it was situated. “The logic of the monument” that Krauss describes is the logic of context specificity – the idea that the poetics of a work locate meaning (transparently or opaquely) in its specific context(s).

The Marxist thinking behind early ‘context-specific’ work was that it could not easily be commodified under global capitalism. Because an experience of art ‘for us: here and now’ cannot be as simply reproduced, transported, and exchanged for money as other artworks in what Walter Benjamin calls “the age of mechanical reproduction,” a work of context-specific art preserves “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 33.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 22

Benjamin calls this presence aura. Fredric Jameson says that art without aura enables our post-modern condition. Without the logic of the monument – without context – he argues, we suffer from “historical amnesia” and that “the disappearance of a sense of history” is being shown by:

The way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions.<sup>9</sup>

We are so caught, in other words, in an urgent cycle of “now” that we forget where we have been – and therefore who we are.<sup>10</sup> Some feminist artists – myself included – see feminist stakes in this particular Marxist resistance to global capitalism and post-modern amnesia. In my mind, to acknowledge or privilege the context of a work is to acknowledge or privilege subjectivity. Because subjectivity is feminized by traditionally privileged Western society, erasure of context is also erasure of feminized knowledge production. This led me to wonder: might making ‘effective’ context-specific art raise the value of historicity and subjectivity within our social systems, and in so doing raise the value of ‘feminine’ knowledge?

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<sup>9</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 125.

<sup>10</sup> “Those who don’t know history are doomed to retweet it” – People Like Us (Vicki Bennett)



When I describe works of art as ‘context-specific’ in the first two chapters of this dissertation I mean to say that the poetics of the art work *transparently* locate meaning in its specific contexts – the work consciously engages precise details of the realization context such as a song written for a particular singer or audience, an installation for the physical properties, and/or historical significance of a particular place, et cetera. These kinds of practices give traction for proxy resonance to take hold.

By using the term ‘context-specific’ to describe certain works of art in the first two chapters I do not mean to create a duality. Actually, faced with the question of what does or does not constitute context specificity in art, I take Krauss’s point and follow to its furthest conclusion; I think art of all media is ‘inseparable from the logic of the monument.’ Art is made by, for, and of people (even if ‘people’ is just the artist themselves) and we people are socially embedded creatures whose subjectivities are constellations of context. Furthermore, I think that everything that can be described should be ascribed to the context of an artwork. Context could include: the acoustics and design of the concert hall where it was performed; the relationship between the conductor and the concertmaster; the catalog of music that the composer studied before writing the piece; the weather outside the concert hall the night of the performance, et cetera. In a better world, our society would have a common vocabulary to indexically describe

systems of cultural production and aesthetic meaning – a dream I will return to in the ‘Reverberations’ chapter.

I most often use ‘context-specific’ to encompass works that are specific to performers, audiences, places, moments in time, and other details of context. The term ‘site specific’ is more commonly used to describe works like these, especially in visually-based media histories. Rosalyn Deutsche says site specificity is the praxis of “ideas about art, architecture, and urban design on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other.”<sup>11</sup> Miwon Kwon, in her book *One Place After Another*, traces the concept of site-specificity from modernism into the present age following Deutsche’s definition of site specificity and in so doing “seeks to reframe site specificity as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes.”<sup>12</sup> I am influenced by Kwon’s directive in my thinking about specificity. However, I have found the word ‘site’ to be unclear in music discourses, especially when discussing performer or audience specific works, and so I use ‘context.’

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<sup>11</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 3.

## Sonic specificity

*For You are great and perform wonders; You alone are God.*  
– Psalms 86:10<sup>13</sup>

Because I am a musician, my vested interest in context-specific art is in sonic specificity. So what does context-specificity *specifically* mean within music and sonic art discourses?

Georgina Born writes that because of how sonic art is created, propagated, and experienced socially, it “engenders myriad socialities” and has a multiplicity of relationships to the development of both individual and collective subjectivities.<sup>14</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez addresses the multiple meanings of sonic artworks in his semiology of music by describing how a sonic art work functions on three different planes: the poietic or creation level; the esthetic or reception level; and the immanent or neutral level – the “trace” evidence of the work.<sup>15</sup> Sonic art therefore, according to these points elided, has different special meanings on the poietic, esthetic, and neutral levels and those meanings are refracted through a multiplicity of social contexts.

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<sup>13</sup> “Psalms 86:10,” *Sefaria.org*, <https://www.sefaria.org/Psalms.86.10?lang=bi>

<sup>14</sup> Georgina Born, “Music and the Social,” in *The Cultural Study of Music 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 266.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12.

If sound is uniquely polysemic, is it uniquely well-suited to context-specific practice? Some think so. Brandon LaBelle argues that because sound “*performs* through and with space,” it has a particular relationship with its context.<sup>16</sup> Are there more sites in sound to encode the secret languages of specificity for proxy resonance to take hold? I would *like* to think so, but I cannot be convinced.

*I* find sound to be magical and superior and think of sonic art as uniquely polysemic – I am, in other words, a believer in sonic exceptionalism. However if I honestly analyze that perspective, I have to acknowledge that my belief in sonic exceptionalism is rooted in my particular perceptual conditions. I have a ‘good ear’ but not good eyes; my hearing is ‘temporarily non disabled’<sup>17</sup> and I have absolute memory for musical pitch, but my vision is astigmatic and myopic. To illustrate by analogy: I am more like a bat than an eagle. As such, I am designed to be more receptive to sonic information, so *of course* I believe in sonic exceptionalism. Which is all to say: though *I* am a believer in sonic exceptionalism, I do not think sonic exceptionalism is *objectively true*. I am an agnostic sonic exceptionalist; I cannot in good conscious sing Psalm 86:10 about sound.

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<sup>16</sup> Brandon LaBelle, "Auditory Relations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 470.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Though I cannot be convinced of the merit in aligning context-specificity and sonic art as natural bedfellows, I do see objective truth to aligning sonic practice and feminism. Femininity prescribes a (sometimes literal) laundry list for how those enculturated towards it should operate in the world. Women should first be ‘good’ daughters, then lovers, and finally mothers; our subjecthood always defined by our value to others, by our capacity to take on the emotional labor for those around us.<sup>18</sup> We do this, in part, by listening. To be a ‘good’ woman is to be a good listener – to validate the experiences of the others around us with understanding silence. Sound has an exceptional relationship with femininity, so it follows that sonic specificity has an exceptional relationship to feminism.

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<sup>18</sup> The most clear illustration of this value I have read is Kate Manne’s critique of Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree* in her conclusion, “The Giving She,” of *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*.



## Hear her?

*Wagner said: “To the eye appeals the outer man, the inner to the ear.”  
The ear is also an erotic orifice. Listening to beautiful sounds, for instance the sounds of music,  
is like the tongue of a lover in your ear.  
– R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape*<sup>19</sup>*

Ocularcentrism places seeing and hearing in an oppositional binary that privileges the former. Brian Kane<sup>20</sup> and Jonathan Sterne<sup>21</sup> trace ocularcentrism to a pervasive epistemology of the senses that essentializes seeing and hearing, and warn that the essentialist epistemology valorizes cultural prejudices. I propose that there is androcentrism embedded within ocularcentrism: that dominant discourse codes seeing as masculine and hearing as feminine, and so as ocularcentrism valorizes cultural prejudice against hearing, it reproduces prejudice against femininity.

Sally Haslanger writes that “the goal of social constructionist analyses is to locate the (often obscure) mechanisms of injustice and the levers for social change.”<sup>22</sup> Such analyses “reveal the error of gilding and staining and the relational conditions that are obscured by such projective errors; the point is to set

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<sup>19</sup> R. Murray Schafer, “The Soundscape” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 103.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Kane, “Musicophobia, or Sound Art and the Demands of Art Theory,” NONSITE 4 (2013). <http://nonsite.org/article/musicophobia-or-sound-art-and-the-demands-of-art-theory>.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Sterne, “Sonic Imaginings,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 184.

us straight by revealing the metaphysically objective basis for our judgments.”<sup>23</sup>

Essentialization – of seeing/hearing; of masculinity/femininity; of any false dichotomy – is a projective error, and when such dualisms are aligned with each other by connotation, the projective errors become compounded.

Androcentrism is the mechanism of injustice which enables cultural prejudice against femininity; it is the mythology that functions in dominant discourse to devalue unmasculine traits, values, ways of being and ways of knowing in order to preserve masculine power. To root out some of the ways in which androcentrism is embedded within ocularcentrism, I will analyze some of the figurative language of ocularcentrism. Sterne has collated a list of ocularcentrisms that he calls “the audiovisual litany” (e.g. ‘hearing tends toward subjectivity; vision tends toward objectivity’). Using Haslanger’s theory of gender as a frame, I will present my analysis of the perceptual dualism articulated by Sterne’s audiovisual litany as evidence of gendered implicit bias against hearing in traditional Western society. I will then explore what some of the stakes of the double perceptual-gender dualism might be on macro and micro planes of cultural discourse and in so doing interpret how two sonic artists, Pierre Schaeffer and Pauline Oliveros, have worked to reinforce and resist the double dualism, respectively.

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<sup>23</sup> Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 207.



## Previous resistance to the double dualism

Kane and Sterne are neither the only sound scholars to identify the essentialist epistemology of the senses innate to ocularcentrism nor the only scholars to problematize it. Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager critically describe the perceptual dualism this way:

An image appears before us – or at least appears to appear before us. As visual phenomenon, objects are generally discrete; they have a (sur)face and exteriority...Sound, on the other hand, does not appear to stand before us but rather to come to or at us...Objects as sonic phenomena are points of diffusion that in listening we attempt to gather<sup>24</sup>...In the English language, such a conceptualization seems at play in various connotations of the word *sound*: as a deep body of water; as the quality of firmness or of purity...When we recognize that these uses are etymologically unrelated to “sound” meaning sonic phenomenon, do these connotations decay? Or do they resonate around us all the more?<sup>25</sup>

Steven Feld<sup>26</sup> and Veit Erlmann<sup>27</sup> are leading what Born calls “a concerted attempt to wrest the bases of human knowledge away from the long-standing hegemony of visual, text-based and representational models.”<sup>28</sup> Feminist sound

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<sup>24</sup> Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager, “In Pursuit of Sound: An Introduction,” *Differences* 22, no.2 and 3 (2011): 2.

<sup>25</sup> Chow and Steintrager, “In Pursuit of Sound,” 2.

<sup>26</sup> See Feld, “Waterfalls of song.”

<sup>27</sup> See Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*. Erlmann himself specifically refers to Sterne’s litany.

<sup>28</sup> Georgina Born, “Introduction – music, sound and space: transformations of public and private experience,” in *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

scholars have problematized the essentialization of hearing in terms of gender.<sup>29</sup> Fred E. Maus has pointed out how the act of listening is feminized in academia. Music theorists, he writes in “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” “are musicians who specialize in taking a passive, receptive role as part of their job and also, sometimes, as their main musical vocation. It is easy to think of this listening role as gendered.”<sup>30</sup> Feminists outside of sound scholarship, on the other hand, have tracked the seeing/masculinity connotation within ocularcentrism. Continental feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva in the later half of the 20th century extensively deconstructed the relationship between ocularcentrism and phallocentrism. These philosophers “radicalized the antivisual components in deconstruction,”<sup>31</sup> as Martin Jay puts it, but they were not as focused on the hearing/femininity connotation. Similarly, Anne Carson traces the gendering of speech from Ancient Greece to Freud and an encounter between Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein in “The Gender of Sound” but does not directly address the act of listening.<sup>32</sup> Olivia Bloechl’s recent scholarship explores

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<sup>29</sup> I do not differentiate between hearing and listening here, though I recognize that in most discourses they should be differentiated.

<sup>30</sup> Fred E. Maus, “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” *Perspectives in New Music* 31, no.2 (1993): 267.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 498.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Carson, “The Gender of Sound,” Chapter 6 in *Glass, Irony and God*, (New York: New Directions Books, 1992).

the relationship between listening and vulnerability grounded in Continental feminist epistemology.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas these related projects have succeeded in undermining the hegemony of ocularcentrism and aligning hearing/femininity *or* seeing/masculinity, my focus is not on ocularcentrism, per se, nor the specific relationships between hearing and femininity or seeing and masculinity. My project is to demonstrate how the double perceptual-gender dualism functions symbiotically to simultaneously denigrate hearing and femininity.

### **The gender dualism**

The feminisms of my analysis are grounded in Haslanger's theories of social construction as they relate to gender.<sup>34</sup> My arguments are based on the following suppositions:

- 1) Sex is a natural<sup>35</sup> kind, gender is a social kind.

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<sup>33</sup> Olivia Bloechl, "The Vulnerability of the Ear: Toward an Ethics of Listening," paper presented at *American Institute for Levinassian Studies: The Return of Ethics*, Los Angeles, November 17, 2016.

[https://www.academia.edu/30198222/The\\_Vulnerability\\_of\\_the\\_Ear\\_Toward\\_an\\_Ethics\\_of\\_Listening](https://www.academia.edu/30198222/The_Vulnerability_of_the_Ear_Toward_an_Ethics_of_Listening)

<sup>34</sup> I use Haslanger's voice as the authority on gender because the language she uses to describe how power functions hierarchically between the social kinds 'men' and 'women' lends itself well to describing other hierarchical social kinds – such as those defined by race (also see Haslanger) and disability (see Barnes). The gendered dynamics of social power are (of course) not universally applicable to other imbalances of social power, but Haslanger's model is a useful tool with which to start these other conversations.

<sup>35</sup> The nature of 'nature' is beyond my scope, but I acknowledge that the classification of natural kinds is also murky. I also by no means mean to say that because sex is a natural kind that there are only two kinds!

Our chromosomes, reproductive organs, and hormones have an objective relationship to how we are sexed by society, but there is no such objective relationship between sex and gender. Gender is a social construction historically affiliated with reproductive labor.

2) Because it is a social kind, there is no ‘core truth’ to gender, but it *is* real.

There is no single, authentic way to perform masculinity or femininity; no stable, universal meaning to gender normativity. Gender norms are different in different social contexts, and even then they are slippery because social contexts themselves are, of course, slippery. However, “the notion of gender is,” as Haslanger puts it, “at least dialectically appropriate.”<sup>36</sup> Haslanger defines gender normativity this way:

Masculinity and femininity are norms or standards by which individuals are judged to be exemplars of their gender and which enable us to function excellently in our allotted role in the system of social relations that constitute gender...In the traditional privileged white Western scenario, to be good at being a man (that is, to be masculine), one should be strong, active, independent, rational, handsome, and so on; to be good at being a woman, one should be nurturing, emotional, cooperative, pretty, and so on...There is an unmistakable tendency to conclude that a woman is ‘by nature’ or ‘essentially’ feminine (and a man masculine). In short, the prescriptive role of the norms is not acknowledged, and gender differences are taken to be natural or inevitable. But this inference is mistaken: Even if the generalizations are accurate, their accuracy may simply reflect the impact of the norms and the

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<sup>36</sup> Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 39.

pattern of social relations that underwrites the acceptance of those norms.<sup>37</sup>

So where traditional privileged white Western masculinity prescribes the traits ‘active, independent, rational’ as well as objective, assertive, abstract and secure (among others), femininity<sup>38</sup> prescribes the corollary opposite traits: passive, dependent, intuitive, subjective, timid, and vulnerable; and where such masculinity values abstract thinking, femininity values narrative thinking.

3) Even though there is no ‘core truth’ to gender, one has to use the notion of gender under erasure to build political arguments.

Masculinity and femininity are diffuse concepts, but they must be concentrated for rhetorical efficacy and political power. Again, gender is real: it has real implications. It is an objective truth that the people who are gendered as male by society are treated differently than those who are gendered as female and those who cannot be gendered by the binary.

4) Gender functions hierarchically.

Traditional Western society grants men more power to control their bodies and lives than it grants those who are not gendered as male.

5) Power moves through language.

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<sup>37</sup> Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Throughout this discussion all the characterizations I make of gender norms in traditional Western society are biased towards white social contexts.

Identifying how power moves hierarchically through gendered figurative language can be a lever for social change. In “Masculine Discourse,” Maus writes that analyses of figurative language,

[...] can provoke a range of reactions, from admiration to outrage. The outrage is understandable: readings of figurative language often involve the claim that someone, working hard at communicating something, has also been communicating something *else*, in ways that are not under conscious control. That may seem like an unpleasant or disrespectful claim, but...it has become hard for me to doubt that discourse is often, perhaps always, working in such inexplicit, uncontrolled ways. In particular, I believe figuration is one of the most pervasive media in which we unreflectively circulate and reproduce thought about gender.<sup>39</sup>

Language reproduces gender norms, both knowingly and unknowingly. Though it may appear to be an academic exercise (or, worse, a witch hunt) to some, analysis of figurative language can be a useful tool for rooting out androcentrism.

### **Analysis of ocularcentrisms**

R. Murray Schafer (uncritically), and Chow and Steintrager (critically) have already provided this essay examples of gendered ocularcentrisms (“the ear is an erotic orifice,” listening is an act of “gathering,” sound is about “depth,” “purity,” etc.). I am using Jonathan Sterne’s litany of ocularcentrisms as fodder for my feminist fire because he has collated the platitudes critically and succinctly. Hopefully my use of his litany makes for a better short cut than a straw

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<sup>39</sup> Maus, “Masculine Discourse,” 271.

man. Sterne writes that hearing and seeing are “often associated with a set of presumed and somewhat clichéd attributes” which he says elevate “a set of cultural preconceptions about the senses (prejudices, really) to the level of theory.”<sup>40</sup>

Sterne’s audio-visual litany goes as follows:<sup>41</sup>

- [a] hearing is spherical; vision is directional
- [b] hearing immerses its subject; vision offers a perspective
- [c] sounds come to us, but vision travels to its object
- [d] hearing is concerned with interiors; vision is concerned with surfaces
- [e] hearing involves physical contact with the outside world; vision requires distance from it
- [f] hearing places you inside an event; seeing gives you a perspective on the event
- [g] hearing tends toward subjectivity; vision tends toward objectivity
- [h] hearing brings us into the living world; sight moves us toward atrophy and death
- [i] hearing is about affect; vision is about intellect
- [j] hearing is a primarily temporal sense; vision is a primarily spatial sense
- [k] hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, while vision removes us from it.<sup>42</sup>

These ocularcentrisms can be grouped by the androcentric mythologies that they perpetuate. Ocularcentrism [c], “Sounds come to us, but vision travels to its object,” dictates that hearing is passively feminine and vision is actively masculine. Ocularcentrism [j], “hearing is a primarily temporal sense; vision is a

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<sup>40</sup> Sterne, “Sonic Imaginings,” 9.

<sup>41</sup> The lettering system is my own.

<sup>42</sup> Sterne, “Sonic Imaginings,” 9.

primarily spatial sense” contrasts the feminine value of narrative thinking against the masculine value of abstract thinking. Ocularcentrisms [a, d, k], “hearing is spherical; vision is directional,” “hearing is concerned with interiors; vision is concerned with surfaces” and “hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, while vision removes us from it,” can be read as metaphors for sexed reproductive anatomy. Ocularcentrisms [g,i], “hearing tends toward subjectivity; vision tends toward objectivity” and “hearing is about affect; vision is about intellect” implies that hearing is intuitively feminine and vision is rationally masculine.

Some of the audio-visual litany reinforces specifically Freudian androcentric mythologies. Ocularcentrism [h], “Hearing brings us into the living world; sight moves us toward atrophy and death,” correlates to a woman’s role in childbirth and man’s so-called death wish motivation. In Freud’s frame, the superego is the mind’s metaposition, but women’s superegos are underdeveloped. Freud asserted, as Nancy Kulish and Deanna Holtzman put it, that girls, “lacking the motivation of castration anxiety that boys have, can never resolve the triangular situation and that their superego development is therefore compromised and untenable.”<sup>43</sup> Ocularcentrisms [b, e, f], “Hearing immerses its subject; vision offers a perspective,” “hearing involves physical contact with the outside world; vision requires distance from it” and “hearing places you inside an event; seeing

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy Kulish and Deanna Holtzmann, “Femininity and the Oedipus complex,” in *On Freud’s “femininity”* ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini and Graciela Abelin-Sas Rose, (London: Karnac Books, 2010), 37.



gives you a perspective on the event” ally hearing and femininity as bereft of metaposition.

## **Stakes**

What harm is done in the perpetuation of the double perceptual-gender dualism? Broadly, the double perceptual-gender dualism teaches little boys in traditional Western society that they are “naturally” visual learners because they are male and little girls that they are “naturally” good listeners because they are female. “The social is cast as natural,” Haslanger writes, “and so exempted from critique.”<sup>44</sup> These falsehoods lead individuals (who are neither naturally visual learners nor good listeners by merit of their gender alone) down life paths paved by the expectations of their gender norms rather than their actual talents and inclinations (and those paths are often self-alienating as result). The double perceptual-gender dualism, in other words, contributes to the pernicious mythology that stands in the way of female economists, primary caregiver fathers, and other individuals who fail to perform their gender normatively.<sup>45</sup>

On micro-cultural planes, the double perceptual-gender dualism manifests itself differently in different contexts. In academia at large, Haslanger writes that “Quantitative ‘hard’ research is coded as masculine and is considered more

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<sup>44</sup> Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 184.

<sup>45</sup> Again, my characterizations of masculinity and femininity are biased towards white social contexts. What might the stakes in the double perceptual-gender dualism be for those who are not protected by the privileges of whiteness?

important and more valuable” and that “often what is considered ‘feminine’ research [...] addresses different though equally valuable domains of inquiry.”<sup>46</sup> Research coded as feminine is systematically excluded from institutions and thereby histories. If and when it is included, it is often essentialized as feminine (and then minimized as a token).

To restate Haslanger’s statement with the terms of the double perceptual-gender dualism in the specific context of academic music composition: sonic research which locates its meaning in the innovation of abstract notation is coded as masculine and privileged as such. Within the hyper-specific realm of academic electroacoustic music composition, the work of two 20<sup>th</sup> century composers, Pierre Schaeffer and Pauline Oliveros, make compelling case studies on even more specific implications of the double perceptual-gender dualism.

Schaeffer published *Traité des objets musicaux*, the theoretical work which would constitute the “a priori ontological foundation” for reduced listening in 1966.<sup>47</sup> The concept of reduced listening is applied in many different ways, but is generally the mode of listening to ‘sounds themselves’ divorced from their source and stripped of their reference. As Kane puts it, it is an “act of audition where the listening subject bars” – through skill and sheer strength of will – “the

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<sup>46</sup> Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 346.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Kane, “L’objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, Sound Objects and the Phenomenological Reduction,” *Organised Sound* 12, no.1 (2007): 22.

appropriation of sounds as indicative or communicative signs.”<sup>48</sup> Reduced listening is an active form of abstract thinking ‘independent’ of intuition and contextualization, and therefore ‘invulnerable’ to subjectivity. Schaeffer theorized reduced listening as scientific and objective; taken as such, reduced listening can be valued as masculine by traditional Western society.<sup>49</sup>

In 1966 when *Traité* was published, Schaeffer had been experimenting with *musique concrète* for more than 20 years, and, as Andra McCartney describes, had suffered ridicule for this creative work by his peers for just as long. “The concepts of *musique concrète* and *elektronische Musik* were created in opposition” and constituted a gendered dichotomy, McCartney argues. Where Schaeffer connected *musique concrète* to “stereotypically feminine concreteness, relationship, domesticity and subjectivity” and distanced himself from “stereotypically masculine abstraction, artificiality and objectivity,” Stockhausen, Boulez and other electroacoustic composers of the time demeaned Schaeffer as “capricious and technically ill-informed, characteristics are also used to create

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Kane, “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject,” *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no.5 and 6 (2012): 441.

<sup>49</sup> I am by no means saying that all interpreters of Schaeffer’s theories read reduced listening as masculine. For example, Annea Lockwood adopted the Schaefferian concept of “sounds themselves” (via John Cage) as the foundation for her feminist theory of non-hierarchical formal structures in sonic art.

denigrating stereotypes of femininity”<sup>50</sup> and asserted “that ‘primordial’ sounds need to be controlled.”<sup>51</sup>

This arc of history implies that Schaeffer theorized *masculine* reduced listening (which has since evolved into a complex agent of scientific ideology within academic electroacoustic music) at the same time as he was being chided for making *feminine* creative work. Might reduced listening be a defensively masculine overcompensation by Schaeffer for the feminization of *musique concrète* and as such a symptom of the double perceptual-gender dualism?

Another outcome of the double perceptual-gender dualism is that the double dualism forces women making sonic art into a complicated relationship with listening. For a woman to make sonic art (to be heard rather than to hear) is inherently ‘unfeminine’ according to traditional Western gender norms and therefore transgressive. Because the cultural value that traditional Western femininity places on listening is so strong, women may be particularly interested in making sonic art which locates its meaning in hearing – but if they do so, they risk (further) feminine essentialization and institutional exclusion.

The work of Pauline Oliveros provides evidence of that risk. Oliveros details the complex relationship between femininity, what she calls “the intuitive

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<sup>50</sup> Andra McCartney, “Gender, Genre and Electroacoustic Soundmaking Practices,” *Intersections Canadian Journal of Music* 26, no.2 (2006): 20.

<sup>51</sup> McCartney, “Gender,” 22.

mode” of “receptive creativity,” and composition in her 1984 collection of essays *Software for People*.<sup>52</sup> In “The Contribution of Women Composers,” Oliveros argues that while women are enculturated towards intuitive creativity, and men are enculturated towards analytic creativity, neither the intuitive mode nor the analytic mode is innate to gender. Western society, she writes, values the analytic mode over the intuitive mode, but both should be valued equally and have much to learn from each other. She advocates balance between the two and proposes a study of creative working methods to better understand the relationship between femininity, masculinity, intuitive and analytic modes. Her own creative working methods towards complicating these social kinds include “compositions that call for collaborative music-making” – works that Martha Mockus writes: “insist on a ‘continuous circulation of power’ between listening and sounding – a give and take that requires an unusual sensitivity to the relationship between oneself and others.”<sup>53</sup> A paradigm in this pursuit is *Teach Yourself to Fly (dedicated to Amelia Earhart)*, the first work in her 1974 collection *Sonic Mediations*. The complete score of *Teach Yourself to Fly* is as follows:

Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow

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<sup>52</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-1980*. (Kingston, NY: Pauline Oliveros Publications, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Martha Mockus, *Sounding out: Pauline Oliveros and lesbian musicality*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10.

your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity of the vibrations to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible, naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle. Variation: translate voice to an instrument.<sup>54</sup>

This piece locates its meaning in hearing by blurring the line between those who are hearing (audient) and those who are heard (performer), giving all participants equal agency to engage in all modes. The score is imbued with details that complicate static audient and performer roles: those participating are asked to organize themselves in space non-hierarchically; and as constant observers, they are called on to both hear *and* be heard. In a letter to Kate Millett, Oliveros said that the Sonic Meditations “call into question that whole symptom of active performer, passive audience as a perfectly sexist expression.”<sup>55</sup> She specifically called iterations of *Teach Yourself to Fly* “meditations” not performances to make the point that everyone is participating, engaging in both sounding and listening. Everyone is an active participant, an active audient. In the variation they are also allowed make sound with or without the prosthesis of an instrument, which blurs the gendered nature/technology dichotomy. Oliveros writes expansively on *Teach Yourself to Fly* in *Software for People*, and notes that two effects of the piece on

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<sup>54</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 149.

<sup>55</sup> Mockus, *Sounding out*, 47.

participants are “a fresh receptivity to external sound” and “the discovery of unused vocal or instrumental range and qualities.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, she notes:

Often, even ordinarily, when my attention is engaged (and awareness is present, or absent, as the case may be), I am too caught up in the present moment, or too subjective, to observe myself during an event or events. Later however, reflecting on a situation, it is possible to remember myself objectively in the event or events and in detail<sup>57</sup>...

It happens that I very much like the musical as well as social and psychological results of *sonic meditations*, although they seem to require re-orientation of the tangled jungle of expectations among performers and audience.<sup>58</sup>

Participants are, in other words, better at both hearing and being heard after an experience of the work. The *Sonic Meditations* lay the groundwork for what would become Oliveros’ best-known project, *Deep Listening*.

“The Contribution of Women Composers” was originally written as part of a Ford Foundation grant proposal that was not funded. Oliveros has since won a place in music history amongst the ranks of the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century composers. As noted by Mockus, McCarthy, and Tara Rodgers, she is, however – as Rodgers puts it – “often isolated as the only woman in textbooks that otherwise cover a variety of men’s work in detail. Recognition of Oliveros is

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<sup>56</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 156.

<sup>57</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 153.

<sup>58</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 156.

crucial and admirable, but her isolation has at times positioned her work as representative of an essentialized, ‘feminine’ aesthetics.”<sup>59</sup> Oliveros’ subtle, sophisticated work on listening and femininity (amongst other topics), in other words, is being essentialized.

### **Further questions**

Jean-Luc Nancy problematizes common-places of listening in his 2002 book on the subject, *À l’écoute*,<sup>60</sup> and in so doing gives some resistance to the double perceptual-gender dualism. He offers what might be used as a rebuttal to reduced listening by noting that ‘sound itself’ is intrinsically referential because it is “made of referrals”<sup>61</sup> in the physical sense (i.e. sound is a pressure wave and each wave front refers to its antecedent). And like Oliveros, he complicates the historical role of static audient through a description of listeners as “resonant subjects.”<sup>62</sup> There are, however, also places in the text where he reinforces the double dualism. He includes this analysis of the 16<sup>th</sup> century iconographic painting *Venus and the Organ Player* by Titian:

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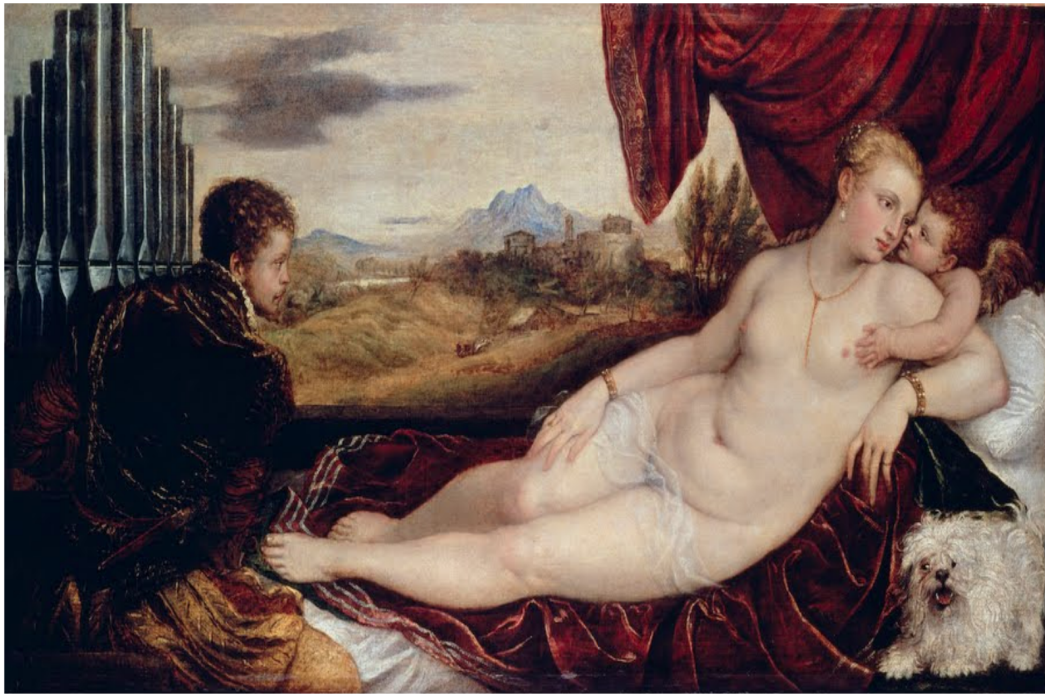
<sup>59</sup> Tara Rodgers, “Toward a Feminist Historiography of Electronic Music,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 479.

<sup>60</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Nancy, *Listening*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Kane, “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject,” 445.





**Figure 1: *Venus and the Organ Player* by Titian<sup>63</sup>**

We'll add an image here, which has not much been commented on: Titian painted this Venus listening to an organ player. Evidently – it is clearly shown – the musician is gazing sensually at the woman. But isn't this belly that he is gazing at the very place where his music comes to resound, and isn't it also the resonance of his instrument that he is listening to? In this reverberation, the inside and the outside open up to each other. The background of the scene is not that of a room, but a park whose trees prolong the organ pipes in a perspective that turns toward us like a large resonance chamber. The ear opens onto the belly, or the ear even opens up the belly, and the eye resounds here: the image distances its own visibility to the back of its perspective, in the distance from which the music returns, resounding with desire, so as, with it, not to stop letting its harmonics resound.

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<sup>63</sup> "Titian (around 1550): *Venus with the Organ Player*," *Google Arts and Culture*, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/venus-with-the-organ-player/2gFsYP9mMe6fNA>

From very far away, in the arts and in time, one can reply to this painting with music by Wagner, the instant that Tristan, to Isolde's voice, cries out: *What, am I hearing light?* – before he dies in front of the woman who will survive him only long enough to join him in the song of death that she is *alone in hearing*, in the breath of death that becomes *the melody that resounds* and that will mingle with, and resolve into, *the mass of waves, the thunder of noises, in the All breathing with the breath of the world*.<sup>64</sup>

Venus and Isolde are caricatures of the feminine listening that traditional Western society prescribes. Their ears (and wombs) are vessels for resonance – the resonance of masculine penetration. In these scenes, the women are seen and hearing while the men are heard and seeing. Nancy does not mention the third human figure in the painting, but cupid is present too, whispering into his mother's ear. Venus must listen to both man and man-child. Isolde is “alone in hearing:” and after the death of Tristan she herself dissolves into sound – broken up by the forces of resonance.

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<sup>64</sup> Nancy, *Listening*, 45.

## Resonance

I describe a creative practice as resonant when it serves as reflective self-affirmation. Audients with aligned perspectives may benefit from the self-affirmation by proxy, and perspective alignment can be facilitated by the formal techniques of context-specific practice.

I arrived at my model of resonance by working through models of resonance and recognition in cultural theory, philosophy, feminism, and cognitive science.

### **Preliminary models of resonance**

The word ‘resonance’ has multiple meanings in English,<sup>65</sup> but it is polysemic even within sound studies. We use the term in reception analysis to describe the attachment to a work that the work fosters in listeners, and we also use the term to describe acoustic phenomena. In physics, resonance is the vibrational motion of an object at its fundamental frequency. An object is set into vibrational motion by a disturbance, and this disturbance can come from a mallet, a bow, or some other such galvanizer, or it can come from sound itself: if an object is disturbed by a sound whose fundamental frequency matches its own fundamental frequency (in ‘tune’ with each other), the object will vibrate without

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<sup>65</sup> This introduction is inspired by Veit Erlmann’s introduction in “Descartes’s Resonant Subject” in *Differences* 22, no.2 and 3 (2011): 12.

any other galvanization. This particular phenomenon is called *sympathetic resonance*.

Continental philosophy has its own definitions of resonance. Cartesians locate the advent of subjecthood in aurality and describe subjects as resonant. Erlmann and Nancy do readings of the Cartesian model of subjecthood, and Erlmann posits that there are feminist stakes in locating subjecthood in hearing because hearing is feminized. Brian Kane summarizes Nancy's 'resonant subject' (based on the Cartesian model) this way:

Nancy calls *his* subject 'a resonant subject' because both the object and subject of listening, in his account, resonate. And they resonate because the object and subject of listening both share a similar 'form, structure or movement' (Nancy, 2007, p. 9), that of the *renvoi*—a word whose translation as 'reference' obscures its double meaning as both a sending-away (a dismissal) and a return...Both meaning and sound are comprised of a series of infinite referrals, a sending- away which returns, only to be sent away again, ever anew. The return penetrates the sending, 'all simultaneously', producing a dispersal of bounds and rebounds without end. This applies, for Nancy, equally to the actual physics of sonorous reverberation as well as to the infinite circulation of *renvoi* upon *renvoi*. Meaning and sound share the 'form, structure, or movement' of resonance... Nancy conceives the subject, not as a proper self (an I), but as a 'form, structure, and movement of an infinite referral [*renvoi*], since it refers to something (itself) that is nothing outside of the referral' (Nancy, 2007, p. 9). The self is always an 'approach to the self' (Nancy, 2007, p. 9) in that any representation of the self (a specular imago or proper 'I', the other, whether present or absent, rival or gap) cannot capture the productivity of the self as an ongoing temporal or rhythmic pulse. The unrepresentable self produces an oddly quasi-circular logic, a spiral logic. This involuted curl, this misalignment of presentation and representation grounds Nancy's claims that the self 'identifies itself by resonating from self to self', and is, 'hence outside itself,

at once the same as and other than itself', or echoing Lacoue-Labarthe, 'one in the echo of the other' (Nancy, 2007, p. 9). Therefore, sound is not 'intentioned' by the subject, rather it is contemporaneous with the subject because meaning, sound and self all share the same 'form, structure or movement', namely renvoi, resonance.<sup>66</sup>

Nancy's resonant subject as described by Kane is embedded within and situated by its context – the resonant subject is context-specific/dependent.

Stephen Greenblatt outlines two modes for sharing works of art and historical objects in the context of museums: resonance and wonder. Resonance, he writes, evokes the "power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand."<sup>67</sup> Wonder, on the other hand, is "the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Brian Kane, "Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject," *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no.5 and 6 (2012): 445-446.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>68</sup> Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 42.

## Feminist models of recognition

In Rita Felski's book *Uses of Literature*, she defines recognition as a "mode of textual engagement"<sup>69</sup> wherein a reader feels themselves "addressed, summoned, called to account."<sup>70</sup> Felski writes of experiencing recognition:

I cannot help seeing traces of myself in the pages I am reading. Indisputably, something has changed; my perspective has shifted; I see something that I did not see before... when we recognize something, we literally 'know it again'; we make sense of what is unfamiliar by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know.<sup>71</sup>

"What we already know" is ourselves – who we think we are and our place in the world – but art can be a medium for increased understanding and actualization: we can use art to better understand ourselves and the world around us. With an experience of recognition in art, we see something we know about ourselves in a work, come to 'know it again,' and then see it refracted differently. Felski posits that whereas empathy is a form of identification that comes from *feeling*, recognition is a form of identification that comes from *knowing*. "We are fundamentally social creatures... whose survival and well-being depend on our interactions with particular, embodied others. The other is not a limit but a

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<sup>69</sup> Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 14.

<sup>70</sup> Felski, *Uses*, 23.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

condition for selfhood.”<sup>72</sup> Felski concedes that our notion of self is influenced by language – “The I and the Thou never face each other naked and unadorned” – but we are “embodied and embedded beings who use and are used by words.”<sup>73</sup> Because our selfhood is (messily) characterized by this dialog between “I” and “you,” it is marked by a dichotomy of sameness versus otherness. In literature, Felski further defines the recognition of sameness as *self-intensification* or reflective affirmation in the familiar. The recognition of otherness is *self-extension*, on the other hand, is “coming to see aspects of oneself in what seems distant or strange.”<sup>74</sup>

Recognition in literature often means a reader sees themselves in a descriptive detail that denotes an aspect of the character’s external or internal life, but the mechanisms of recognition in sound art and music can be trickier. I parse recognition in sonic art into two modes: recognition through first-order mimetic representation and through second-order affective representation. Mimetic representations are simply sounds that sound like other sounds which are familiar to the listener for a variety of reasons, e.g. Etta James’ wailing ornamentations sound like crying in “Church Bells,” or, less literally, a particular instrument (“I play guitar and Bob Dylan plays guitar so I hear myself in his music”). Affective

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 39.

representations are less about specific sounds and more about the listener's affected response to the environment of the soundscape ("Songs in minor keys made me sad because I have heard many sad songs in minor keys").

The logic of self-extensive recognition leads to a political implication: if one sees themselves in someone different by definition one is seeing the world differently. As a result of that different outlook, one might also act differently. If one is "called into account" by recognition, are they necessarily called into action? This implication is slightly different than how political theorists use the term recognition. Felski points out, "Political theorists are currently hailing recognition as a keyword of our time, a galvanizing idea that is generating new frameworks for debating the import and impact of struggles for social justice."<sup>75</sup> She summarizes Axel Honneth's proposal that recognition, "offers a key to understanding all kinds of social inequities and struggles for self-realization."<sup>76</sup> When political theorists use the term "recognition," Felski clarifies that they mean "not knowledge, but acknowledgement. Here the claim for recognition is a claim for acceptance, dignity and inclusion in public life...recognition in reading revolves around a moment of personal illumination and heightened self-understanding; recognition in politics involves a demand for public acceptance

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



and validation.”<sup>77</sup> Political theorists use recognition in terms of marginalized members of society being moved in from the margins through acknowledgement.

In Judith Butler’s 2004 book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* and her 2015 essay, “Precariousness and Grievability – When Is Life Grievable?” her discussion of recognition in the politics of violence fits easily with Felski’s definition of self-extensive recognition in literature. All people, Butler argues, are commonly vulnerable to violence (in the most primitive sense – that our living bodies are susceptible to death). She writes, however, that:

Recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of ... vulnerability itself. In this sense, if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject.<sup>78</sup>

So if, to apply Felski’s definition to Butler’s writing, we see our own vulnerability to violence in others that seem “distant or strange,”<sup>79</sup> they are humanized to us and we are less disposed to enact violence against them.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004), 43.

<sup>79</sup> Felski, *Uses*, 39.

## Cognitive science models of recognition

In *Ways of Listening* Eric Clarke defines a listening-specific model of the Gibsonian<sup>80</sup> ecological approach to perception which in his words:

Offers an alternative view [to information-processing accounts of perception] that gives a coherent account of the directness of listeners' perceptual responses to a variety of environmental attributes, ranging from the spatial location and physical source of musical sounds, to their structural function and cultural and ideological value. This entails extending ecological theory into the cultural environment, based on the principle that the material objects and practices that constitute culture are just as directly specified in the auditory invariants of music as the events and objects of the natural environment are specified in their corresponding auditory information.<sup>81</sup>

Sonic perception is not a one-step process of the brain representing the world internally, Clarke argues from basis of the Gibsons' research. Sonic perception is a multi-step process of *hearing* and then *listening*. Clarke puts it this way:

Rather than considering perception to be a constructive process, in which the perceiver builds structure into an internal model of the world, the ecological approach emphasizes the structure of the environment itself and regards perception as the pick-up of that already structured perceptual information.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Clarke cites Dr. James J. Gibson's 1966 book *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. However, Gibson's seminal work on the subject of perceptual learning, *Perceptual learning: differentiation or enrichment?*, was written together with his wife, Dr. Eleanor J. Gibson, in 1955 so I chose to credit the approach as a whole to both Dr. Gibsons.

<sup>81</sup> Clarke, *Ways*, 46.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

In other words, we do not perceive the world by simply creating a representation of the world in our brain bit by bit. We perceive by comparing and cataloging every bit of the world with which we come into contact to other bits with which we have already had contact. By means of analogy: if perception was a game it would be less like “The Sims” and more like old-fashioned Rock Collecting. J.J. Gibson puts it this way:

Instead of supposing that the brain constructs or computes the objective information from a kaleidoscopic inflow of sensations, we may suppose that the orienting of organs of perception is governed by the brain so that the whole system of input and output resonates to the external information.<sup>83</sup>

The Gibsonian ecological approach says that our forebrains are constantly attuning the system of symbolic representation we already have stored to the new external information of our environments. We are looking to match the new external information to already-stored symbolic representation – “Recognition is that kind of perception for which the system has become adapted”<sup>84</sup>— or we are looking to integrate new external information into the system by learning about it through differentiation. Clarke explains further:

The ecological approach views perceptual learning as progressive differentiation, perceivers becoming increasingly sensitive to distinctions within the stimulus information that were always there but previously undetected<sup>85</sup>... A newborn infant...has a limited

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 22.

range of powerful perceptual capacities and predispositions that give it a foothold in the world: but the overwhelming majority of an adult's more differentiated perception develops from these simple but powerful beginnings by virtue of environmental exposure/exploration and enculturation.<sup>86</sup>

The newborn infant's perceptual system is shaped by their environment as they develop into an adult, and their environment is influenced by the social constructions of their cultural context.<sup>87</sup> Clarke says, "The whole system [of perception] depends on, but is not reducible to, the effects of exposure to real-world events. As Gibson put it: "all knowledge rests on sensitivity."<sup>88</sup> J.J. Gibson expands on this concept:

The human observer learns to detect what have been called the values or meanings of things, perceiving their distinctive features, putting them into categories and subcategories, noticing their similarities and differences and even studying them for their own sakes, apart from learning what to do about them. All this discrimination, wonderful to say, has to be based entirely on the education of his attention to the subtleties of invariant stimulus information.<sup>89</sup>

And Clarke directly relates it to culture:

Cultural regularities are as much a part of the environment as natural forces, and they exert their influence on the invariants of the world in just the same way...The same set of principles,

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>87</sup> Clarke's argument is more sophisticated than the potentially dangerous 'ontology recapitulates phylogeny' argument

<sup>88</sup> Clarke, *Ways*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 37.

therefore, can account for the ways in which perceivers pick up information from all parts of the environment – cultural and natural<sup>90</sup>...Representational systems [such as language] can guide perceptual information pick-up explicitly or tacitly, and can lead to the accumulation and transformation of knowledge, but every kind of knowing rests upon or involves a perceptual relationship with the environment.<sup>91</sup>

### **A feminist cognitive science model of recognition**

Jennifer Ruth Hosek and Walter J. Freeman's description of perception in "Osmetic Ontogenesis, or Olfaction Becomes You: The Neurodynamic, Intentional Self and Its Affinities with the Foucaultian/Butlerian Subject" is altogether consistent with the Gibsonian<sup>92</sup> ecological approach that Clarke defines. Hosek and Freeman view perception as an active process wherein the "brain takes in sensations from the world, converts them into symbols, and manipulates them to understand and predict the world."<sup>93</sup> However, Hosek and Freeman take their model one step further to apply it to the notion of individuation. Hosek and Freeman's individuation hypothesis states that:

The self is defined as forming through embedding itself in its surroundings. In these understandings, an organism's ontology is not one of passive, static being but rather of becoming within its environment. Otherwise put, a self's ontogenesis is through that self's actions into its environment<sup>94</sup>... An organism with a central

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>91</sup> Clarke, *Ways*, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Jennifer Ruth Hosek and Walter J. Freeman, "Osmetic Ontogenesis, or Olfaction Becomes You: The Neurodynamic, Intentional Self and Its Affinities with the Foucaultian/Butlerian Subject," *Configurations* 9 (2001): 513.

<sup>94</sup> Hosek and Freeman, *Osmetic Ontogenesis*, 509.

nervous system that includes a forebrain complex enough for the organism to construct its own history uses this history to contextualize its actions and to engage in behavior based on prediction of its future from its experience.<sup>95</sup>

And they provide this vivid example:

Fried liver is not inherently ‘delicious’ or ‘disgusting’ – or even ‘fried’ or ‘liver’: those meanings arise from previous individual experience. Knowledge is epistemological *and* ontological. It is not based on preexisting representations or categories; rather, it is created through our actions into the world and our responses to the impact of the world around us<sup>96</sup>... For Foucault and Butler, the self’s apprehension of her environment is always constituted by her unique subjectivation within the environment. Yet, simultaneously, that subjectivation – that forming of herself, that forming of her subjectivity – engenders an apprehension of the surroundings that is itself distinctive. The self is uniquely bio-epistemologically constructed through intra-action with its environment.<sup>97</sup>

So, to extend the narrative of Clarke’s example with the Hosek/Freeman’s theory of individuation: not only is the child’s perceptual system shaped by their cultural value-laden environment as they mature, but they individuate and comes to think of themselves as a person through the process of perceptual learning.

### **My model of resonant creative practice**

The preceding 3,000 words I have used to circumscribe the concept of resonance have not much helped me to *narrow* my definition (and resonance is

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 511.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 534.

just as polysemic in my vocabulary as it ever was) but it has given me a more nuanced understanding with which to make art. One can be “broken up” by the forces of resonance like Isolde<sup>98</sup> or use resonance in their creative practice for self-affirmation. My claim that the reflective self-affirmation of resonant creative practice makes space for the marginalized subjectivity of the artist is rooted in the definition of resonance from physics: sound waves travel out and literally make space where the artist can be heard. The physics of sympathetic resonance and the mechanisms of proxy resonance share structural characteristics: if the artist and the audient are ‘fundamentally’ in tune with each other, the audient will sympathetically resonate with the artist.

I take from this discursive survey that we are what we eat (and touch and smell and see and hear); we are socially situated constellations of perceptual context because the perceptual is also social. The Gibsonian Clarke and Hosek/Freeman models of recognition make me skeptical of the potential for wonder and self-extensive recognition that Greenblatt, Felski, and Butler describe. I cannot see or hear aspects of myself in others that seem strange if I am not adapted to see or hear them at all. An extra-species illustration: the mating songs of a humpback whale may be evocative or arresting to a human listener, but only if those calls fall within the human listener’s audible range.

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<sup>98</sup> There is a McClarian argument in here that certain forms of resonance, by force or (as in the Isolde case) codependent sympathy, are akin to non-consensual penetration that I would like to suss out in the future. See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

My skepticism of wonder and self-extensive recognition lead me back to the potential of Felski's self-intensification recognition and resonance. The constellation of context I (hopefully) understand the best is my own, and if I make art for myself I can work to track the impact. Perhaps this is a meta-narcissistic view, but I do not negatively judge self-affirmative resonant creative practice as a selfish act *because* we are "resonant subjects" and "The I and the Thou never face each other naked and unadorned," à la Nancy and Felski. If our subjecthoods are socially situated in relation to each other, when I make art for "me" I might also make it for "you." Context specificity is a formal technique to enhance the proxy benefits of resonant creative practices – a tuner designed by the artist to alert the audience that they share a fundamental frequency. It is not the only way, just one formal technique. Details of context help to grab the attention of the audience and direct it towards the ways in which their perspective is aligned with the artist's.

Back to the artist themselves specifically: creative practice and perceptual learning processes are, of course, enmeshed. If, as Hosek and Freeman postulate, we individuate through perceptual learning processes, we also most certainly individuate through creative practice. Female individuation is a political act: to defy the subjugating emotional labor expectations of femininity is to live radically. Resonant sonic specificity practices, therefore, are political on both individual and collective planes.



## Chapter Two

In this chapter I will analyze two works of resonant sonic specificity made in the decade before I was born. I cannot help but think that these are works by my creative practice ‘aunts’ – artists with whom I share congruities, am influenced by (but not as directly as I would be by a teacher), and from whom I am removed by a generation.

In each case study, the *Description* section will provide a primary-source account of the piece; the *Context* section will provide details relevant to documenting the creation and exhibition processes; and the *Reception* section will be my exegesis.

The primary premise of my resonance theory is self-affirmation: that an artist makes a place in the world for themselves with their work to validate their marginalized subjectivity. I cannot definitively speak for any artist aside from myself, and I am not trying to go down *intentional fallacy* lane in these analyses by unilaterally proclaiming that these artists ‘achieved’ self-affirmation. My objective in the *Description* and *Context* sections is to report the findings of my research on the works. The secondary premise of my resonance theory is benefit by proxy, and the *Reception* section speak to the benefits *I* garnered by proxy.



## Carolee Schneeman – *Interior Scroll* (1975-1977)

### Description

At an August 1975 art festival called *Women Here and Now* in East Hampton, New York, Carolee Schneeman,

Approached a long table under two dimmed spotlights dressed and carrying two sheets. She undressed, wrapped herself in a sheet and climbed on the table. After telling the audience she would read from her book, *Cezanne, She Was A Great Painter*, she dropped the sheet, retaining an apron, and applied strokes of dark paint on her face and body. Holding the book in one hand, she then read from it while adopting a series of “life model ‘action poses.’” She then removed the apron and slowly drew a narrow scroll of paper from her vagina, reading aloud from it... The text [of the scroll] was taken from a super 8 film Schneemann had begun in 1973 entitled *Kitch’s Last Meal*.<sup>99</sup>

The text of the scroll is:

I met a happy man  
a structuralist filmmaker  
– but don’t call me that        it’s something I do –  
he said        we are fond of you  
you are charming  
but don’t ask us to look at your films  
we cannot  
there are certain films we cannot look at:  
the personal clutter  
the persistence of feelings  
the hand-touch sensibility  
the diaristic indulgence  
the painterly mess  
the dense gestalt  
the primitive techniques

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<sup>99</sup> Manchester, “Carolee Schneeman: Interior Scroll 1975.”

(I don't take the advice of men  
they only talk to themselves)

PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL AND PRACTICAL FILM  
LANGUAGE IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY ONE GENDER

even if you are older than me you are a monster  
I spawned      you have slithered out of the excesses and  
vitality of the '60s

he said      you can do as I do  
take one clear process  
follow its strictest implications  
intellectually establish a system of permutations  
establish their visual set

I said my film is concerned with  
DIET AND DIGESTION  
very well      he said      then why the train?

the train is DEATH as there is die in diet  
and di in digestion

then you are back to metaphors and meanings  
my work has no meaning beyond the logic of its systems  
I have done away with emotion intuition inspiration –  
those aggrandized habits which set artists apart from  
ordinary people – those unclear tendencies which are  
inflicted upon viewers...

it's true I said when I watch your films  
my mind wanders freely      during the half hour  
of pulseing dots I compose letters  
dream of my lover  
write a grocery list

rummage in the trunk for a missing sweater  
plan the drainage pipes for the root cellar  
– it is pleasant not to be manipulated

he protested

you are unable to understand and appreciate  
the system      the grid      the numerical and rational  
procedures  
the Pythagorean cues –

I saw my failings were worthy of dismissal  
I'd be buried alive  
my works lost...

he said we can be friends equally  
tho' we are not artists equally

he told me he had lived with a 'sculptress'  
I asked              does that make me a 'film-makeress'?

Oh no              he said              we think of you as a dancer.<sup>100</sup>

Schneeman performed the work on one other occasion:

Two years later, Schneemann was invited to the 1977 Telluride Film Festival by friend and experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage to introduce a series of erotic films by women. Upon learning that the program was titled *The Erotic Woman*, a description that she found limiting and counterproductive, Schneemann decided to once again perform *Interior Scroll*. In the context of a film festival, the scroll's words — which recount a conversation between herself and an unnamed "structuralist filmmaker" who refused to watch her films — became all the more cutting.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Carolee Schneeman, "From Tape no.2 for 'Kitch's Last Meal' (1973)" in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968 – 2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 26-27.

<sup>101</sup> Quinn Moreland, "Forty Years of Carolee Schneeman's 'Interior Scroll'", *Hyperallergic*, last modified Aug. 29, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/232342/forty-years-of-carolee-schneemanns-interior-scroll/>

## Context

Schneeman said of the work:

I feel I've worked into a big blind spot in the art world. I've been enraged by the sexually negative reactions to so much of my work. I always felt like I was doing the most obvious next step...The necessity was to investigate the absence in my culture of a visual heterosexual intimacy that corresponded to my own experience...The invisibility of 'self' that I experience is that I really don't see *myself* there. I'm an available conscious form that's permeable, that I'm able to use. The culture obfuscates lived experience, the female erotic and the sacredness of sexuality...I didn't *want* to pull a scroll out of my vagina and read it in public, but it was because the abstraction of eroticism was pressuring me in a way, that this image occurred.<sup>102</sup>

The name of the festival indicates that the audience of the 1975 festival was mostly other women. Schneeman has said of her practice: "In some sense I made a gift of my body to other women: giving our bodies back to ourselves."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Aviva Rahmani, "A conversation on censorship with Carolee Schneeman" in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 6 (November 1989), 6-7.

<sup>103</sup> Lucy Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art (1976)," in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968 – 2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 341.



**Figure 2: Schneeman performing *Interior Scroll* at *Women Here and Now*<sup>104</sup>**

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<sup>104</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), 104.

## Reception

The image above is how I first learned about *Interior Scroll* in the required reading of course called “Art History’s Feminisms” I took my first semester of college. A print of this image covered by Schneeman in beet juice, coffee, and urine represents the work as part of the Tate Modern’s collection.<sup>105</sup>

Schneeman satirizes the objectification of her body under the male gaze by pushing it to its logical conclusion. The image of her nude form ‘birthing’ her art forces the hand of the male gaze as if to say: ‘Here I am. This is how you see me: you cannot pretend to see me differently.’ Second, the work interrogates the relationship between a woman’s visual and aural presence. How might women, who must always be seen, also be heard? Can we *hear* Schneeman’s aural deconstruction of her gendered professional environment or are we too distracted by the spectacle of her nudity? And, finally, if she can be heard: who is listening? The last question is where I think the work is context specific: first for the mostly female audience of the 1975 festival. Schneeman is standing naked before other female artists – other women who are struggling against the objectification of their bodies – and making a place where she can be *heard* by *them*.

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<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Manchester, “Carolee Schneeman, Interior Scroll, 1975,” *Tate* online, last modified Nov. 2003, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282>



## Sorrel Hays – *Southern Voices* (1980-1982)

### Description

*Southern Voices* has two iterations: *Southern Voices for Tape* and *Southern Voices for Orchestra*, with the second being based on the first. *Southern Voices for Tape* and an excerpt from *Southern Voices for Orchestra*, *Blues Fragments* (with the orchestra part in piano reduction), were both released on Hays' 1983 Smithsonian Folkways album *voicings: for tape / soprano / piano*. George C. Stoney made a 1985 documentary about *Southern Voices for Orchestra* called *Southern Voices: A Composer's Exploration with Sorrel Doris Hays*.

Hays spent six months between 1979 and 1980 traveling through communities in Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, and South Carolina asking long-time local residents from diverse backgrounds questions like: "If there was anything you could change about the community that you live in, what would you change?"<sup>106</sup> She recorded the interviews as well as music idiomatic to the communities, modulated excerpts of the interviews through a Buchla Electronic Music Box, and assembled all of these parts as the fixed media piece *Southern Voices for Tape*. In *Voices for Tape*, the voice playback is variable speed, manually-panned tape overdubbed with itself for chorus effect. An envelope follower turns the amplitude of the voices into a voltage and then she uses that

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<sup>106</sup> Stoney, *Southern Voices*.

voltage to control other parameters like the filter cutoff and oscillator pitch. She frequency modulates one oscillator with another at audio rates and uses the voice's amplitude voltage to control the primary oscillator's pitch. In *Southern Voices for Orchestra*, Hays “transformed speech contours [from the recorded interviews] into melodic fragments,”<sup>107</sup> for example:

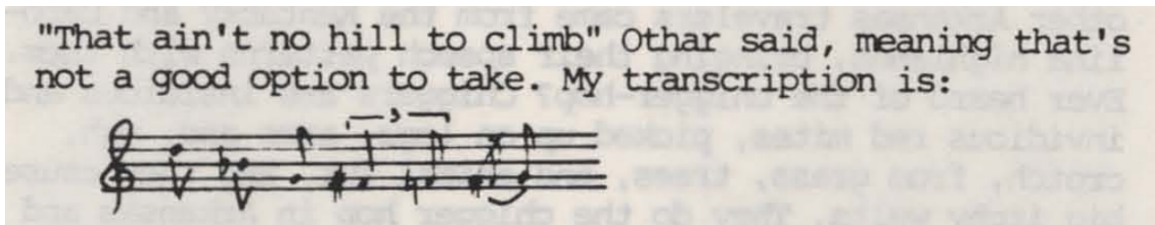


Figure 3: notes by Hays on *Southern Voices for Orchestra*<sup>108</sup>

### Context

*Southern Voices* seeks “to investigate ways Southern speakers distinguish themselves.”<sup>109</sup> The project is a creative inquiry into how city people make themselves sound different than country people; how rich people sound different than poor people; how Black people sound different than white people – an attempted study in sonic intersectionality. The work, Hays writes, “reflects...disenchantment with my woman/middle class/homemaker place in Chattanooga in the fifties; and my hatred for ranking people according to their

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<sup>107</sup> Stoney, *Southern Voices*.

<sup>108</sup> Hays, *Voicings*.

<sup>109</sup> Hays, *Voicings*.

income, race, sex, and religion.”<sup>110</sup> Hays recognizes her own subjective voice in processing these fragments and de-centers herself in the artistic process when she says, “I gave my own coloring to these sounds.”<sup>111</sup>

This is what Hal Foster calls an ‘artist as ethnographer’ work – a work which follows Benjamin’s 1934 call to, as Foster puts it “intervene [against fascism], like the revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production- to change the ‘technique’ of traditional media, to transform the ‘apparatus’ of bourgeois culture.”<sup>112</sup> Hays is inviting the subjects of her interview to be collaborators with her in an effort towards democratizing the artistic process.

### Reception

*Voices for Tape* captures a sonic landscape of the South. It transports the listener to the time and place of the recorded interviews and provides dense context. The way that the Buchla dips and dives between the sounds of the less altered recordings makes the work feel like a sonata for field recording with synthesizer accompaniment – the Buchla sounds holds all the parts together.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Stoney, *Southern Voices*.

<sup>112</sup> Foster, *Return of the Real*, 171.

I discovered and became interested in *Voices for Tape* as part of my research for *Overmorrow*. Here, I thought, was another southern<sup>113</sup> white woman making experimental electronic music about racism. My interest in *Voices for Tape* led me to watch George C. Stoney's documentary, *A Composer's Exploration*, about *Voices for Orchestra*.

George C. Stoney was described in his New York Times Obituary as,

"A dean of American documentary film and a leader of the citizens movement that gave every American the right to a public-access television show of his or her own... Mr. Stoney devoted himself to training community activists in the use of film as a tool for voiceless people. His role in the creation of public-access television was rooted in a hope that it would become an outlet for that kind of community-building documentary film."

Stoney is, in short, a legend of American film and it's intersections with social justice movements. *A Composer's Exploration* is commercially available because of Stoney's notoriety as a filmmaker. The documentary tells the story of the Chattanooga Symphony commissioning the work from Hays and shows scenes from the rehearsal process. It interweaves Hays describing the compositional process with interviews with linguists, musicologists, and the conductor.

*Voices for Orchestra* is not, however, exclusively an orchestra work – it is scored for orchestra and solo soprano. The soprano soloist in the Chattanooga debut and on the *Folkways* recording is Daisy Newman. Newman spends a

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<sup>113</sup> I call myself southern – despite my paternal New England roots – because my mother and her family are, and at the time I was also living in Virginia.

significant amount of *A Composer's Exploration* on camera, and she is visually depicted as Hays' closest collaborator – a natural relationship between composer and soloist. When Hays explains the compositional process over the piano and next to the Buchla as part of the documentary, her *ostensible* interlocutor is Newman. Hays and the conductor also talk *about* Newman frequently. We are told that they feel lucky to have found her and to work with her because she is a Southerner now living in New York (like Hays). Newman's voice is beautiful, and I would feel lucky to work with her too. She sounds like the classically-trained operatic singer working in the 1970s New York scene that she is and her voice perfectly fits the neoclassical style of the piece.

Which leads me to two points. First, Newman is black and her race is never acknowledged in the liner notes or the documentary. Second, Newman is never heard speaking in the documentary. As these facts stand together, I read Newman being depicted in the documentary as Hays' idealized black avatar: Newman is performing Hays' 'authentic' (i.e. black) southern voice. I do not know if responsibility for this two-dimensional representation of Newman falls more on Stoney or Hays, but in any case: Hays is complicit. I do not mean to imply that black performers cannot perform works by white composers without being essentialized, or, moreover, do I mean to deny a black artist's agency in what they may choose to perform. As is the case for gender, context specificity amplifies issues of race.

Hays includes a recording in *Voices for Tape* in which someone, whom I presume to be white, can be clearly heard to be saying “I worked like a nigger my whole life.” So though Hays does not entirely shy away from the realities of southern racism, neither is she entirely ready to face her own. Even when she attempts to center herself by saying that their work is about “disenchantment with my woman/middle class/homemaker place in Chattanooga in the fifties,” she leaves her racial identity out of the litany.

The hypocrisy of this liminal space haunts me because I see myself in it.

## Chapter Three

In 1973 Adrian Piper published an article in *Artforum*, “In Support of Meta-Art” advocating for “a new occupation for artists...making explicit the thought processes, procedures, and presuppositions of making whatever kind of art we make.”<sup>114</sup> Knowingly or not, Pauline Oliveros took up that occupation with *Software for People*.<sup>115</sup> Based on the models that Oliveros and Piper provide, I attempt to continue that practice here.

Most of my pieces evolve from other pieces: *Revontulet* comes from *Eden* and *Overmorrow*. *Overmorrow* evolved within itself because I did multiple iterations. A previous version of what I write here about *Overmorrow* was published in *Feminist Media Histories*.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Site, Volume II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 17.

<sup>115</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*.

<sup>116</sup> Rachel Devorah, “overmorrow,” *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no.3 (Summer 2017), ed. Miriam Posner and Lauren F. Klein.





## *Overmorrow*

<http://racheldevorah.studio/works/overmorrow/>

*Plato wanted to ban the poets from the Republic.  
He thought that if the citizens went too often to watch tragedy,  
they would weep over the losses they saw, and that such open and public  
mourning, in disrupting the order and hierarchy of the soul,  
would disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority as well.*  
– Judith Butler, *Precariousness and Grievability*<sup>117</sup>

*Overmorrow* is a context-specific sonification of American gun violence data for percussion duo and video projection. Between 2014 and 2016 I developed three iterations of the piece, each an evolving variation on its antecedent.

### ***OVERMORROW* – the first iteration**

#### Description

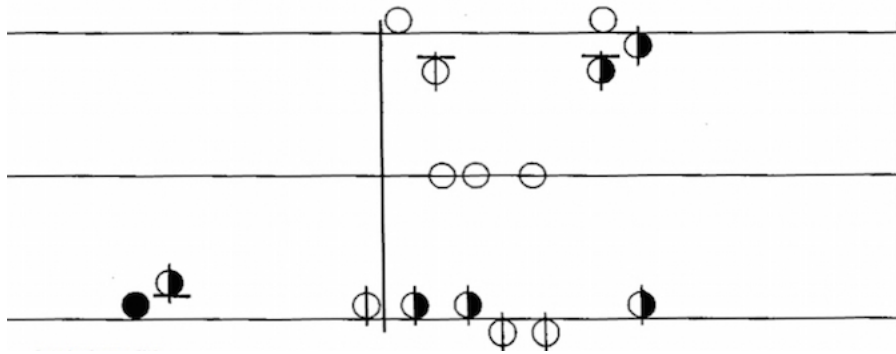
*Overmorrow* is a sonification of the incidents of reported American gun violence that occur over the course of the 72 hours immediately preceding a performance of the piece as the incidents relate geographically to the place where that performance is held. Each hour of the 72-hour timespan corresponds to 5 seconds of the piece, and incidents are represented within the timeframe of the piece proportionally to when they occurred over the course of the preceding three days at local time. The video projection visually marks the day and hour of the sonified incidents. Gunshots which were reported without injury are heard on the

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<sup>117</sup> Judith Butler, “Precariousness and Grievability – When Is Life Grievable?” *Verso Blog*, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2339-judith-butler-preciousness-and-grievability-when-is-life-grievable>

drum, gunshots which injured victims non-fatally are heard on wood instruments, and gunshots which injured victims fatally are heard on metal instruments. The physical distance of the incident from the place where the performance is held is mapped onto the representational sound by dynamic level; and the age of the victim is mapped onto the representational sound by pitch. The sonified data on the reported incidents is gathered from The New York Times, [gunviolence.org](http://gunviolence.org), and Police Scanner reports on Twitter, and the score must be inscribed the day of the performance using the data specific to that performance.

Because the score must be inscribed the day that it is performed, it must be easily sight-read by the players. The score uses originally developed graphic notation to represent as much information about the incidents as efficiently as possible. Instrument choice within the percussion instrument family is left to the discretion of the players, but all other information traditionally included in standard western notation is also included in the score to *Overmorrow*. The staff is organized proportionally both in terms of pitch and time, and the noteheads themselves contain the necessary dynamics information.



**Figure 4: excerpt from the score of *Overmorrow* (2014)**

*Overmorrow* was performed by the Meehan/Perkins Percussion Duo in Old Cabell Hall at the University of Virginia on February 20, 2015 as part of a concert of graduate student works. The video was projected onto a pop-up screen approximately four feet high by six feet wide placed between and a foot or two in front of the two players. The hall was dimmed with spotlights on the players. The video is visually sparse: a black screen with the date and hour of the data being sonified inscribed in white. The audience of approximately 50 people was mostly comprised of music students (both graduate and undergraduate) and other affiliates of the McIntire Department of Music at the University of Virginia.

### Context

In undertaking *Overmorrow*, I conceived of the work as a poeticized study in recognition and sonic specificity. I hoped that listeners would experience self-extensive recognition through my use of mimetic representation and temporal alignment; that they would come to see themselves in the issue of American gun violence – an issue that may have previously appeared “distant or strange” to

them. The attacks of the wood and drum percussion instruments sound like gunshots, the attacks of the metal instruments sound like the bells of death knolls, and I thought that the silence which echoes between the percussion attacks would call to mind the “moments of silence” marked at public events. I employed focalized alignment in the form of the piece by making the work context-specific and directly framing the sonification around the circumstances of the listener experiencing the work. The work facilitates a listener hearing his or her own life in a sonified incident by mapping two parameters of the sonified incident (time and proximity) onto the listener’s own life. When a listener in the concert hall hears a sound – for example a loud, high metal sound which symbolizes the nearby death of a young person by gun violence – and also sees on the video projection an hour from the afternoon of the day before, that listener can easily recognize similarities and dissimilarities between the sonified incident and their own life: where they were and what they were doing at that moment; places nearby where the incident might have occurred; young people that they know, etc. Americans know that incidents of gun violence are happening around us, but *Overmorrow* uses recognition to take what listeners know (about their lives and their country), have them come to know it again, and perhaps see the issue of gun violence in America differently.

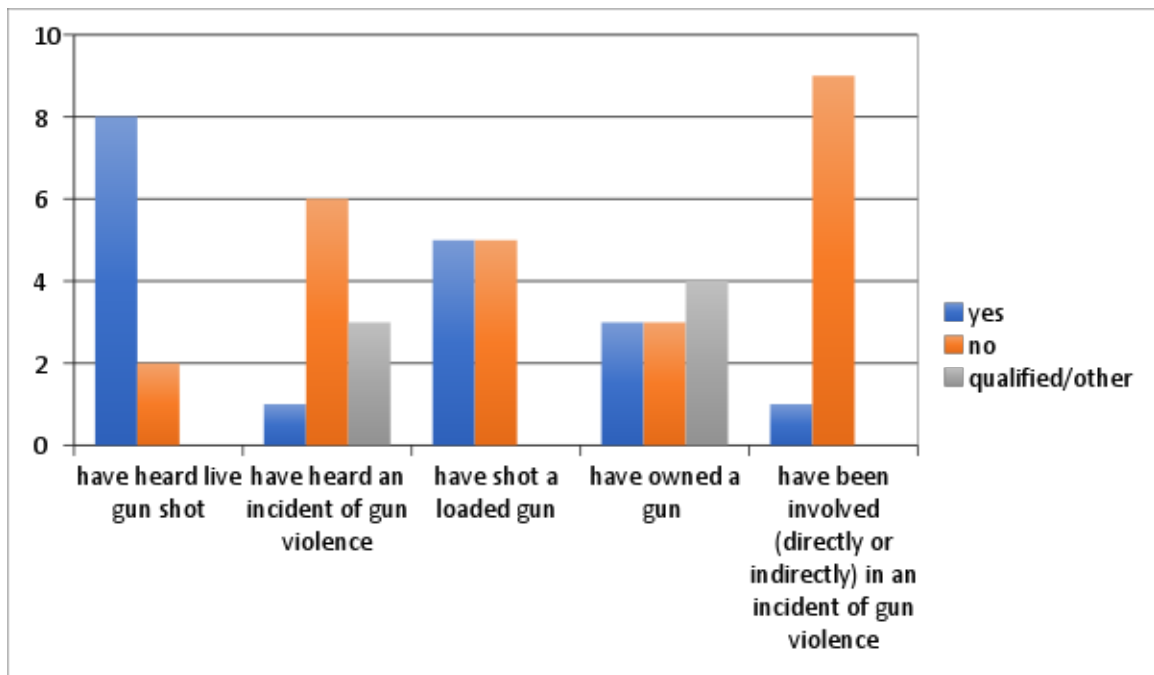
This piece is a sonification, not music, because I wanted to keep my editorial voice as quiet as possible in their experience of the work (though I

recognize that this is, in fact, an impossibility). I wanted to enable listeners in recognizing themselves in the data and to facilitate their own newly refracted perspectives to take shape: I am not calling them to an action beyond rethinking, but the call to rethink is itself a political call to action. It is, perhaps, the fundamentally political call of all art.

### Reception

I am attempting to manipulate the listeners into rethinking but I have no control over or, really, idea of what they are thinking to begin with – the context that they come with to their experience of the work. To better understand the gap between my intentions and actual listener response I distributed a listener response questionnaire for *Overmorrow* in late April 2015. The ten respondents to my questionnaire are friends and acquaintances of mine from the experimental music community of Charlottesville (I solicited their responses to an online survey through a listserv of local experimental music happenings). They are listeners who are already members of the self-selecting community that would be in attendance at a performance of the work because I wanted to be sure that I did not artificially construct the listener pool or listener context for the purposes of this paper of this study. My respondents were between the ages of 21 and 45; five of the respondents were female and five were men; all but two had heard a live gunshot; one had heard an incident of gun violence, three had likely heard an incident of gun violence, and six had never heard an incident; five respondents

had shot a loaded gun, five respondents had not; three respondents had never owned a gun, three had owned a gun, and four had never personally owned a gun but someone in their life close to them has; one respondent had been either directly or indirectly involved with an incident of gun violence, and the nine others had not.



**Figure 5: Overmorrow (2014) questionnaire responses**

The answers to these demographic questions helped me to better understand my relationship to the listeners and to the work itself. I have heard live gunshots, incidents of gun violence, shot a loaded gun, grew up in a home with loaded guns, and I have been indirectly involved with incidents of gun violence: I have been aural witness to at least seven homicides by gun violence in Brooklyn and Oakland. I have lived with the threat of gun violence in my home and community

to a degree that my respondents have not. When I conceived of the work I thought that I was aiming to have listeners identify with those involved in the incidents of gun violence, but this study (and the nature of the questions I myself asked) has perhaps revealed to me that I was really aiming to have listeners identify with my own fear of American gun violence.

Did listeners, in fact, think differently about the issue of gun violence in America after experiencing *Overmorrow*? I got a mixed response. After asking the demographic questions listed above, I asked “what did your experience of *Overmorrow* make you think or feel?” One male respondent who owns a gun but has never been involved in an incident of gun violence wrote “I thought that was an interesting way of hearing trends in gun violence but I did not really feel anything.” Another neutral response, from a female respondent who has never shot a gun or been involved in an incident of gun violence, said that the work “Felt like a museum exhibit piece rather than a concert piece - felt more factual than musical. (Both valuable, just different purposes.)” One female respondent who owns a gun but has never been involved in an incident of gun violence made a comment that led me to question the efficacy of the mimetic percussion attacks: “The frequency of the sounds was distressing yet the sounds themselves were beautiful, making for an emotionally ambivalent listening experience.” I wondered if she associated the percussion attacks with gun shots and death knells but still found them to be beautiful. Half of the respondents mention negative

feelings. The one respondent who had never heard a live gun shot, a male who indicated no other interaction with guns or gun violence, wrote “It's shocking, to be honest. We have things like the ‘Debt Clock’ that are there to make us consciously aware of how much money our government owes, but we don't have something similar that relates to gun violence. It just shows where our priorities lie.”

Two of the respondents, both males who have heard live gun shots but have never been involved in an incident of gun violence, mentioned the use of silence in the work: “I longed for silence after sections of solitude. Solitude being the lack of deaths in the early hours of the morning,” one wrote, and the other said “I felt relief during the silent stretches...the moments with dense percussive activity made me feel uncomfortable, as if i was hearing gunshots and murders. It was unsettling and provocative.” The performers, Meehan/ Perkins Duo, also stressed to me in rehearsal how important they thought the silence was to the piece. In making *Overmorrow* (2014) I had simply thought of the silence as a reference to memorializing “moments of silence.” I did not account for the relief that the silence engendered in relationship to the content of the work. The silence intentionally represents peaceful moments of non-violence with mimesis, but the listener responses to the silence also point to an unintended affective representation on the formal scale of the work: listeners are affected by the tense



environment of the soundscape which balances sound and violence against silence and peace.

The listener response questionnaire for *Overmorrow* left me with more questions than answers. It led me to wonder: as an artist, why did I privilege recognition over empathy as a form of identification? Why did I attempt to write myself out of the identification narrative? Does all art function on a subliminal level to elicit identification between the artist and the audience? What is the relationship between the political implications of *Overmorrow* that I have identified and potential further political actions? Will the respondent who was “shocked” by the piece be galvanized into voting differently? Can any art serve such a purpose? And if so, does recognition play a fundamental role in serving that purpose?

### ***OVERMORROW: NO ATTACK IN PROGRESS* – the second iteration**

#### Description

*overmorrow: no attack in progress* sonifies the 257 fatal shootings of civilians by American on-duty police officers in 2015 where The Washington Post reported no attack was in progress or the threat level was undetermined at the time of the shooting. Each minute of the piece represents one month of the year, and incidents are heard within the minute in proportion to the date on which the incident occurred. From the audience perspective in the concert hall, the player on the left is sonifying the fatal shooting deaths of civilians reported to be White, and

the player on the right is sonifying the fatal shooting deaths of civilians reported to be Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other, or Unknown. Incidents in which the civilian was armed with a gun at the time that they were shot are heard on the drums, incidents in which the civilian was armed with a knife, a vehicle, another weapon, or a toy gun is heard on wood instruments and incidents in which the civilian was unarmed or their armament was undetermined are heard on metal instruments. The sonified data is gathered solely from The Washington Post National Police Shootings Database. Because *overmorrow: no attack in progress* sonifies a year of data and is not temporally specific to the date of the performance, it need not be inscribed the day of the performance like *Overmorrow*.

The score of *overmorrow: no attack in progress* differs from the score of *Overmorrow* in significant ways. The staff and notehead system of the first iteration are eschewed in the second. Instrument choice within the percussion instrument family is still left to the discretion of the players, and now dynamics level information is as well. Again, the staff is organized proportionally in terms of time, but now pitch is left entirely unspecified.

*overmorrow: no attack in progress* was performed by the Dunkelman/Lopez Duo of the William Winant Percussion Group in Littlefield Hall at Mills College as part of a concert on the Mills Music Now series on February 6, 2016. The video was projected onto a large screen approximately 12 feet by 24 feet hanging above the stage. The hall was again dimmed (with

spotlights on the players) so that the audience could see the video, and the video preserved the format of the earlier iteration. The audience of approximately 50 people was mostly comprised of the Bay Area “New Music” community and members of the Mills College community.

### Context

If opposing parties in a cycle of violence are humanized to each other through self-extensive recognition of shared vulnerability to violence, cycles of violence may be deescalated. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler argues that dehumanization of opposing parties perpetuates cycles of violence and humanization of opposing parties through self-extensive recognition arrests cycles of violence.<sup>118</sup>

Butler’s analysis of recognition can be applied to the cycles of gun violence between civilians and police officers in the U.S. The escalating armament of American civilians leaves American police officers more vulnerable to gun violence. American police officers respond to this vulnerability by escalating their own armament, which in turn leaves American civilians more vulnerable to gun violence, and so on and so forth. Both parties are dehumanized by the escalating armament so the cycle of violence continues.

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<sup>118</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, 43.

Reading Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 essay "The Cosby Show" (on the accusations of rape against Bill Cosby) gave me a paradigm for how to practice the self-extensive recognition of Butler's framework. Coates writes:

Rape constitutes the loss of your body, which is all you are, to someone else. I have never been raped. But I have, several times as a child, been punched/stomped/kicked/bumrushed while walking home from school, and thus lost my body. The worst part for me was not the experience, but the humiliation of being unable to protect my body, which is all I am, from predators. Even now as I sketch this out for you publicly, I am humiliated all again. And this happened when I was a child. If recounting a physical assault causes me humiliation, how might recounting a sexual assault feel? And what would cause me to willingly stand up and relive that humiliation before a national audience? And why would I fake my way through such a thing? Cosby's accusers—who have no hope of criminal charges, nor civil damages—are courting the scrutiny of Cosby-lovers and rape-deniers. To what end?<sup>119</sup>

Coates is using self-extensive recognition to see the vulnerability of his experience in the vulnerability of others' experiences. The essay itself is Coates' self-rebuke (the subtitle is "Declining to seriously reckon with the rape allegations against him is reckless. And I was reckless") for failing to bring attention to the allegations earlier when he knew about them. It is, in other words, a self-rebuke of his earlier failure to decenter himself in the issue of violence against women.

The listener response questionnaire for *Overmorrow* revealed to me how much I had centered myself in the issue of American gun violence. Respondents

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<sup>119</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Cosby Show," *The Atlantic*, November 2014.

identified with *my* fear of gun violence as, essentially, a rural<sup>120</sup> white woman transplanted into urban war zones. If I am to live up to my self-proclaimed artistic objective of making socially engaged art that facilitates recognition, I need to try to understand where I fit into the issues that I address and decenter myself.

Coates' writings and the listener response questionnaire helped me to see that I needed to decenter myself in this work. My experience of living in urban war zones compelled me to make work about my fear of my vulnerability to American gun violence, but as a white woman I was never vulnerable in the same way to that violence as my neighbors who were black men. The listener response questionnaire revealed to me that I was not practicing self-extensive recognition with my own neighbors, but that I needed to: I may hear violence and be afraid of stray bullets but no one would ever mistake me for a gang member, no police officer would harm me unjustly. I needed to try to come to understand the vulnerability to violence that black men in my old neighborhoods have to live with in the same way that Coates tries to come to understand the vulnerability to violence that all women have to live with. My identity is non-threatening to dominant culture, and my piece reflected that - so I rewrote the piece.

I researched databases of incidents of American police shootings and found the Washington Post's 2015 National Police Shootings Database. I felt that

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<sup>120</sup> Rural because my maternal family are cattle farmers.

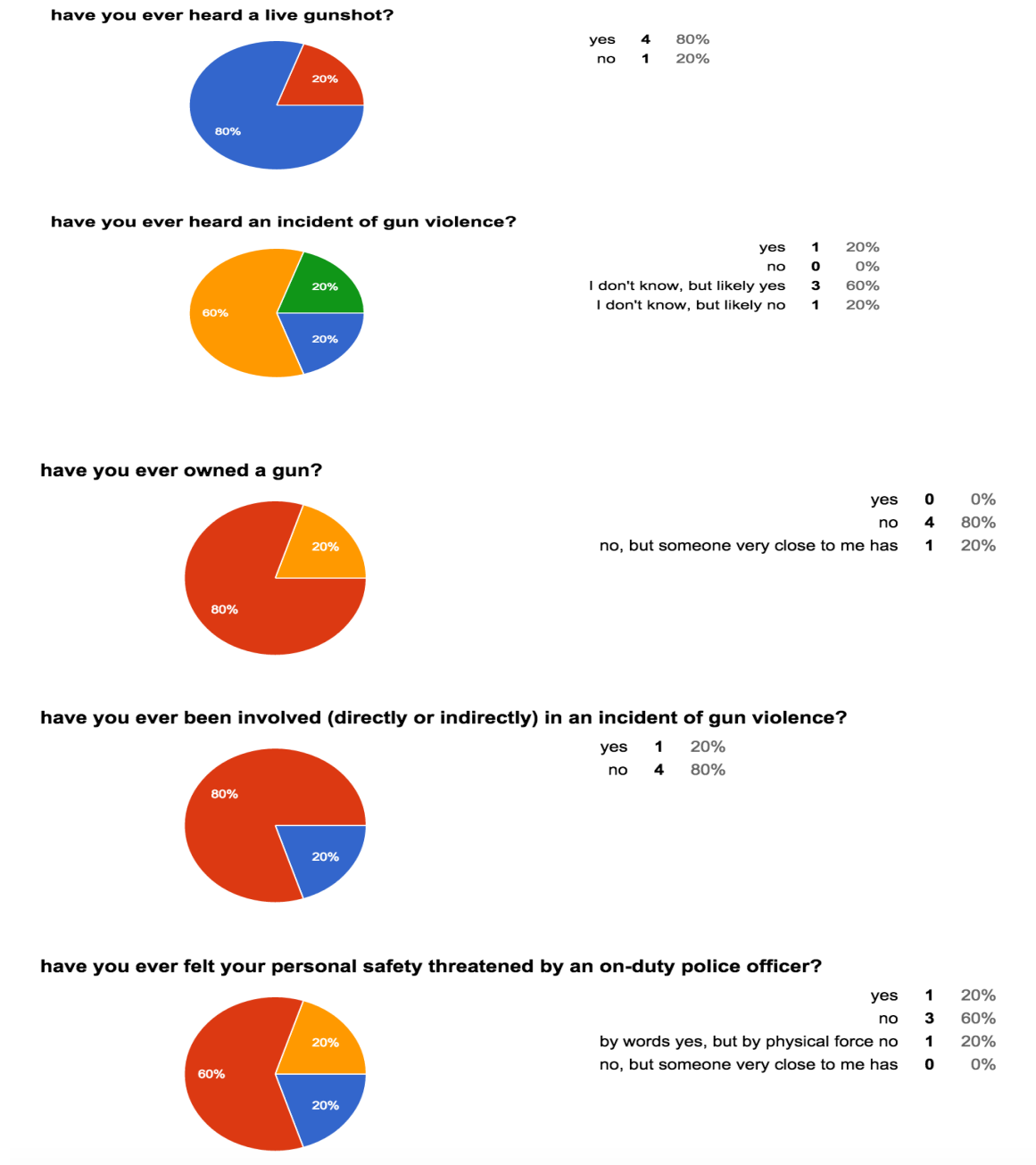
the time sonification variable was efficient in the first iteration of the piece, so I preserved the concept and only shifted the scale (making one minute of the piece represent one year of data). Because I was using a database of incidents from a whole year, the work was less specifically about the experience of time in the concert hall. The experience of space in the concert hall relative to the incidents was likewise minimized in the second iteration because I chose not to map the distance of the incident to the concert hall. I determined that my original age sonification variable was ageist – in the sense that higher pitches (the lives of younger victims) are easier to hear and may be perceived as being more valuable than lower pitches (the lives of older victims), so I did away with that parameter. I weighed the merits of sonifying the gender of the victims in both iterations, but statistically the victims were so overwhelmingly male that sonifying such a parameter could not provide sonic interest.

Racial data is a sonified factor in the second iteration where it was not in the first, a crucial difference.

### Reception

As in the first iteration, I distributed a listener questionnaire response for *overmorrow: no attack in progress* to better understand the reception of my work. I again solicited responses to an online survey through the Facebook invitation for the performance one week after the concert in mid-February 2016. The five respondents to my questionnaire were all white men between the ages of 21 and

45.



**Figure 6: overmorrow: no attack in progress (2015) questionnaire responses**

These respondents had different experiences with guns than the respondents in my first questionnaire: the respondents from the performance in Oakland, California are significantly more likely to have heard incidents of gun violence than the respondents from the performance in Charlottesville, Virginia and are also significantly less likely to have owned and/or shot a gun.

One respondent wrote:

I feel already quite sensitive to, and understanding of, the epidemic of gun violence in America. That said, I thought the piece was engaging in the way that it works simultaneously in the realm of abstracted data sets, as well as the aural equivalences of the outcomes of those 'numbers.' Though I understand the imbalance present in systemic police violence, hearing the datasets transposed onto instruments re-affirmed the constant and horrific nature of those sorts of violences. While I didn't necessarily feel that I 'learned' anything new, I did feel that I was able to embody and understand gun violence in a way more visceral and raw than mundane reports and headlines.

### **OVERMORROW – A third iteration?**

Butler writes that “To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming.”<sup>121</sup> It was my hope that *Overmorrow* can be such a becoming – that it could initiate a conversation about American gun violence and our various vulnerabilities to that violence in different contexts.

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<sup>121</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 44.



In 2016 I began developing a third iteration of *Overmorrow* which would be a born-digital version integrating aspects of both the first and second iteration. Both the first two iterations of the project were realized in concert halls, which are inherently esoteric transmission infrastructures with alienating codes of conduct. As result, concert-goers are a self-selecting group of like-minded people and I was effectively preaching to the choir. My friend Aldona Dye, who was in the audience of the first iteration, wrote to me later that: “The concert hall, because it is seen as a neutral space, actually robs this piece of its full potential, and turns it into art for passive consumption.”

In this third iteration, an algorithm developed in Python would automatically generate scores for visitors to my website for same-day performance using data specific to the day and the visitor’s IP address. The scores would look similar to the scores of the first iteration, I thought, but race would be a factor in the representation. It was my thought that anyone interested in realizing the piece could do so easily in any context (in a classroom, at a protest, at the dinner table) and that the broader performance context might help broaden the debate of American gun violence. As I engaged more deeply with the anti-racism movement, however, I had growing concerns with my direction in the project and found more questions than answers.

Some of the anti-racism movement writings that led me to reexamine my direction with a third iteration include Shaka McGlotten’s lecture at the Chicago

Center for Contemporary Theory on Black Data;<sup>122</sup> Hari Ziyad's *Afropunk* essay on the 2016 and 2017 Whitney Biennial controversies, "Why Do White Liberal Artists Love Black Death So Much?"<sup>123</sup>; and statements made by Ijeoma Oluo and Marc Mazique on empathy and the Black Lives Matter movement.<sup>124</sup> I am only including excerpts here that directly address my process of reexamination.

Shaka McGlotten writes that:

Assigning numerical or financial value to Black life, transforming experience into information or data, is nothing new. Rather, it is caught up with the history of enslavement and the racist regimes that sought to justify its barbarities. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries more than twelve and a half million Africans were transported to the New World. Two million, and likely many more, died during the Middle Passage alone. A typical slave ship could carry more than 300 slaves, arranged like sardines, and the sick and the dead would be thrown overboard, their loss claimed for insurance money... Of course, all of the statistics that I have just gone through are probably familiar, at least to some of us. And while useful, they tell only very partial stories, and they tend to reduce Black life to a mere effect of capitalism or to a kind of numerology of bare life.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Shaka McGlotten, "Lecture: Black Data. March 15, 2015," Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory, <http://ccct.uchicago.edu/events/2015/3/5/black-data-with-shaka-mcglotten>

<sup>123</sup> Hari Ziyad, "Why Do White Liberal Artists Love Black Death So Much?" *Afropunk*, <http://afropunk.com/2017/03/why-do-white-liberal-artists-love-black-death-so-much>

<sup>124</sup> Marc Mazique, "The Tyranny of Civility – Part Three in a Four Part Series," *Black, Whole: Fragments of a Black Mind Under (Re)Construction*, <http://www.black-whole.org/2016/06/06/tyranny-of-civility-part-three/>

<sup>125</sup> McGlotten, "Black Data."

*Overmorrow* was not originally conceived of as a work about racism, but American gun violence disproportionately affects people of color. Because sonification is based on quantitative knowledge, I thought that *Overmorrow* could ‘speak truth to power’ about American gun violence (and, I too belatedly realized, the racism it abets) in the language of power: numbers, facts, and figures. McGlotten’s lecture, however, makes me question my logic: might the very act of speaking the language of power give more power to power and enforce oppression? I benefit from racist oppression: might I not be more likely to ‘tell only a very partial story’ about race and American gun violence and wouldn’t that be dangerous?

Ziyad is writing specifically about art made by white women about racism. The Shutz and Moore that they refer to are the two white women artists who depicted the bodies of Emmett Till and Mike Brown with their works included in the 2017 and 2016 Whitney Biennials – Dana Schutz and Ti-Rock Moore. Ziyad states:

‘I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby’ is often read as though ‘they’ is a faulty pronoun that does not refer its antecedent, ‘the world,’ and instead only to the white men who personally lynched Emmett. But it was white society that let his murderers off the hook and those belonging to it were therefore willful co-conspirators in the barbaric act. “The world” is the perpetrator of the violence Black people have been bearing since even before being stolen and shackled, and this is the same world Shutz and Moore belong to.

A white artist ‘showing the world’ Black suffering in an artistic statement would necessitate a look in the mirror, not at the Black bodies on the ground. It would show Schutz and Moore over the bodies of Till and Brown, holding the gun and barbed wire. Mamie’s statement was so powerful because Emmett was her baby. She chose Black media specifically to reprint the images. But under the hand of the likes of Schutz and Moore, Black death becomes less a call to awareness, more a titillating spectacle, using non-Black media and galleries to recreate images of it with no regard to the fact that they were once lives—once loved. Einstein once famously said ‘The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.’ This type of work does nothing but encourage more looking and nothing—more danger for Black people.

By now it should be clear that these type of well-meaning artists don’t deserve the benefit of the doubt. What they are doing with capitalizing Black death.<sup>126</sup>

Does art made in sound rather than image have a different relationship to spectacle? Am I capitalizing black death? How can I ‘look in the mirror’?

And finally, this statement by Oluo and Mazique’s reading of the statement:

It’s not about empathy. It’s not about “walking a mile in someone’s shoes.” I hate that phrase so much. Because you just can’t. How am I supposed to walk a mile in the shoes of a migrant worker from southern California? In what way? I had a summer job I hated once...that’s in no way comparable. So if they tell me what they’re going through, I just have to look at them and say, you know what, you’re a human being capable of communicating what’s happening to you, and I believe you because you’re a person. And that I think, is the number one thing that I see throughout feminist movements, women saying, believe us, this is happening to us, we are being attacked, we are being belittled, you know, we are being killed. And Black Lives Matter is black people

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<sup>126</sup> Ziyad, “Why Do White Liberal Artists Love Black Death So Much?”

saying the same thing, believe us, this system is destroying us. And you just have to.

[Mazique:] Oluo thus identifies a central flaw in the practice of the politics of empathy as a basis for anti-oppressive politics: that different identities, different experiences, different levels of social power will always affect people's capacity to identify with the experiences of others. The validity, the very reality of oppressed folks' experiences is diminished by this requirement to translate them to match the experience of folks not targeted by that oppression. A sometimes insurmountable burden of proof is required to make oppressed folks' stories believable and "real" to those with greater social power, and it has to be presented in a way that recenters the experience of those with greater social power — in the case of folks of color and discussions of racial oppression, on whites.

*Overmorrow* presents a reality of black life — increased vulnerability to American Gun violence — in a way that centers whites: both me and my white listeners. I center myself and my whiteness with how I sonify the data; I center my listeners and their whiteness by weighing the sonification towards their specific experience in the concert hall; and I center capital and whiteness at large by using a quantitative metric to represent qualitative knowledge. I believe Oluo. Empathy is not enough, and it is especially not enough when it is expressed in a language of oppression. Time to look in the mirror.

I am lucky enough to call Marc Mazique a friend. Marc generously responded to this work and my grappling with these issues by parsing apart the questions I have raised here in correspondence with me. He raised two further points that I continue to process.

The first is to point out that ‘call-to-awareness’ political art by those with low or no stakes in the issue at hand rewards artists for effective inaction, and he likened the process to socially-responsible consumption. His point made me think about the reward process and part of that process, I realize, is self-soothing. When I ‘shop local,’ I am not principally rewarded by the actual slow-down of global climate change. Rather, I am rewarded by the self-perception that I am ‘doing something’ about global climate change. I can *tell* myself I am not part of the problem by miming part of the solution.

Marc also hopefully proposed that artists may be able to make political art about issues they have low or no stakes in if they can represent the gap between their experience and the experiences of the actual stakeholders in the issue. I am trying to represent such a gap with this writing, but I am not a writer. My medium is sound: this writing is not ‘the work.’ How might I represent such a gap in sound?

## *Revontulet*

<http://racheldevorah.studio/works/revontulet/>

### **Description**

*Revontulet* is an intermedial sonification of aurora data – both quantitative and qualitative – realized as a video, sculpture, and 6-channel audio installation. The work attempts to blur the lines between science and art; objectivity and subjectivity; looking and listening; masculinity and femininity as it embodies every aspect of the false binaries.

Auroras are the phenomena in which electrons accelerated by earth's magnetosphere collide with the atmosphere and release light around the magnetic poles. Geomagnetic storms shape the light into arcs that can appear to dance across the night sky. The Aurora Borealis (the aurora around the northern magnetic pole) can be seen in winter by peoples throughout the northern hemisphere, sometimes as far south as places such as the city of New Orleans. Different northern cultures have different mythologies surrounding the auroras. The Finnish call the phenomenon *revontulet*, which means 'fox fire,' because they believe the dancing arc of light is made by sparks flying off the tail of a fox running in the snow.

Auroras operate on a geophysical scale beyond human comprehension. Though humanity has ways of attempting to understand these phenomena –

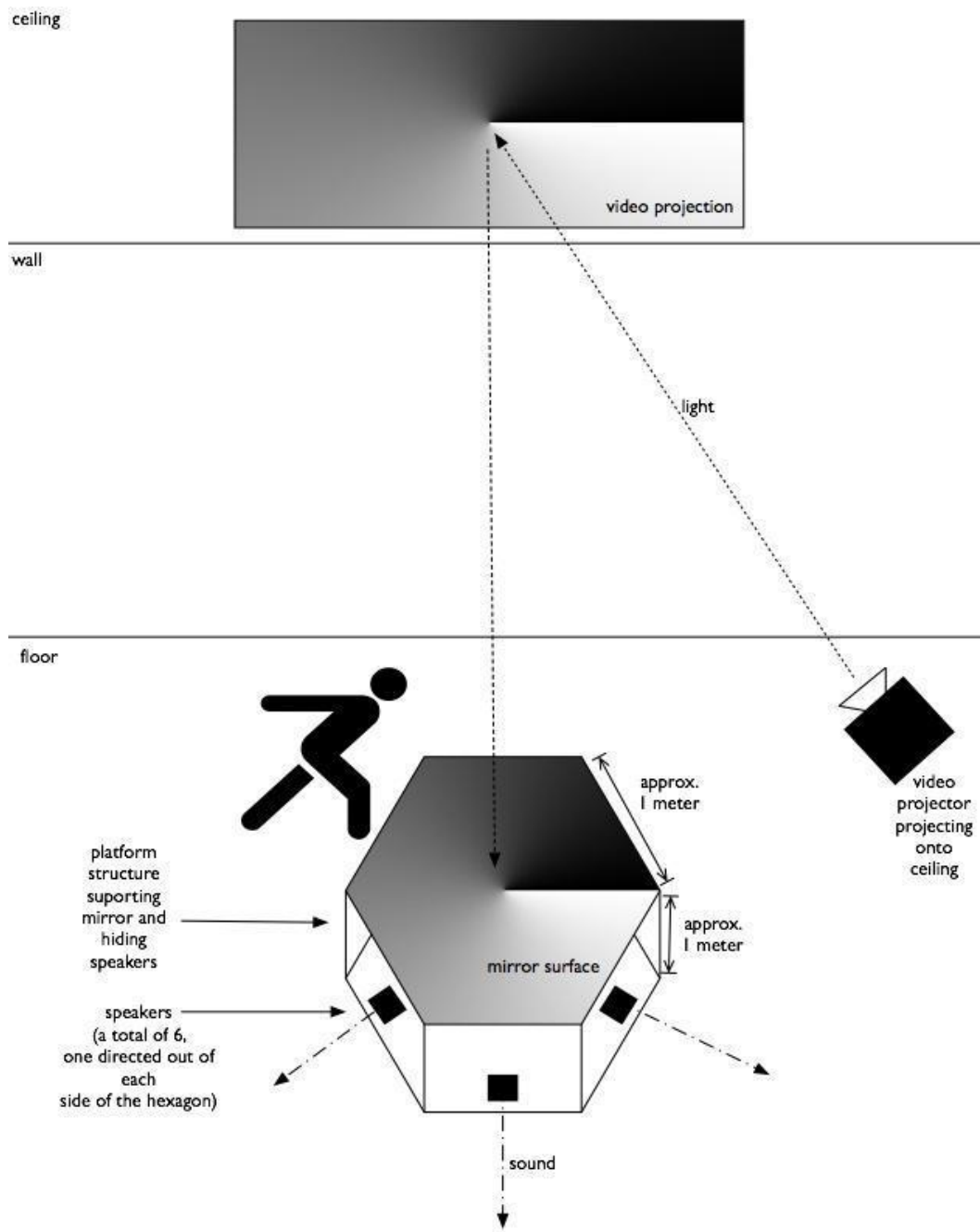
quantitative interpretations of our observations and qualitative narrative explanations – auroras remain beyond human comprehension because our understanding of the universe is limited by the conditions of our humanity.

The quantitative aspect of the work is magnetometer data and all-sky camera footage from the Aurora Borealis activity of January 2017 as captured by the Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory. Time-averaged field strength at the ground-based magnetometer is mapped directly to sinusoidal frequency using SuperCollider. The qualitative aspect of the work includes audio recordings of interviews taken by the artist with three women who have witnessed aurora: the Estonian mixed media artist Evelyn Mürsepp Grzinich, the Swedish space physicist Dr. Hannah Dahlgren, and the Finnish performance artist Inari Virmakoski. I asked them to describe an experience they had of aurora in their first language – the interviews are unedited. The three axes of the magnetometer data are independently heard in three different channels spacialized after the design of the magnetometer instrument itself. The three interviews are also independently heard in three different channels. The work was supported by the International Alliance for Women in Music's Ruth Anderson Prize as it was installed at Sound and Music Computing 2017 July 5-8 at Aalto University in Espoo, Finland.

The all-sky camera footage is projected on the ceiling of the installation space. Six hexagonal mirrors are placed underneath the projection and speaker



array. Visitors lean over the mirrors to see the all-sky camera footage – along with their own reflection – as they listen to the soundscape.



**Figure 7: diagram for installation**

## Context

Since my work on *Overmorrow*, my interest in sonification stemmed from two hypotheses. The first was that because sonification is based on quantitative knowledge, it might ‘speak truth to power’ in the language of power: numbers, facts and figures. The second was that because sound locates a listener in time, sonification can facilitate relational logic and that that relational logic can in turn facilitate recognition. I wonder now if humanistic sonification may be the new ‘Scientistic’ music<sup>127</sup> and as such whether or not it may be used for feminist intervention. I suspect that it might always reproduce privilege because it is speaking the language of privilege.

I wrote my thesis at Mills College on Annea Lockwood’s *The Glass Concert* and have since been mulling her Cageian methods of minimal sonic editorializing.<sup>128</sup> To paraphrase her approach: sounds do not always need to be harnessed and controlled; the voice of the composer will be sufficiently audible in the way that the sounds are presented; and if the composer lets go of complete control they allow more creative listening agency to the audient. This approach was very present in my mind as I was constructing *Revontulet*.

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<sup>127</sup> Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>128</sup> Rachel Devorah, "Listening beyond language: Annea Lockwood's *The Glass Concert* (1967–70)," Master's thesis, Mills College, 2013, Proquest (1537722).

I was also thinking about my experience making an earlier work, *Eden* (documentation of which is attached as Appendix A). I had learned from *Eden* the aesthetic richness of using multiple languages as sonic material. In *Eden* I had sat and spoken intently with my collaborators even when I did not understand the exact words that they were saying and my attention – my active listening without understanding literal meaning – made for a closer collaboration. So, as I recorded the responses for *Revontulet*, I sat and actively listened to my three collaborators. I made eye contact and did my best to parse meaning from the language that is foreign to me. Dr. Dahlgren, who was the least familiar of the three with the unusual methods sometimes necessary for experimental art practice, said after our interview that she was shocked and moved by how helpful it was to her interview that I sat and listened without completely understanding.

Installing the piece at Sound, Music and Computing was one of the most positive experiences I have had as a woman at a conference for electronic music, which is to say I felt as welcome there as I have felt at any conference. Demographically it was like most other conferences I have attended: I counted 9 women at the conference's keynote address out of roughly 90 people. There was no one in the crowd whom I would racialize as a person of color. I wrote an email to a friend who is also a female electronic musician from the conference that I had a realization there:

in masculinity. i'm a stranger, a foreigner.  
i have to be aware of that.

the organizers didn't provide me an adequate space for my installation (they put me in a room without blinds when i'm using a projector - literally my only request was a dark room), they didn't reserve any of the rooms with the university (so people kept trying to barge in and take the space), and the organizers tried to move me after i'd already spent 3 hours installing my piece.

so everyone is nice, but i've had to be stubborn and firmly (politely!) say 'no' over and over again. no, this room isn't good enough. no, you can't kick me out of this room [if you have a problem, you have a problem with the organizer - not me], and no, i won't move now.

basically, even under decent circumstances, it is hard and weird for those of [us] enculturated towards femininity to hold our own in masculine cultural environments.

## **Reception**

All nine of the women at the conference came and spent significant time in my installation space. They came and looked and listened and talked to me in depth about my process. So too did the youngest men in attendance, those in their 20s and 30s. My installation created a literal gathering space for feminists at an electronic music conference.



## Reverberations

*Civilisation begins with a rose.  
A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.  
It continues with blooming and it fastens clearly upon excellent examples.*  
– Gertrude Stein, *As Fine as Melanctha*<sup>129</sup>

This dissertation attempts to engage a conversation about whom artworks speak to and why. All art is context-specific and is always reflexively ‘about’ the ontology of its creation. It is my hypothesis/hope that discussions of resonance and sonic specificity can provide rhetorical scaffolding for larger discussions about indexical systems of aesthetic meaning that might upend false universals.<sup>130</sup>

How might a conversation about resonant sonic specificity upend false universals? An illustration: in 1998, when I was twelve years old, I was obsessed with Lauryn Hill’s album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, especially the single “Doo-Wop (That Thing).” In the single, Hill both raps the refrains and sings the chorus – what sounded to me like her being in complete control of the sonic landscape. The video<sup>131</sup> for the single visually iterated to me that she could be

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<sup>129</sup> Gertrude Stein, “As fine as Melanctha, 1914-1930,” in *Unpublished Works of Gertrude Stein*, edited by Carl Van Vechten (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954): 262.

<sup>130</sup> Without a language to describe how art is deictic, dominant culture can continue to gild its own work with false universals. Here is an illustration of how this is done: in an April 2016 colloquium at the University of Virginia on Spectralism, Oliver Schneller cited Varèse in this way: “Let’s not forget that, for us as musicians sound is one of the best teachers. That is why we should observe and study it: its lessons are inexhaustible.” Schneller posited that Spectralist techniques are “free from cultural charge” because they follow Varèse’s edict and are rooted in “sound itself” rather than social context.

<sup>131</sup> So does the title of the double title of the single.

anyone she choose to be: it is filmed in split screen with Hill singing the chorus as ‘60s Doo-Wop singer character on the left and rapping as her ‘90s self on the right. There is no explicitly sexualizing imagery in the video and some of the words of the song (which I memorized) bore down in me like an anthem:

Showing off your ass cause you're thinking it's a trend  
Girlfriend, let me break it down for you again  
You know I only say it cause I'm truly genuine  
Don't be a hard rock when you really are a gem  
Baby girl, respect is just a minimum<sup>132</sup>

At one point she raps, “Lauryn is only human – don’t think I haven’t been through the same predicament.” There were messages embedded in this art work that I needed to hear, imagery I needed to see – I got proxy benefits from this resonance.

A little later I heard a rumor that Hill had said something along the lines of “I’d rather starve than have white people buy my albums.” Hill’s response to this rumor was:

What I did say was that I love my people, black people, and I will continue to make music for them... There are a lot of young black girls who I meet in my travels who don’t have a lot of self-esteem, so if I communicate to them that they’re beautiful, no white person should find fault in that. It doesn’t mean that young white girls aren’t beautiful, because they are just as beautiful.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Lauryn Hill “Doo Wop (That Thing) Lyrics,” *Genius.com*, <https://genius.com/Lauryn-hill-doo-wop-that-thing-lyrics>

<sup>133</sup> “The Miselucidation of Lauryn Hill” *Snopes*, last modified Oct. 28, 2017 <https://www.snopes.com/politics/quotes/laurynhill.asp>



Participating in a panel at the Berklee College of Music's International Women's Day 2018 Teach-In, Dom Jones<sup>134</sup> was asked what art she first saw herself in. Jones is an artist, producer, a black woman from Oakland, California, and the editor of the Berklee student publication Berklee Groove. Jones replied, "Lauryn Hill, because she rapped *and* sang."

*The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* is a practice of resonant sonic specificity. As a white tween girl, I garnered proxy benefits of resonance from listening to Hill's messages about freedom from sexualization and submissiveness. Black female listeners like Jones garnered those proxy benefits *but also others* that are critical to understand and acknowledge. For example, this caveat against the misogynoir of American beauty standards:

It's silly when girls sell their souls because it's in  
Look at where you be in, hair weaves like Europeans.<sup>135</sup>

I needed to comprehend as a twelve-year-old this message about the racism of American beauty standards, racism that I was/am immune to with my European hair.<sup>136</sup> A conversation about resonance and sonic specificity would have helped accomplish that, and will hopefully help others.

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<sup>135</sup> Lauryn Hill, "Doo Wop (That Thing) Lyrics," *Genius.com*, <https://genius.com/Lauryn-hill-doo-wop-that-thing-lyrics>

<sup>136</sup> Of course I continue to benefit from white supremacy. Should I use my incremental awakening towards intersectional issues to soothe my discomfort with that reality? No. Even though this dissertation is, in some sense, a study in incrementalism, let this be the last word: those who are dehumanized by systems of oppression are *entitled* to what they are expected to wait for. The 'better than' of incrementalism is *not* good enough. I recognize that I am not good enough.



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## Appendix A

### *Eden*

In August 2014 I was invited to participate in a Sound Art Co-Lab organized by the cross-disciplinary artists and instrument builders Marie Kaada Hovden and Johannes Bergmark at the Røst Artist-in-Residence on the arctic Lofoten Archipelago off the coast of Norway. Twelve other artists (with a wide range of backgrounds and interests) and I gathered at the Skomvær Lighthouse with Marie and Johannes to make work without any predetermined constraints.

The first day on the island, Marie gave us a tour. As part of our tour, she brought us to a sunken plot of land at the southernmost edge of the island. She explained that the plot had been a rose garden, planted by a lighthouse keeper for his homesick wife. No more details about the story of the garden were offered to us then, but because of the isolation of the lighthouse and the severity of the climate, the act of planting a rose garden under such conditions struck me to be no small act of love. The place stayed with me for this reason. And because my creative practice is concerned with the intimacy that the specificity of person and place can bring to performance, the garden began to germinate in me an idea.

For the next few days, I sat in the garden most of my waking hours and I asked each artist on the island to come alone and visit me and “tell me a story about a garden that they considered home.” It was extraordinary to connect so quickly and intimately with the other artists individually, and to hear about their rich and vast range of experiences in life and art. One artist described the Anaconda tree that grew outside her window when she lived at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro; another told me the story of a gifted Aloe plant that had saved his life; another about planting strawberries with his grandfather as a child. All the stories connected me to the artists, and to the rose garden itself, which was otherwise so foreign to me.

If any of the artists asked me if I had my own story, I told them about my mother and her butterfly garden. My seven year-old sister died when I was ten, and in the spring after my sister died my mother dug up every inch of the yard around our house with a pick-ax. The yard had been full of heavy shrubs, and the work she did was better fit for a group of strong men with machinery. When the ground was cleared, my mother planted a coterie of plants which attracted the attention of butterflies. My mother, she said, wanted to look at the butterflies that came to her garden and think about the rebirth that my sister had undergone now that she was in heaven. I did not and do not believe in heaven, and coming home to that new

garden was a painful reminder both of the loss of my sister and the dissonance of disbelief in rebirth between my mother and me.

I imagined a site-specific piece for sound and movement that would develop out of the experiences I had with the artists in the rose garden, and asked Marie to collaborate with me. I took one plant word from each of my conversations and asked the artist who's conversation it came from to teach me the name for that plant in their native language (9 different languages in all). I, in turn, taught these words to Marie, along with some simple vocal gestures to improvise with. She developed a set of simple movements out of the idea of "growing" for us to improvise with. She and I, with the outside-eye help of Rolf Meester, designed a structure for us to explore these sounds and movements within the space of the garden: singing the words of the conversations that had happened there, and dancing with each other and the plot of earth.

I wanted to perform the work for the artists at sunrise, a particularly magical time on an arctic island in summertime because it is the best time to hear the birdsongs of the native inhabitants. The performance was set for sunrise (4:45am) for the penultimate day of our residency, and the time spent singing and dancing with Marie in the garden in preparation before were some of the best working days I have ever had.

The afternoon before the performance, one of the artists took me aside. She had been reading a history of the island (in Norwegian, a language only few of us on the island spoke) and had discovered that the rose garden (my rose garden it felt by this time) had been planted by a lighthouse keeper at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for his wife, just as I had been told, but because the couple had lost a child, a young daughter of seven or eight. The girl had drowned in the well on the island.

This information was struck me to the core. There is no explaining the sense of loss and wonder I felt hearing this story and understanding the connection I had felt to this place.

The performance went on as planned, but that morning there was unexpected rain and the ground was soaked. I, in turn, became soaked by the rain during the course of the performance and shivered violently dripping with rainwater in the 50F degree air. The performance was, as one can imagine, painful from all perspectives, but I am, nevertheless, grateful beyond measure for the opportunity that this experience afforded me in learning about myself and my craft.

# RACHEL DEVORAH WOOD ROME

[racheldevorah.studio](http://racheldevorah.studio)

## **b. 1986, Hartford**

aka Rachel Devorah Trapp, 2011-2015

## **GRANTS, AWARDS, & RESIDENCIES**

Adrian Piper Foundation Berlin Multi-Disciplinary Fellowship  
to support *Mémoire*, 2018-2019

Shannon Fellowship from the Jefferson Scholarship Foundation  
supplement to the departmental graduate student stipend,  
2014-2018

Elektronmusikstudion [Sweden]  
guest composer, 2017

Cove Park [Scotland]  
artist-in-residence, 2017

Mooste Külalis Stuudio (MoKS) [Estonia]  
artist-in-residence, 2016

Ruth Anderson Prize from the International Alliance for Women in Music  
for *revontulet*, 2016

Buckner W. Clay Award  
for *blood moon*, 2016

McGuffey Art Center  
artist-in-residence, 2015

Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music (STEIM) [Netherlands]  
artist-in-residence, 2015

Kulturrådet: Røst Sound Co-Lab [Norway]  
artist-in-residence for site-specific performance, 2014

Wolfgang M. Freitag Award Finalist  
to support my work at the New Museum, 2013

Del Sol String Quartet – Student Composition Competition Winner  
for *milk*, 2013

New Music USA Grant  
to support the performance of *Burning* in the Music for People  
and Thingamajigs Festival, 2012

Crowdfunder  
artist-in-residence to support *moss*, 2012

## PUBLICATIONS

"overmorrow" in *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no.3 (2017).

<https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2017.3.3.173>

"Ocularcentrism, Androcentrism" in *parallax* 23, no.3 (2017).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1339969>

"Absence (2013) by Rachel Devorah Trapp" in *Emergency Index* 3 (2014).

"New Sonic Paths: Sound Studies Expanded" [guest moderator] in *-empyre-*  
from the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art, Cornell University. June 2014.  
[goldsen.library.cornell.edu](http://goldsen.library.cornell.edu)

"The Particular Music of Red Velvet Cake" in *Raiding the Larder: a journal at the  
junction of food and art*. February 2012. [raidingthelarder.com](http://raidingthelarder.com)

## SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Education

Instructional Informationist at the Berklee College of Music, 2017 – present  
Praxis Fellow at the Scholars' Lab, UVa, 2015-2016  
Charlottesville Circuit Design Workshop Instructor, 2014-2016  
Teaching Assistant for Post-Tonal Composition course at UVa, 2015  
Lab Instructor for Technosonics course at UVa, 2014  
Musicianship Instructor (Level 2) at Mills College, 2012  
Music Education Specialist for Toolworks, Oakland, 2008-2010  
Musicianship Tutor for the Copland School, 2006-2007  
Music Teacher for the Police Athletic League Arts Conservatory  
Program in East New York, Brooklyn, 2004-2007

### Leadership

Reviewer for the International Conference on Live Coding [Spain], 2019  
Berklee Women in Action Advisor, 2018 – present  
Change Maker Content Advisor for HUBweek 2018  
Co-Chair for the Berklee Sexual Assault Awareness Week 2018  
Co-Chair for the Berklee International Women's Day Teach-In 2018  
Berklee Feminist Faculty Alliance, 2018 – present  
Faculty - Staff Representative on the Berklee Working Group for  
Gender Equity, 2017 – present  
Reviewer for the International Conference on Live Coding [Mexico],  
2017  
Graduate Student Representative on the UVa Music Department  
Safety/Sexual Misconduct Task Force, 2014-2016  
Chair of the UVa Fight Song Competition Commission, 2014-2015  
Reviewer for the Network Music Festival [England], 2014

Cofounder of the Mills College – UC Berkeley Composition Colloquium  
with Ken Ueno, 2013

In-store Event Coordinator & 'Experimental Expert' for  
Amoeba Music, San Francisco, 2007-2008

#### *Digital Archive Work*

Les Femmes de GRM Collection Archivist at  
Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) [France], 2016-2017

Describing the Indescribable-Digital Archivist at the  
Sonic Acts Festival [Netherlands], 2015

Digital Archive Fellow at the New Museum, 2014

Information Assistant for the New York Public Library,  
Music Research and Mid-Manhattan divisions, 2015-2016

Center for Contemporary Music and Darius Milhaud Collections  
Archivist Intern at Mills College, 2013

Archivist for Brenda Hutchinson in the acquisition of her work "What  
Can You Do?" by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) library,  
2010-2012

Volunteer Sound Engineer for the New York Public Library's "Daddy and  
Me" Literacy Program at Rikers Island, 2011

Cataloguer of the Performance Collection at the  
Copland School, 2004-2005

#### *Ensemble Work*

Improvising laptopist with offal  
(orchestra for females and laptops), 2016 – present

Improvising hornist with *Aorist*, 2016 – present

Improvising hornist with *blood moon*, 2014-2016

Improvising hornist with the *Andrew Weathers Ensemble*, 2011-2013

Improvising hornist with *The Auricle*, 2007-2010

Improvising vocalist with *The Cornelius Cardew Choir*, 2007-2010

Hornist with *Nota Bene* conducted by Michael Lipsey, 2004-2007

Hornist with *Queens Philharmonica* conducted by  
Tito Muñoz, 2004-2007

### **FESTIVALS, SYMPOSIA, & CONFERENCES**

New Interfaces for Musical Expression

Paper presentation:

'Sonic Cyborg Feminist Futures in Virtual Reality,' 2018

Conference for Research on Choreographic Interfaces

Invited participant, 2018

Next:2018 at the Society of Arts and Crafts

Plenary paper presentation:

'Sonic Cyborg Feminist Futures in Virtual Reality,' 2018  
 Feminist Theory and Music Conference  
 Plenary paper presentation: 'Oliveros and the audient,' 2017  
 Sound and Music Computing [Finland]  
*revontulet* selected for installation, 2017  
 Segnali Festival [Italy]  
*revontulet* selected for installation, 2017  
 Sonic Cyberfeminisms Conference at the University of Lincoln [England]  
 performance by offal, 2017  
 Reembodied Sound Festival and Symposium at Columbia University  
*objectify* selected for installation and invited panelist on *Gender Representation in Music and Sound Art*, 2017  
 Open Waters New Music Festival [Canada]  
*ethel* commissioned for context-specific performance, 2017  
 Women in Music Tech at Georgia Tech  
 performance by offal, 2016  
 International Conference on Live Coding [Canada]  
 performance by offal, 2016  
 International Conference on Live Interfaces [England]  
 performance by offal, 2016  
 temp'óra international meeting [France]  
 presentation of *ethel* with Janice Isabel Jackson, 2016  
 Electropixel Festival [France]  
*napperon* commissioned for site-specific performance, 2016  
 Opera from Scratch Festival [Canada]  
*the hopewell* commissioned for site-specific performance, 2015  
 orkest de ereprijs: Young Composers Meeting Finalist [Netherlands]  
 for *Pontifex*, 2015  
 OPENSIGNAL Festival at Brown University  
*judges sixteen* commissioned for installation, 2014  
 Rhymes with Opera Pocket Opera Festival  
*chiromantia* commissioned for site-specific performance, 2013  
 Art in Odd Places Festival  
*four* commissioned for site-specific installation, 2013  
 International SuperCollider Symposium  
*Alloy* selected for performance, 2013  
 California Electronic Music Exchange Concert  
*Alloy* selected for performance, 2013

International Society of Improvised Music Symposium  
performance by The Cornelius Cardew Choir, 2009

## **MEDIA**

Purdum Lindblad, "Advocacy by Design: Moving Between Theory and Practice" Keynote Address at the Library Research and Innovation Forum at the University of Maryland. June 8, 2017. [www.lib.umd.edu/mckeldin/info/library-research-and-innovation-forum](http://www.lib.umd.edu/mckeldin/info/library-research-and-innovation-forum)

Dan Damon, "The sound of the London Underground" on the *BBC World Update* (London). August 23, 2016. [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)

Interview with Carl Testa for *SuperCollider Interviews*. May 13, 2015. [scinterviews.com/rachel-devorah-trapp-interview](http://scinterviews.com/rachel-devorah-trapp-interview)

Dave Cantor, "Blood Moon examines the line between notes on page and improvisation on stage" in *The Daily Progress* (Charlottesville, Virginia). January 16, 2015. [dailyprogress.com](http://dailyprogress.com)

## **LANGUAGE AND TECHNOLOGY PROFICIENCIES**

*Languages:* French (intermediate), American Sign Language (intermediate)

*Coding:* SuperCollider, Chuck, Python, JavaScript, HTML, CSS

*Software:* Unity, Logic, ProTools, Final Cut Pro, Sibelius, Spear, PureData, Isadora, git, Slack, iDraw

*Circuitry:* electrical engineering for audio applications including integration with Bela, BeagleBone, Arduino and Raspberry Pi

## **SELECTED PERFORMANCES AND INSTALLATIONS**

*As composer/sound artist*

### 2018

*Palladian* at 'Paul Rudolph – Playing the Campus' at UMass-Dartmouth, April 27

*three* by New Thread Quartet at Spectrum, New York, February 18

*three* by New Thread Quartet at UVa, February 2

### 2017

*revontulet* documentation at the Bushwick Open Studios MISE-EN\_PLACE sound art festival, New York, September 24

*overmorrow: no attack in progress* by Noise Bias at Slate Arts and Performance, Chicago, August 12

*revontulet* at Sound and Music Computing, Espoo [Finland], July 5-8

*revontulet* documentation at the Segnali Festival, Perugia [Italy], May 2-6

*objectify* at the Computer Music Center of Columbia University, April 7-8

*laho* by Katy Ambrose at UVa, March 19

*alberene* by yarnlwire at UVa, January 27

*ethel* by Janice Isabel Jackson and choir at the Open Waters New Music Festival, Halifax [Canada], January 8

## 2016

*imparpripyt* by Driftless Winds at the

College Music Society National Conference, Santa Fe, October 27

*Alloy* by Katy Ambrose at the

Technosonics: Transmissions festival, Charlottesville, October 21

*sound walk in an apple orchard* at MoKS [Estonia], October 18

*napperon* at Electropixel Festival, Nantes [France], August 21

*imparpripyt* by Driftless Winds at the International Double Reed Society, Georgia, June 26

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at the International Horn Symposium, Ithaca, June 17

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at Connecticut Summerfest,

The Hartt School of Music, Hartford, June 10

*overmorrow: no attack in progress* by the William Winant Percussion Group at Mills College, February 6

*asylum hill* from *If Only to Say Goodbye* by JACK Quartet at UVa, January 29

## 2015

*the hopewell* by Malina Rauschenfels and Simon Docking at the

Opera From Scratch Festival at Dalhousie University, Halifax [Canada], August 23

*Poem on the Radio* by Kayleigh Butcher at the Omaha Under the Radar festival, July 10

*radiofarmdust* at Pioneer Works, Brooklyn as part of the 60x60 Wave Farm Mix, April 30

*{auto}poetics&tune* (2015) at the Digitalis festival, Charlottesville, April 28

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at

Grace Presbyterian Church, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, April 26

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at the Mid-Atlantic Harp Day,

Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, April 25

*Rush* by loadbang at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, March 20

*radiofarmdust* broadcast on WGXC 90.7-FM, New York as part of the 60x60 Wave Farm Mix, March 7

*Pontifex* by orkest de ereprijs as part of their Young Composers Meeting

Concert at Podium Gigant [Netherlands], February 28

*overmorrow* by Meehan/ Perkins Duo at UVa, February 20

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at the

Jefferson Scholarship Foundation, Charlottesville, January 23

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at Virginia Highlands

Community College, Abingdon, Virginia, January 18

*Citrina Migration* by Apple Orange Pair at Adat Reyim, Springfield, Virginia, January 15

## 2014

*Moss* by Joshua Marshall at the Temescal Arts Center, Oakland, September 12

*return of the lost lamb* and *Alloy* at ABC No Rio, New York, July 13

*judges sixteen in QUARTETS*, an installation curated by Stephan Moore, at

Brown University as part of the OPENSIGNAL Festival, Providence, May 16-17



*Prayers of the Unconvinced* at The Firehouse Space, Brooklyn, March 23

*Alloy* at the Uncertainty Music Series, New Haven, February 22

#### 2013

*four* at Art in Odd Places, Greensboro, November 1-2

*Poem on the Radio* by Kayleigh Butcher at Barbés, Brooklyn, October 4

*Chiromantia* by the Rhymes with Opera Pocket Opera Company at the  
National Opera Center, New York, August 10

*Alloy* at the International SuperCollider Symposium, Boulder, May 22

*Alloy* at the California Electronic Music Exchange Concert, May 12

*Okay* with Joshua Marshall, Tim Kim, Katherine McDonald, and Mateo Lugo at  
Mills College as part of the Signal Flow Festival, March 8

#### 2012

*milk* by the Del Sol Quartet at Z Space, San Francisco, December 4

*Burning* with Robert Lopez at Vessel Gallery, Oakland as part of the  
Music for People and Thingamajigs Festival, October 11

*Unholy* at Wesleyan University, Middletown as part of  
The Musical Singularity Festival, September 27

*Burning* at Ange Noir, Brooklyn, June 30

*Prayers of the Unconvinced* at the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association's  
FaSoLa Festival, Jasper, Alabama, June 13

*Prayers of the Unconvinced* at Nightlight, Chapel Hill, May 27

*Prayers of the Unconvinced* at Squidco, Wilmington, May 26

*Willie and Rose* by Meaghan Leferink at Mills College, March 16

#### 2011

*Non Mi Merito Questo* on YouTube, December

*Short Stories* by Fred Frith at Mills College, November 28

*Static* with Andrew Weathers and Shanna Sordahl at Occupy Oakland, November 1

#### 2010

*moss* on the Mechanical Turk platform, *Crowdflower*, November 19-21

#### *As improviser*

#### 2017

*Aorist* at infuse, Paris [France], October 16

*Aorist* at the North Country Electronic Music Festival, Burlington, September 9

*offal* at Sonic Cyberfeminisms, Lincoln [England], May 5

#### 2016

*offal* at the Women in Music Tech festival, Georgia Tech, Atlanta, November 2

*offal* at the International Conference on Live Coding at McMaster University [Canada],  
October 15

*offal* at the International Conference on Live Interfaces at the University of Sussex  
[England], July 2

*blood moon* at the University of California, Irvine, February 9

2015

Aorist at Mardi Spaghetti, Montréal [Canada], August 11  
Aorist at Array Space, Toronto [Canada], August 9  
Aorist at Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, August 8  
blood moon at the Sondation festival, Charlottesville, April 24  
blood moon with Sir Richard Bishop at Twisted Tea Bazaar, Charlottesville, April 13  
blood moon at The Bridge, PAI, Charlottesville, January 16

2014

Aorist at the ZeroSpace Initiative, Charlottesville, December 1  
Aorist at the Technosonics: Found Sound festival, Charlottesville, November 6  
Guest improviser with Articular Facet as part of the Chicago Calling festival, Chicago, October 5  
Aorist at 17 Frost, Brooklyn, February 1

2013

Aorist at Actual, Oakland, May 4

2009

The Cornelius Cardew Choir at the International Society of  
Improvised Music at the University of California, Santa Cruz, December 5

*As cross-disciplinary collaborator*

2018

*Floating Lanterns* with Theresa Wong at the Stone, New York, March 30

2016

*Poem on the Radio / Belle Island* at Boxue Concert Hall, University of International  
Business and Economics, Beijing [China], July 13

*For Now* with Kathryn Baer Schetlick and Jennifer Lauren Smith at  
The Niche, Charlottesville, October 11-November 7

2015

*Dandelion Wine* with Max Gutmann at the  
Technosonics: Music in Contemplation festival, Charlottesville, October 17

*For Now* with Kathryn Baer Schetlick and Jennifer Lauren Smith at  
P/H/A/O/N Gallery, Brooklyn, April 4

*radiodustmonster* with Liew Niyomkarn by I-Jen Fang at UVa, February 20

2014

*eden* with Marie Kaada Hovden at Røst AiR [Norway], August 21

*Mirror Thickets* with Lisa Blas at the Elizabeth Street Garden Gallery, New York, June 1

*Shoot* with Brad Henkel and Alex Nathanson at Outpost, New York, February 21

*As performer realizing the compositions of others*

2016

Ryan Ross Smith's *Concerto for Franziska Schroeder*  
at the New Notations Symposium, IRCAM, Paris [France], September 22

2015

Matthew Burtner's *Nocture: Music for a Moth Cinema*,  
a cross-disciplinary collaboration with Natalie Jeremijenko, at  
Ruffin Gallery, Charlottesville, March 27

2013

Dilek Acay's *Amnesia* at the Watermill Center, New York, August 11  
Sam Withrow's *Afterimage* at the Signal Flow Festival, Mills College, March 10

2012

Brenda Hutchinson's *What Can You Do?* at The Stone, New York, August 22  
Roscoe Mitchell's *Cards: In the Faces of Roses* at Yoshi's, Oakland, April 16  
Giselle Eastman's *Changes* at the Signal Flow Festival, Mills College, March 9

## DISCOGRAPHY

*As composer/sound artist*

2016

Selected artists, *The Next Station*.  
London: Cities and Memory with The London Sound Survey.  
Covent Garden

2015

Selected artists, *60x60 Wave Farm Mix*.  
New York: Wave Farm Dispatch.  
*radiofarmdust*

*As improviser*

2013

The Andrew Weathers Ensemble, *What Happens When We Stop*.  
Oakland: Full Spectrum Records.

*As performer realizing the compositions of others*

2014

Nightworship's "Degrading & Everlasting the Same" on  
*Frozen In Time II: Music to Accompany the Films of Ingmar Bergman*. San  
Francisco: Black Horizons.