



issue 4 winter 2015

# reflections

on process  
in sound

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# Editorial

by Iris Garrelfs

Dear reader,

From the beginning, one key aim of *Reflections on Process in Sound* has been to provide a forum for artists to present their own reflections regarding a wide variety of sound related practices - variety not just in content but also in form. This fourth issue presents perspectives from international locations, it includes collaborative viewpoints and hybrid writings manifesting process and reflections about process.

In some instances the format of the journal had to be adjusted to reflect artists' intentions and to avoid interrupting the flow of the text; for example adding references as endnotes, rather than our usual Harvard-based style. I hope that in trying to avoid such interruptions I have not inadvertently caused confusion.

To start of with, Chris Weaver explores the creation of *Variations for Rooms and a Tone*, a collaborative series by the author and Fari Bradley spanning performance and installation, and the development of the piece during a residency programme in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

In *For the rest of today partly cloudy (for numerous voices)*, Melbourne based Catherine Clover presents her expanded species-bridging approach to language, exploring urban birds through a framework of everyday experience.

*Postcards from the Volcano* is a collaborative project by SoundFjord's Helen Frosi and musician Stephan Barrett. Their contribution *Walking into the abyss: a meditation on walking, listening and notions of belonging* charts the inception and main strands of their proejct, creating works for radio, performance and fixed media.

Another collaborative piece is *Writers' habits* by David Mollin and Salomé Voegelin. It is a transcript of a talk given by the artists as part of the exhibition *Nietzsche Cyclists and Mushrooms* at the Kunst Raum Riehen in Switzerland and covers their writing practice.

Magz Hall introduces us to one of her recent works, *Tree Radio*, an out-door installation developed during a residency at and for the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

I would like to thank all contributors for their generosity in making their thoughts and process transparent, and investing a considerable amount of time in doing so! Thanks also to Peter Smith for designing the journal itself and to Karen Stone for maintaining the new website at <http://www.reflections-on-process-in-sound.net>.

London, December 2015

iris [at] reflections-on-process-in-sound.net

A photograph of a room with a brick wall, a window, a speaker, and a microphone stand. The room has a white ceiling with a light fixture. The brick wall is on the left, and the window is on the right. A black speaker is on a stand on the left, and a microphone is on a stand on the right. The window is a multi-paned window with a black frame. The room appears to be a recording or performance space.

Chris Weaver is a sound artist and composer whose appearances include Glastonbury Festival, the hills of Scotland, and most recently *Art Dubai*. He has worked with musicians as diverse as Otomo Yoshihide, DJ Sniff, Luke Fowler and John Paul Jones. Weaver has given lectures about the artistic potential of sound at Karachi University and New York University Abu Dhabi amongst others. Chris is a founder member of *Oscillatorial Binnage*, one half of analogue tape duo *Howlround* and functioned as the musical director of the *Resonance Radio Orchestra*. In 2013, he was awarded the BASCA British Composer award for Sonic Art with Ed Baxter.

Since 2006, he has been collaborating with Fari Bradley. Projects include the release of an artist's-edition record with *The Vinyl Factory UK* (*Systems For a Score*) and various international group shows and performances, including major commissions from *Art Dubai*.

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# “Variations for Rooms and a Tone”

by Chris Weaver

### Introduction

This essay details the creation and evolution of a series of works entitled *Variations for Rooms and a Tone*, a performative and installation-based sound piece involving the use of architectural acoustics and feedback. The work was devised by Chris Weaver and is chiefly comprised of microphones and speakers, connected together so that the microphones amplify the speakers in continuous loop. This produces a “feedback” tone directly related to natural acoustics of the space that the work is installed in.

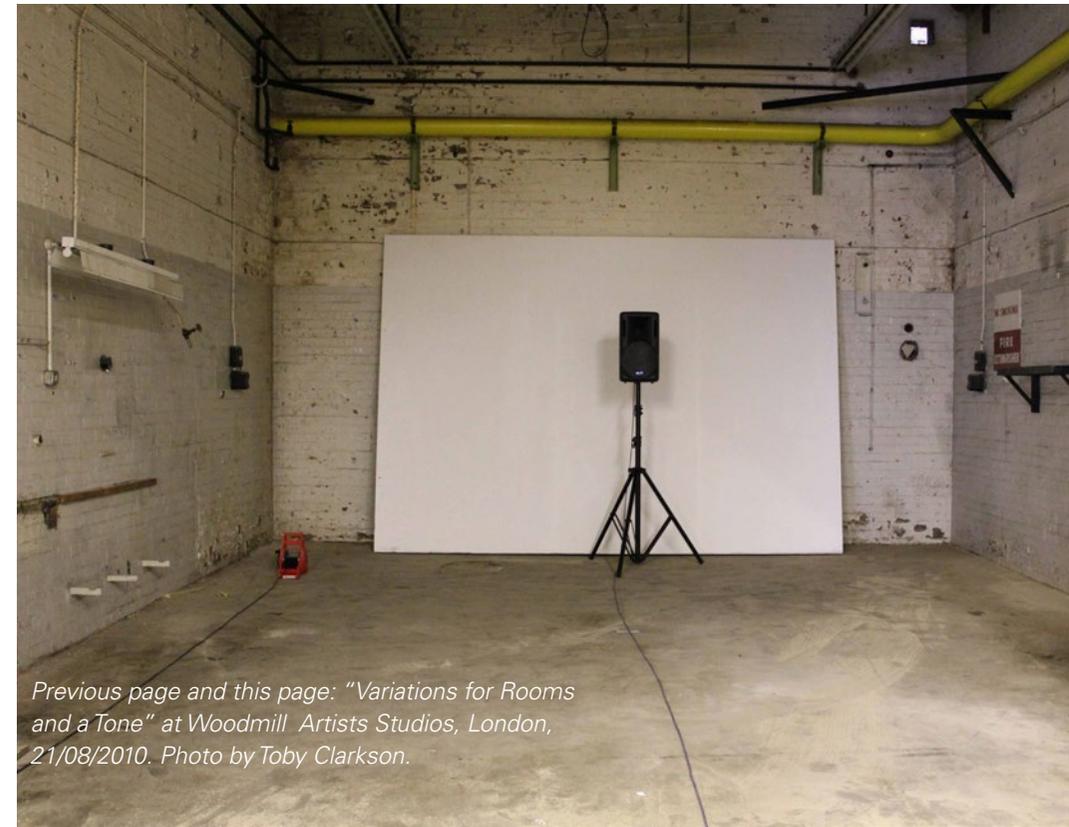
During a residency programme in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the series was greatly expanded by Weaver and collaborator Fari Bradley to incorporate both social and experiential material within the framework of the installation’s architecture, heightening the site specificity of the work. This essay tracks the creative processes and evolution of *Variations for Rooms and a Tone* and the possible influences that led to the expansion of the work in Dubai.

### Starting Points - Feedback as Process and Form

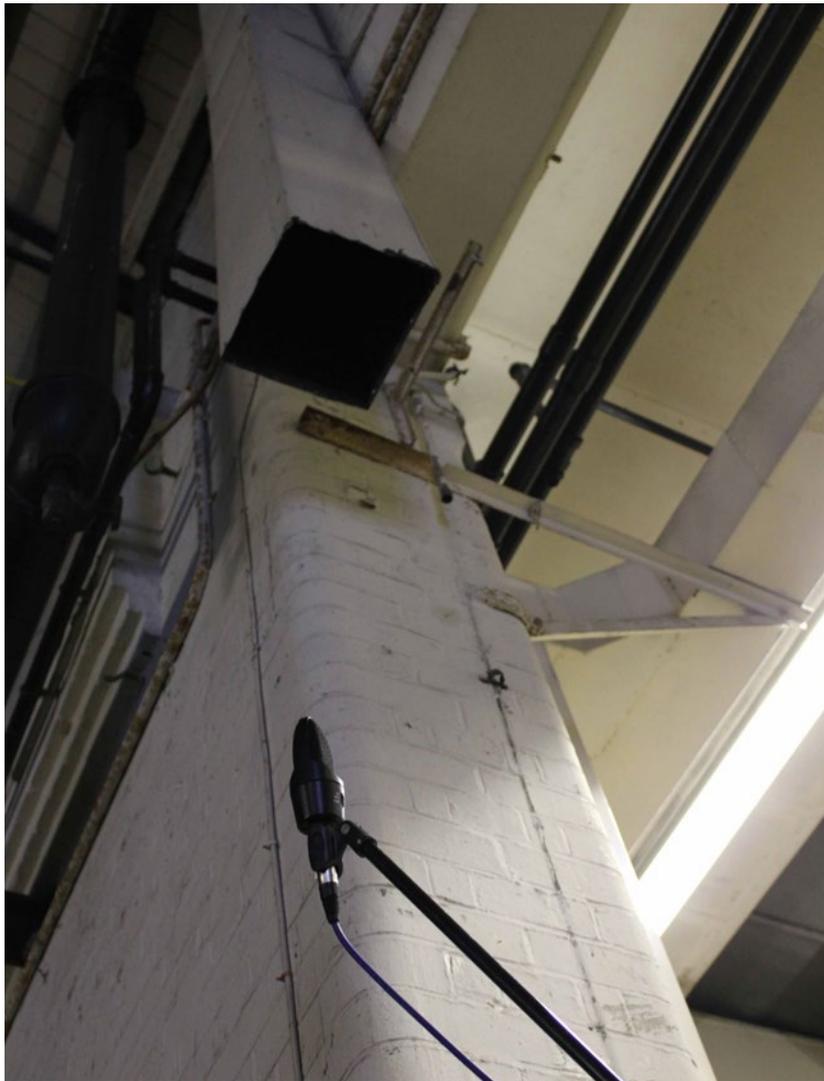
All musicians who practise in the field of *experimental music* come across the phenomenon of feedback in one form or another, either in their own practise or observed perhaps, on stage with others. The runaway howl of a PA system as a microphone amplifies itself ad infinitum, the exaggerated decay of an echo machine, as its echo is looped around and echoed, again and again, to the pure laser-like tone of an audio mixer feeding back, VU meters bursting red as the main outputs are plugged back into a channel. Feedback

is the name given to this looping of an output back into its input, processing the result in an endless circle. The merging of the input and output in a process can be used for stability and self regulation in industrial processes, the output ordered and predictable, (a heater controlled by a thermostat keeps a constant temperature by monitoring its output and adjusting the heater, the input, to compensate) as in the case of the use of feedback in digital electronics, or feedback can veer wildly and chaotically.

The concept arose from studies in systems theory and is a major component in the field of cybernetics. Feedback gives rise to complexity in a system by merging the cause and effect into one



Previous page and this page: “*Variations for Rooms and a Tone*” at Woodmill Artists Studios, London, 21/08/2010. Photo by Toby Clarkson.



process. My personal opinion, arising from working with feedback both as a theoretical and physical process, is that feedback is a wonderful means of delineating the *edges* of a system, the maximum and the minimum states, the thresholds of the possible. I've always described its value as akin to blowing smoke into maze constructed from glass; for a brief moment, all the possible paths are visible, only for the smoke to dissipate moments later.

Feedback has been a technique of electronic musicians for as long as there have been electronic musicians. Indeed the idea of processing the output back through the system that produced it in the first place, shows up in early patents aiming to create *electrical tone oscillators*. Even before the advent of valve technology and the creation of audio amplification, acoustic feedback was the animating factor in one of the earliest electronic sound making instruments, as defined in Alfred Graham's 1894 patent.<sup>1</sup> As the role of the mixing desk has risen to the status of an instrument (or at least one of the most important elements in an electronic *meta-instrument*), the myriad of audio routing options and circular processing paths have been explored and utilized as a means of harnessing feedback for artistic ends.

Feedback could be thought of as an archetype of process music. In the few examples given at the top of this essay, the process of repetition is clearly audible, although the actual mechanics of the process might be obscured somewhat. Michael Nyman defines process music through a series of

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, Alfred. Patent 290. 1894. *A New or Improved Method and Means of Producing Sound*, see <http://miraculousagitations.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/entangled-histories-digging-out.html>

*"Variations for Rooms and a Tone"* at Woodmill Artists Studios, London, 21/08/2010. Photo by Toby Clarkson.

categorisations (Nyman 1974); works using feedback would sit comfortably in types 4, “repetition”, and 5, “electronic processes”. Repetition, with regards to feedback, is certainly its most defining characteristic. Feedback is pure tonal repetition, timbre and form arising from feedback within the electronic system - constant musical restatement. The term *Electronic processes* is a little vague, particularly writing several decades after Nyman defined these types. The relevance here is that the electronic processing, in the various forms *Variations...* has taken, is always done in realtime, acting upon a David Tudor-esque stream of sound (I’m assuming this to be Nymans frame of reference), rather than a collection of recorded sound events.<sup>2</sup>

All the iterations of *Variations...* use real-time processing of the sound environment, a constant dialogue between the space and the speaker. At the time of creating *Variations...* I was not fully aware of the lineage of works using feedback and architecture; of course I was aware of Alvin Lucier’s master work *I Am Sitting in a Room* (Nyman cites this as an example of electronic Process music), but not of his student, Nicholas Collins.

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<sup>2</sup> David Tudor (1926 – 1996) was a composer and performer who worked closely with John Cage. He was a highly sought pianist for the most avant garde and complex musical works of the 1960s. Later in his career he pioneered using live electronics in performance as opposed to the then prevailing trend of using pre-recorded sound on tape.

Collins composed a work entitled *Pea Soup* (1974) whilst a student, the piece uses a phase shifting circuit to *smooth out* the feedback between a microphone and speaker in a room, creating what Collins calls “architectural ragas” (Collins 2014). Collins work with feedback continues to this day and the reader is encouraged to check out his most recent piece *Roomtone Variations*, a work bridging the gap between acoustics and notation.<sup>3</sup>

### A Declaration of Composition as Process

Before continuing, I should outline the technical design of *Variations for Rooms and a Tone*. Having always articulated artistic projects and compositions in a system-like fashion, I feel no need to apologise that this view is rather old fashioned by now, but to simply state that a schematic can be just as an *accurate* a score for music (clearly more suited to electronic and experimental works) than notes on a staff. Perhaps one of David Tudor’s most radical contributions to modern music was the elevation of the circuit diagram to the level of a score. For many working with experimental music and electronics, a description of the quirks of a certain amplifier are a valid starting point for a process of composition that appears alien to those classically trained, but it is a process completely intuitive to many.

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<sup>3</sup> For Collins’ *Roomtone Variations* from 2013 see <http://goo.gl/iwpCeG>. For more about feedback see: Aufermann, Knut (2002). *Feedback Processes - an investigation into non-linear electronic music*. MA dissertation Sonic Arts, Middlesex University

The processes followed in the creation of *Variations...* are an intertwining between form, function and material. Rarely are any particular aspects singled out or examined in isolation, but are really only best defined through their relationship with others. Looking at the work now, it seems obvious that the method of composition should so reflect the dynamics of the material it produces - reiteration, modification, a cyclical process of operations on the *object*. *Variations...* does not have an end goal, due to its



The first version of "Room Tone Variations"; performed at Intervention Gallery in Kensal Green, London, 20/06/2010. Photo courtesy of the artists.

site specific nature the piece will always be renewed wherever it is installed or performed, and the timbral material will be quite different each time. *Variations...* is a collection of processes - technical, social, and physical - which are constantly in a state of flux, adapting and modifying itself according to environmental variables, the space and the audience. The composition is always in the act of *becoming*; attempting to fix the work through recordings or recreations, offers nothing to listener but the collapse of that wave front of *becoming* and stalling the creative work. When these processes stop, are frozen or fixed, then the work ossifies. The score triumphing over the process-driven schematic.

### Variations

The very first sketch in this series of works was entitled *Room Tone Variations*. The principle element in the work, as the title suggests, is the use of room tones, otherwise known as room *eigenmodes*. All enclosed spaces, exhibit resonance effects, that is to say an amplifying of certain frequencies that are mathematically related to the dimensions of the space. This resonance effect is caused by standing waves of acoustic energy, their wavelengths essentially fitting perfectly within the confines of the room, bouncing back forth between walls and constructively amplifying the waveform. Room tones are a problem for recording studios and the like because the room itself acts as an EQ, listening to any music in the room is *coloured* by the space itself, adding bass or some other frequency (the room is said to have an uneven frequency response).

The construction materials add another variable into determining the room modes. Hard stone surfaces exhibit sharp resonances centred around a few frequencies, whilst soft furnishings such as carpet and curtains dampen higher frequencies. Room modes are highly position dependent and vary greatly in volume and tone. A listener can walk around a space full of standing waves, scanning through them with the position of their body. All these physical variables emerging, from what could be nothing more than a simple, empty room, offer much sound material if one regards room tones not as an issue to be overcome, but a form of composition process; an environment to work with and not against.

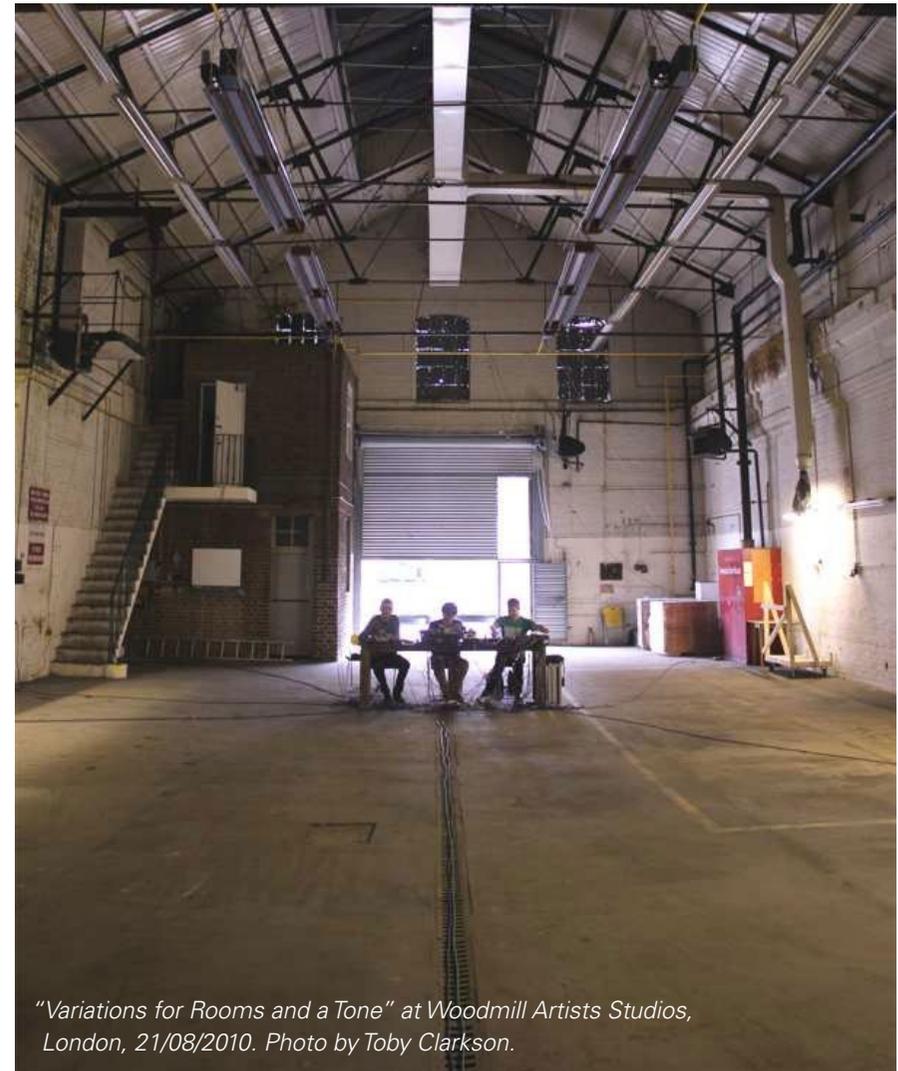
The first iteration of *Variations...* was presented at the opening of the Intervention Gallery in Kensal Green, London on the 20th of June 2010. To be frank, the performance amounted to publicly prototyping the work, at a very basic stage. The work had at that point only existed as an idea, a few sketches. The iterations of *Variations...* are all based on the principle, described above: if every space has a unique set of room tones, then why not use a large environment with multiple spaces as means of harnessing and ultimately *playing* these room tones? Returning to the first performance, the venue was an Anglican Chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery. The chapel had a central space, where the main PA system was located, and several smaller alcoves and recesses, into which were placed microphones running back to the main PA. The majority of the performances of this work have been given by

the electro-acoustic performance group, *Oscillatorial Binnage* (Fari Bradley, Toby Clarkson, Chris Weaver and Dan Wilson).

The process of improvisation, in these early versions of the work (later on residency in Dubai, computer-controlled processing was introduced), was to begin with a *timid* exploration of the system. A channel on the mixer was slowly faded up until the feedback tone began. Once the system was excited in this way, the performers had a number of processes they could use throughout the performance. The performer could hold that particular tone and fade in another room tone into the mix or they could attempt to nullify the existing tone with EQ, pushing the system to respond with a room tone at a different frequency. This early version of *Variations...* also included a performer playing a sine oscillator. The reasoning behind this was to further the chaotic tendencies of the feedback. During some performances, the system tended to *settle* into either the same few tones or other tones dominated. The sine oscillator gave the performer the ability to *nudge* the system somewhat. In practise this meant the player (normally Dan Wilson on account of his developed sense of pitch) would attempt to aurally match a particular feedback tone and then introduce a sine tone a few hertz either side of this frequency. The effect varied widely, from the slow dying out of that feedback tone, to a simple harmony and at other times, erratically destabilizing other unrelated tones in the system. The effect of using this simple tone echoed a sentiment espoused by Alvin Lucier of the *flatness* of pure electronics as opposed to the complexity of an electro-acoustic setup. Feedback

in a mixer, or computer, only exists as a voltage varied by time, the influence upon this hermetically sealed system is only increased by the addition of more audio effects. Sound acoustically diffused in space, on the other hand, has the advantage of the infinite physical interactions of the real world as part of its performance environment: temperature, humidity, surface materials, the number of possible variables is staggering. The first performance was hard work.

At that time not having added compressors or limiters, the volume of the feedback had to be constantly managed by hand, walking the line between a deafening piercing screech or silence. There is always a certain hesitant inertia, before the system first *warms up*. Working with the process of feedback can be unusual and unexpected (turning things down often has as much impact as turning things up). The interconnectivity of a feedback system needs a degree of intuition, a certain feeling into how the system will react. Performing *Variations...* requires a certain amount of practise in the space that it will be performed in, there is a learning process to the variety and scope that a certain building or space exerts on the work. *Variations...* is a work where the compositional effort is in the creation of the *environment* within which a system or process exists. The composition arises not in the sense of arranging the temporal events but is more a question of defining the *edges* and seeing how the process plays out within them. The music itself is simply the results arising from a system, placed in a particular environment, at that moment. The aesthetic decisions are



*"Variations for Rooms and a Tone" at Woodmill Artists Studios, London, 21/08/2010. Photo by Toby Clarkson.*

made in the limits of the processes and the rules chosen. There is a physical indeterminacy at play, the resulting sound work is the sum of all the variables that exist at the moment.

At this point *Variations...* was only ever thought of as a musical work, simply exploring a series of rooms akin to a series of organ pipes, the original work creating an *architectural scale* of which to improvise around. The phenomenological potential of sound in architectural space had not yet been grasped. The next few performances carried on much in this vein. The opportunities to experiment with large spaces and with the equipment were few at the time, so performances were a process of both exploring the composition and the testing that current iteration of the work as it passed through a process of refinement and expansion. The next major expansion of *Variations...* was premiered at *Heathaze - Radical Sound Practises*, the concert series curated by artist Richard Sides at the Woodmill artists studios in Bermondsey, in August 2010. The Woodmill is a very large concrete vehicle depot, consisting of a main space, approximately 25 metres long and several adjoining rooms and offices. The technical system for *Variations...* this time had increased to include separate PA systems for each room tone mixed into a main *front of house* PA for the audience. The reason being that the various strands of feedback were cancelling each other out, if created through one shared set of speakers. The technical system also included compressor/limiters on all channels to hold the feedback tones at a consistent volume and parametric EQ with adjustable Q to be able to pinpoint precise

frequencies more accurately. One more refinement, suggested by limitations in previous performances, was to setup a matrix-style mixer configuration. Matrix mixers were pioneered by David Tudor as a method of easily increasing the complexity of an electronic music setup. Inputs and outputs are arranged in a grid allowing for any input to be connected to any output, rather than in a standard mixer where the inputs (channels) are connected to only one or two outputs. Matrix mixing became a key part of all further versions of *Variations...*

The benefits afforded by mixing the audio into this way, are to have the ability to trace and construct imaginary architectural spaces by feeding the sound of one room through another, or to tie rooms together with feedback (a microphone in one room connected to a speaker in another) chains. Routing the audio in this fashion, especially to rooms far from the central performance space, brings in structure-borne sound and furthers the sense of spatialisation. Often, in a performance using a matrix mixer, a process of *material narrative* begins to arise - sounds are created in one part of the space, and evolve throughout the system, the audible reflections distributed in some other space, transformed by the process of moving through the architectural structure. Matrix mixing excites the compositional system in a much more dynamic and unseen way.



*The choir - version of "Variations for Rooms and a Tone" at Tashkeel Gallery, Dubai. Photo courtesy of the artists.*

### Expansion and Utility

In April 2014, Fari Bradley and I were invited to undertake a residency programme at the *Tashkeel Gallery* in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. One of the aims of our proposal for the residency was to further develop *Variations...* Two lines of inquiry presented themselves: firstly, could *Variations...* be presented as a gallery based installation? What would that entail and what would the shift in context mean for a musical work that relied on live performance (that would ultimately mean using a Max/MSP program to replace the performers roles). The second was a greater investigation into what was possible, not in the technical sense but more aligned with the social, with regard to the audience and the performers. What kind of processes outside of the aesthetic could take place? What happens when you listen to architecture? What kind of *tool* could sound be in this context?

Answering the first of these questions was perhaps the least interesting of the two. Simply a technical process of first reducing all the external hardware to software modules (the EQ, compressor/limiters and matrix mixer) and then deciding on a strategy for the computer to follow to in lieu of human performers. Approaching the second question, inasmuch as it can be answered, has totally changed the context in which *Variations...* is placed, and generated many more lines of inquiry. Sound in space has altered significantly since the arrival of recording and playback technologies, the voice is no longer alone as the means of aural communication, the built environment, literally, rings with it usurpers.

Visitors to Dubai are always shocked by the sheer speed of change, it is a city that has gone from a small fishing village to major economic hub in little over eighty years. Visually comparing photos of the transformation, shows the increasing in density, of buildings and structures but what of the soundscape? Dubai is so highly constructed that the soundscape is almost entirely dominated by what sounds are emitted (or escape) from the built environment.

The city is flooded by the acoustic waste of the industrial processes that are necessary to live in the desert (the air conditioning units being the prime example), and to maintain its position as a global economic hub. Nowadays, most “public acoustic space is characterised by monopoly and repetition” (Truax 1992), one of the results of the supremacy of visual culture results in an indifference to the need for naturally hearing a sense of space very acutely. Once the *machine* stops are any acoustic details remaining? How has this arisen and can it be compensated or alleviated? Despite this overwhelming flattening of the local soundscape, sound still functions as one of the main mediums of negotiation for bodies in a space. Echo, reverberation and proximity to other sources of sound are hard-wired, the accuracy of this sensory data may have blunted somewhat but it is still there. The direction that *Variations...* took in Dubai was to incorporate a pool of performers into the work, who all had a practical connection to the built environment, those who had literally constructed the space. A choir was formed comprised of professionals in the construction industry such as architects, town planners and

engineers. The sine wave oscillator of earlier versions was replaced by the largely untrained chorus.

The first performance of this version of *Variations...* with a choir took place at *Gallery Ward*, Dubai, during the International Symposium of Electronic Art on November 2nd 2014. Fari Bradley's idea of a choir was aimed to reflect those who work with the formative side of architectural spaces, constructing them but subsequently rarely revisiting them. The basic aims of working with a choir were to work around the earlier points raised and to investigate the possibilities of the voice in architectural space. What sense data can be gleaned by simply listening. To a choir, composed of engineering and architectural experts, can you hear the bare walls, the plasterwork, the spacious entry hall? What kind of a building would be constructed through the ears alone?

On a more subtle level, the day-to-day roles of the choir are inverted - from the impositional stance of the creator to a mode of engaged 'end-user'. The repositioning of music "to do this kind of utilitarian work" (Lucier 2003) has its predecessors; again, Alvin Lucier is perhaps *the* composer whose body of work thus incorporates the role of space and architecture in his work. *Vespers* from 1968 is a unique work, the material of which arises solely from the performers navigating a built environment using hand-held echolocation devices. The echolocation devices emit a stream of pulses, the performers navigating the space by listening to the reflections.

Bradley began working with the volunteer participants over three months to build up a collection of both vocal and physical sequences and strategies that she encouraged them to partly devise themselves, at first to working with the physical environment and the choir itself and then working with the live Max/MSP system. The sequences and strategies were slowly arranged into a composition for the choir that included interacting with the space in very specific ways as to heighten the amount of *information* collected about the space. Ideas and methods were workshopped for their effectiveness. The rehearsals were repeated acts of seeking physical insight and coherence in the choir's subjective experience of the space. One such sequence involved the choir scattering around the space, purposely singing at a feature of the space (for example a corner of a wall, or a glass partition) and listening to difference in reflection or absorption. Another used, sustaining particular vowel sounds and then moving these up or down in pitch, listening for periods of resonance within the space. These strategies placed the voices of the choir in the gap between non-linguistic *tool* and musical voice, the voice and body not only responding to the soundscape created by the built environment, but using it as a means of inquiry. This current version of *Variations...* was perhaps the one where the form of process in its composition was most evident. The performances with the choir produced a work that not only resulted in musical work for the audience but began a process with the members of the choir on the possibilities of sound and a re-evaluation of the position of the aural senses in their work. One of the joys of creating this

version of *Variations...* was the remarkable sense of progress during the various performance and rehearsals, a slow expansion of the audible in both their and our consciousness. Many voiced the revelation that walls and partitions are now more than a simple division of visual and physical space but a modification of the built environment that has a resultant impact on the acoustic structure of the space. A subtle but definite change one can hear.

### Summary

In summary, *Variations...* over the period of the last few years has become less of a fixed work that is improved upon and modified but more simply a process of working, a direction of artistic investigation. As mentioned earlier there appears to be no “end goal” for this work, the results of this essay bring that conclusion into sharp relief. *Variations...* no longer can be artistically perfected, the various concerns now feeding into the work aim towards Alvin Lucier’s idea of music as utilitarian in function, but perhaps *Variations...* success as a process, can be measured in the flow of rhizomatic possibilities each performance, workshop or installation brings.

### Documentation of “Variations for Rooms and a Tone”



*Heat Haze Radical Sound Practises*. August 2010. Woodmill Artists Studios, London <https://vimeo.com/30321534>



*Long Cloud of Witnesses*. November 2012. Heath Street Baptist church, London <https://soundcloud.com/christopherjohnweaver/variations-for-rooms-and-a>



*Live Performance*. September 2014 Tashkeel Gallery, Dubai <https://vimeo.com/110115359>

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# For the rest of today partly cloudy (for numerous voices)

by Catherine Clover

Born and raised in London, UK where she completed her undergrad studies in Fine Art (Wimbledon School of Art, East London University), Catherine came to Australia in the 1990s through a residency with *Gertrude Contemporary* in Melbourne. Her multidisciplinary practice explores communication through voice and language and the interplay between hearing and listening – the vocal, the spoken – and seeing and reading – the visual, the written. Using collaboration and performance with field recording, digital imaging and the spoken/written word she is currently exploring an expanded approach to language within species and across species, with a focus on common noisy wild urban birds through a framework of everyday experience – the ordinary and the quotidian. She exhibits regularly internationally and participates in international arts residencies, visiting artist/lecturer opportunities and academic conferences. She holds a PhD in Fine Art from RMIT Melbourne and lectures at Swinburne University Melbourne (MA Writing, BA Media/Communications).

<http://ciclover.com>

mm hm oh ok

huphuphup

Tues 16 Dec 7.10 am (west London) dawn, lilted silvery robin song, waning moon, navy clouds; Thurs 19 Feb 9.45pm (northern Melbourne) clear, warm, dark, stars, new moon, chinking crickets; Wed 11 March 6.50am (northern Melbourne) dawn, low light, bright waning moon high and heading west, clear, still, cold, magpies, wattlebird, starlings, airport rumble; Sat 28 March 5.30pm (northern Melbourne) still, mild now, autumnal afternoon golden sunlight, traffic; Thurs 11 June 8.15am (west London) bright clear high light, breeze, cool, wren singing loudly; Tues 30 June 11am (Lyme Regis) bright sun, warming up, sunlight glittering off the sea, huphuphup herring gull flies over, quiet call (1)

image 01

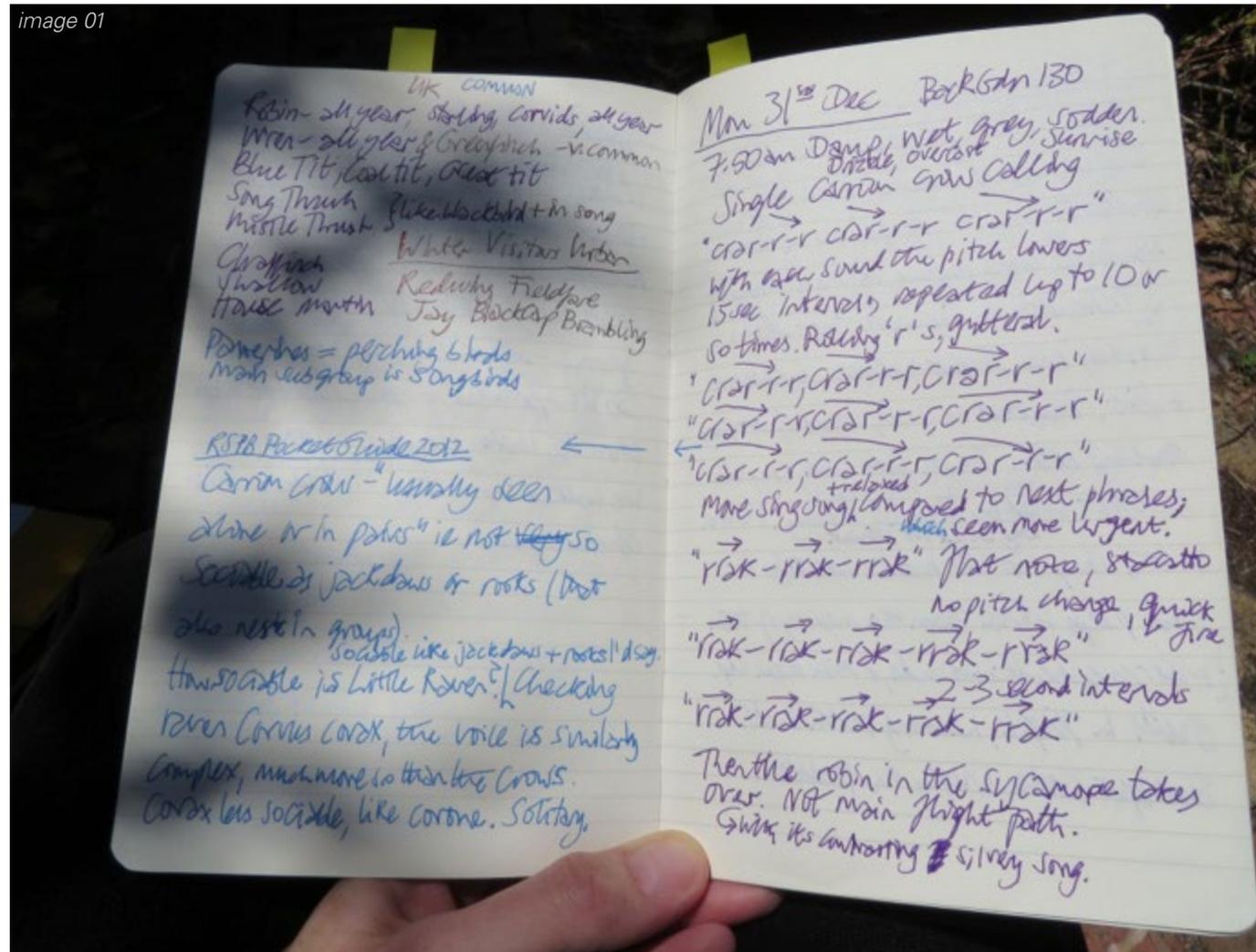
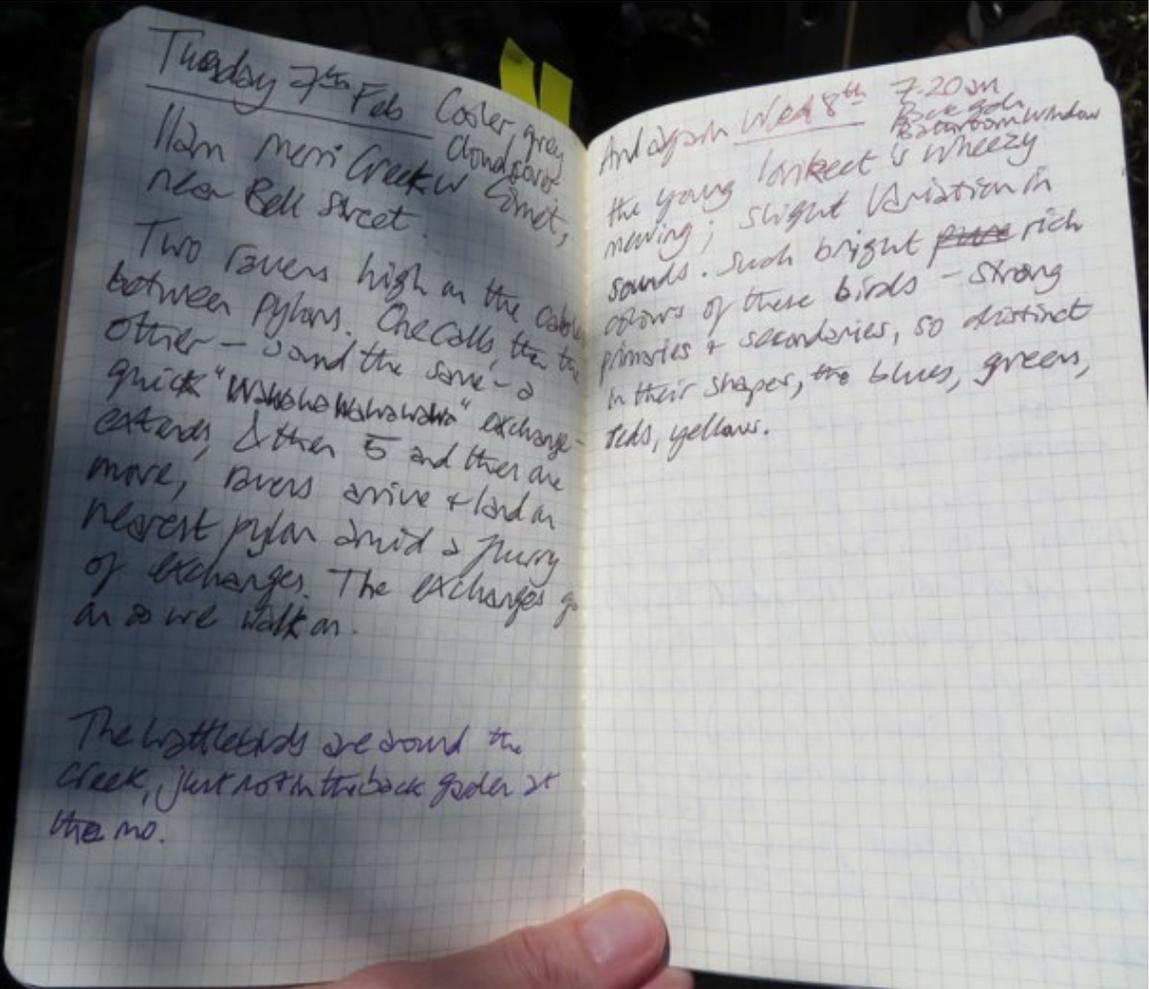


image 02



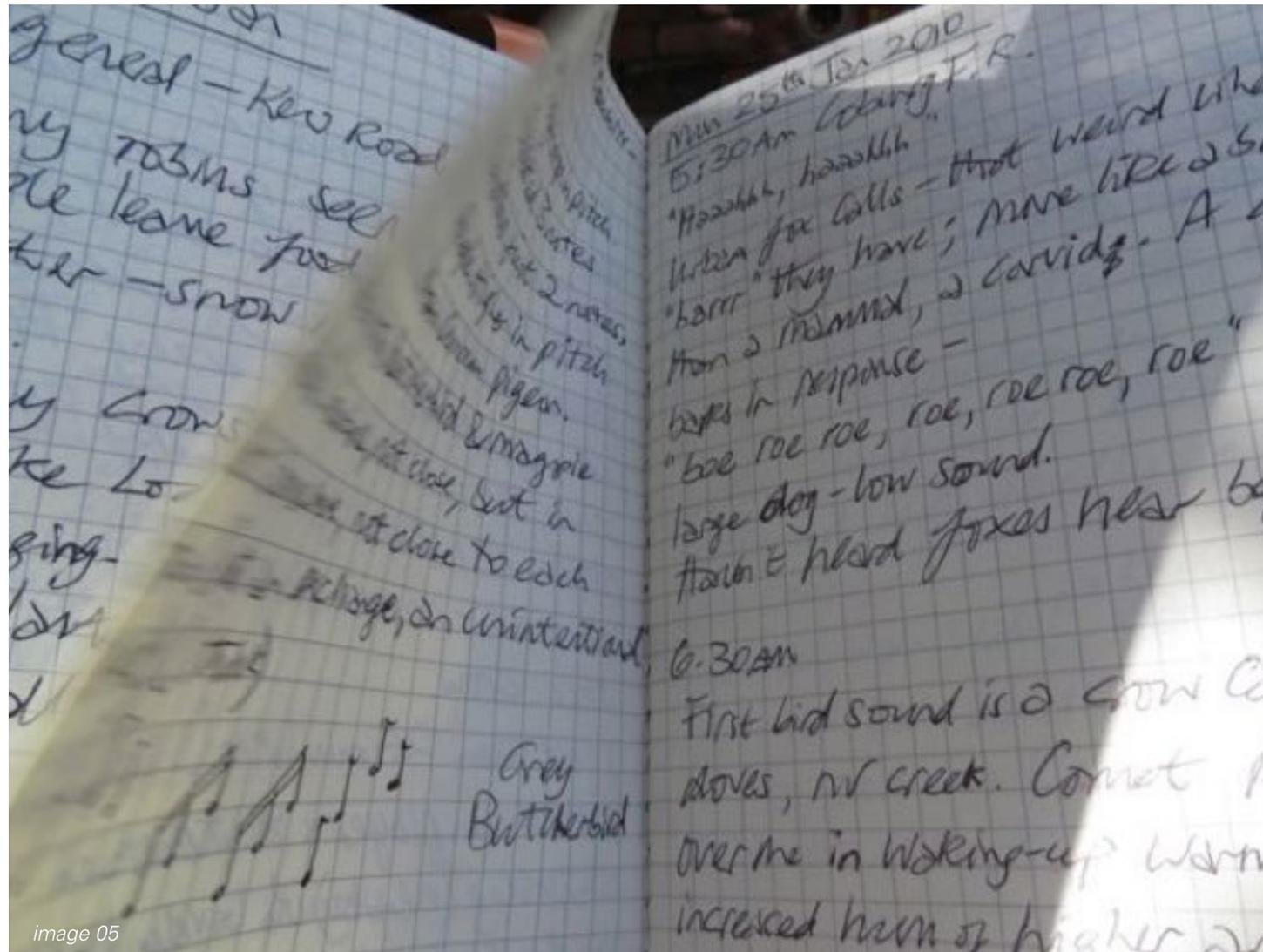
Mon 31 Dec 7.50am (west London) damp, wet, grey, sodden, overcast, sunrise single carrion crow calling  
 crar-r-r                      crar-r-r                      crar-r-r

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 whee eee whoo whee ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep eep eep  
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 ee akakakakak-eep akakak eeeeeep eep eepowpp  
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 epepepepepepep ee-ee-ee akakakakak-eep ee-ee-ee  
 akakakakak-eep ee-ee-ee akakakakak-eep (2)

Tues 7 Feb 11am (northern Melbourne) cooler, grey cloud cover, two ravens high on the pylon cable, one calls the other answers *wa wa wa wa wa wa*

Listening is the method with which I gather material in the field - along city streets, under bridges, in parks and cemeteries. Listening to the urban environment is a distinct kind of listening, a daily attentive listening, one that is not functional listening for information or instruction, nor listening for pleasure, nor listening to language for semantic purposes; it is an attentive listening to the external urban environment and to the everyday sounds within that environment. It is specific, but it is also inclusive. While I listen for the sounds of the birds, the sonic context in which they live provides information about their lives and behaviour. While specific species are localised, these birds are universally present in most cities around the world. They are easily audible and visible in the street trees, along the ledges of buildings, on the pavement, around the cafes, in the parks. They are commonplace and ordinary. (3)





um hm

image 05

Mon 25 Jan 5.30am (northern Melbourne) ... first bird sound is a crow call; Sun 13 Oct 6am (northern Melbourne) cool, still, heavy rain later and low cloud after bright breezy day yesterday *wa-waaah-woooohhhh, wa-waah-woooohhhh* single raven calls; Tues 3 Sept 10am (northern Melbourne) soft humid warmth, watery sun; magpie and starling on wire, mix of voices warbling chorale of magpie, complex rolling high whistles of starling. Buds flowering, blossom, heavy scent along streets, low traffic; Wed 18 Sept 7am (northern Melbourne) cool to mild, big downpour, birds vocal and active in particular the ravens, wattlebirds, blackbirds, one currawong audible, doves, starlings, mynas, sparrows, lorikeets; Sat 16 Nov 6.40am (northern Melbourne) cool, heavy clouds coming, smell of rain

*Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah Woh* Raven 1

*wah wah wah wah wah wah* Raven 2 quieter

Emphatic measured calls over increasingly loud rush hour traffic; Fri 19 July 12.15pm (central Melbourne) cool to mild, breezy, flurries of leaves, low sun prior to huge downpours *rackitty-coo rackitty-coo rackitty-coo coo oo oo mm mm*

*mm mm hm mm* pigeons

*akakak akakak* gulls

*Wah* single raven

*wa wa* noisy traffic trams crowds

*chip chip chip chip* sparrows flitting

*ah-chok* wattlebird (4)

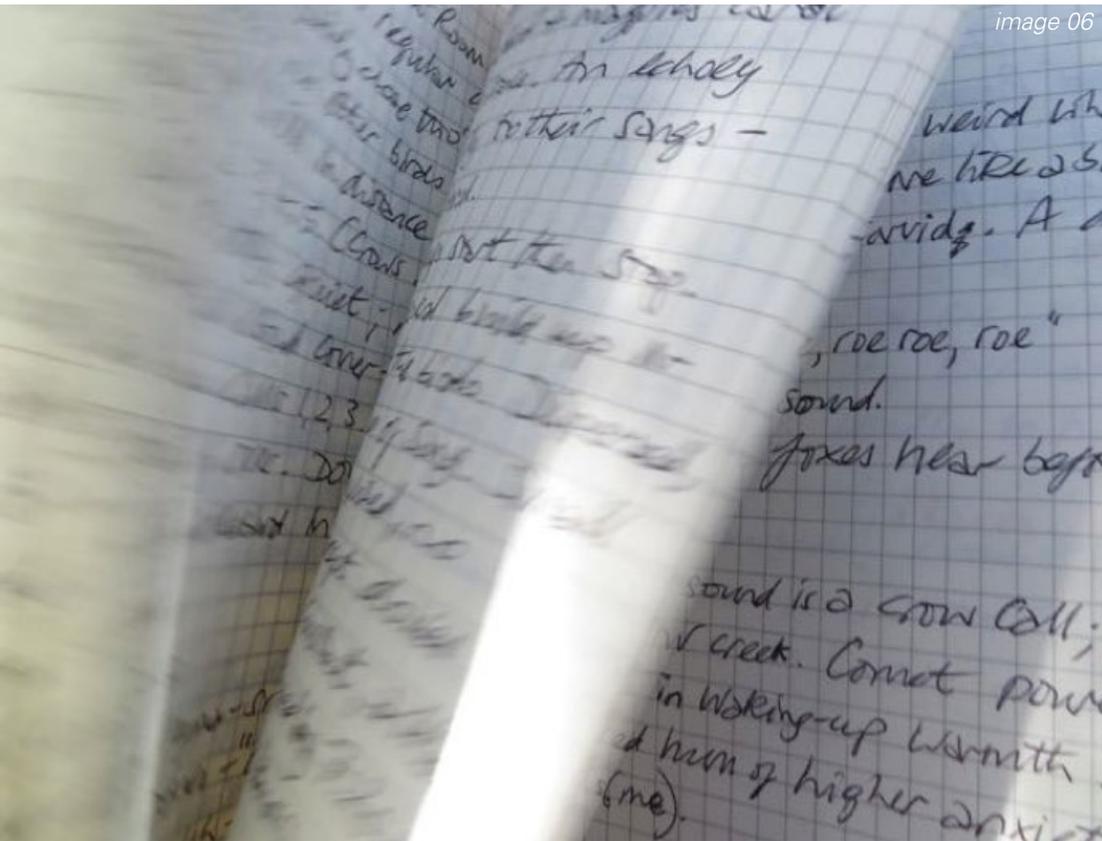


image 06

ee-ee-ee

Listening is followed by two forms of recording, the making of field recordings (audio recordings) and written text (the textual documentation of sound in a bird observation diary). These recordings, both sonic and written, may or may not be actual components of an exhibition or installation, but always form the backbone of the research... Using empirical observation, the diary documents the birds and their voices, along with some contextual information such as date, weather and location. The diary entries are the result of the careful listening process and certain occurrences prompt me to make an entry. (5)

Sat 30 July 7.10am (northern Melbourne) crystal clear Prussian blue sky lightening, black silhouettes, cool, still, single dove, single raven, occasional traffic.

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*wah*

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*wah*

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*cru-cru cruuu-cru cru-cru cruuu-cru*

*wah*

*cru cru-cru*

Loud jet overhead (6)



City, metropolis, urban centre, concrete jungle, central city, city centre, financial centre, down town, municipal centre, civic centre, inner city, municipality, national capital, provincial capital, state capital, town, metropolis, conurbation, megalopolis (7)

*wa*

*wa*

Walking the city, people invent their own urban idioms, a local language written in the streets and read as if out loud... walking, we compose spatial sentences that begin to make sense, come to master the intricate grammar of the streets; slowly, we learn to make the spaces of the city speak... (8)

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

Mon 18 July (northern Melbourne) 8.40am car park. Milder damp overcast. Clouds dissipate at horizon, light grey, some navy blue in the clouds. Rain last night.

*wa*

*wa*

Two ravens one slightly smaller, low volume conversation, on top of Woolworths Liquor sign.

Then both birds swoop down and fly off (9)

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

*wa*

In the long dusk of the modern and postmodern day, we begin to rediscover what the world of mythic premodernity knew long before: that not only humans, but all nature, 'speaks'. The 'linguistic turn' and the 'postmodern' focus on signs (via Saussurean semiology) were not entirely wrong except that they stopped, anthropocentrically, at the human word and world alone. (10)

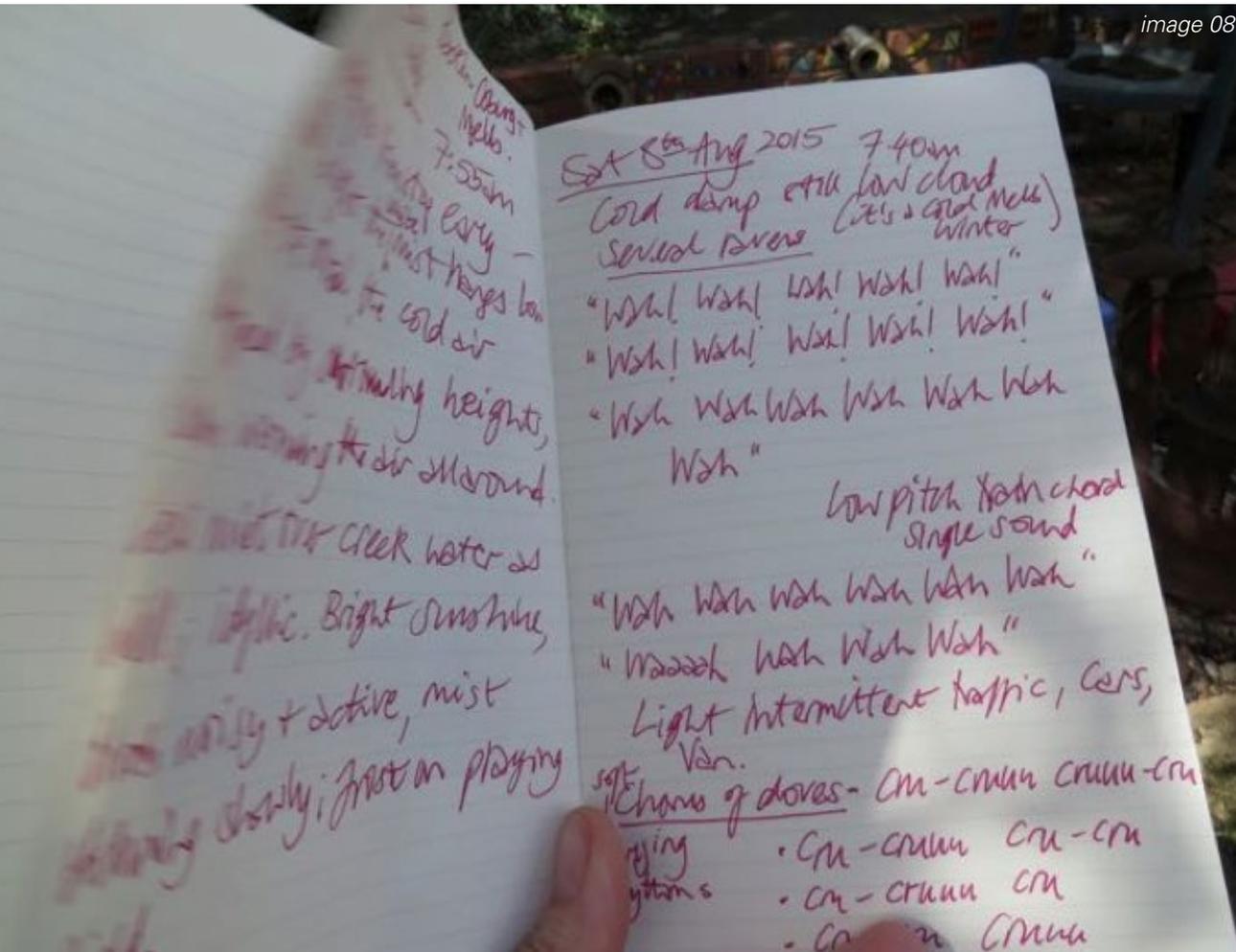


image 08

wah wah wah wah

waaaaaahh

So, while I listen at a material level to the phenomenon of the sounds the birds make as they occur in the urban context, I also listen to the birds and I hear them as users of language. I hear their sounds and I do not understand them, yet I understand that intelligent exchange is taking place... I do not try to translate their sounds scientifically, as a bioacoustician might, but rather to poetically speculate on the exchanges that are taking place. (11)

wa wa wa wa

wah wah wah wah

wah

Using phonetic words to transcribe sound (the birds' voices) has a formal name, that of homophonic translation, a type of translation where sound is the priority and meaning is secondary or even non-existent. (12)



Alley, alleyway, back street, boulevard, avenue, cross street, local road, local street, high street, main street, mews, pavement, paving, rue, side street, thoroughfare, one-way street, two-way street, road, lane, avenue, terrace, row, drive, roadway, expressway, freeway, highway, path route, superhighway, turnpike, way. (13)

As bad luck would have it, most lists these days are lists of winners: only those who come first exist. For a long time now books, discs, films and television programmes have been seen purely in terms of their success at the box-office (or in the charts). Not long ago, the magazine Lire even 'classified thought' by holding a referendum to decide which contemporary intellectuals wielded the greatest influence. (14)

The compilation of the bird list is a component of any bird watching activity. To be included on the list the bird must be heard by three or seen by two. I don't know if it is official in any way but it is usually adhered to. Weather should be included, as in strong north-westerly wind, overcast, two thirds cloud, bright sunshine etc. There are special committees that have to agree to a sighting if it is to be included on vagrant or rare bird lists. (15)

*wah wah wah wah*

*oom oom oom oom mm mm hm hm mm mm*

Possibly we misunderstand each other a lot more often than we think. And really that, instead of presuming that we do understand each other most of the time with occasional misunderstandings, we probably misunderstand each other very often and only sometimes, through luck and reciprocal goodwill, do we experience moments of coincidence where we do understand each other, and no grammatical accuracy and particularity can assure these moments, so we might as well enjoy a more mobile sonic language. (16)

*mm hm*

*yeh yep                      um*

If we are to re-position ourselves as allies rather than conquerors of nature in the production of a newly 'habitable earth', we need to supplement the sciences with a different type of knowledge, premised not on objectification, but on recognition: a carnal kind of knowing, whereby we come to understand the other, if never fully, on the basis of a relationality that is given in and through our shared physical existence. (17)

*cru-cruuu cru cru-cruuuu cru*

By envisaging a seepage that occurs through the sharing of space and by aligning the city with language through social interaction - as a place of enunciation - I discover a continuity of life that links us with these common noisy intelligent birds, a continuity that places human beings as co-habitants of urban space rather than separate from other urban species and that has potential for exchange through a shared vocal space triggered by proximity in the city. (18)

image 10



Ordinary, middling, usual, normal,  
standard, typical, stock, stock standard,  
common, customary, habitual,  
accustomed, expected, wonted, everyday,  
regular, routine, day-to-day, daily,  
established, settled, set, fixed, traditional,  
quotidian, prevailing. (19)

*akak*

*probably yeh but then again I wouldn't say the same thing, I could eat a lot of, I can eat a lot of chips but I need*

*skin off skin on  
errr yeh yeh they are  
yeh exactly right  
wheeeeep ak ak  
what's that Mexican eowp keeeowp chilli and err sour cream  
yeh which is kind of why I*

*oh were you watch out for you mate you've been with for a while haven't you er just about two years keeeowp um oh yeh*

*street sweeping machine brushes McDonald's bag and cup cop vans parked opposite reversing signal tram bell street sweeper #1 tram pram #67 tram 3518 PT> 221 Hungry Jacks Commonwealth Bank trams 5 72 16 ISS facility services motorised wheelchair*

*yeah ak*

*cool breeze conversation three middle aged men heels on pavement chatter passing pedestrians cyclist cyclist kaaar keow Souvenir Australiana gull lands weeow kaah church bell chimes*

*kaar  
keeeear  
aaaarh aah wwweeeow aaargh kaar kaar kaar  
cough bell chimes aark aark.  
chopper overhead  
aaarrggh akak  
orrrrr orrrrr orrrrrr  
tram 67 16 64 3*

*bike bell footsteps sparrow magpie lark a 5 and a 6 Glen Iris cyclist footsteps no worries busker 8 to Moreland 67 to Melbourne University Yarra Trams joggers plane tree leaves are turning a 72 Camberwell via Commercial Road*

*yea bit dangerous because of the sulphur another 72 and a 64 oh yesss  
yea well I wasn't across there but I left it at my mother-in-law's*

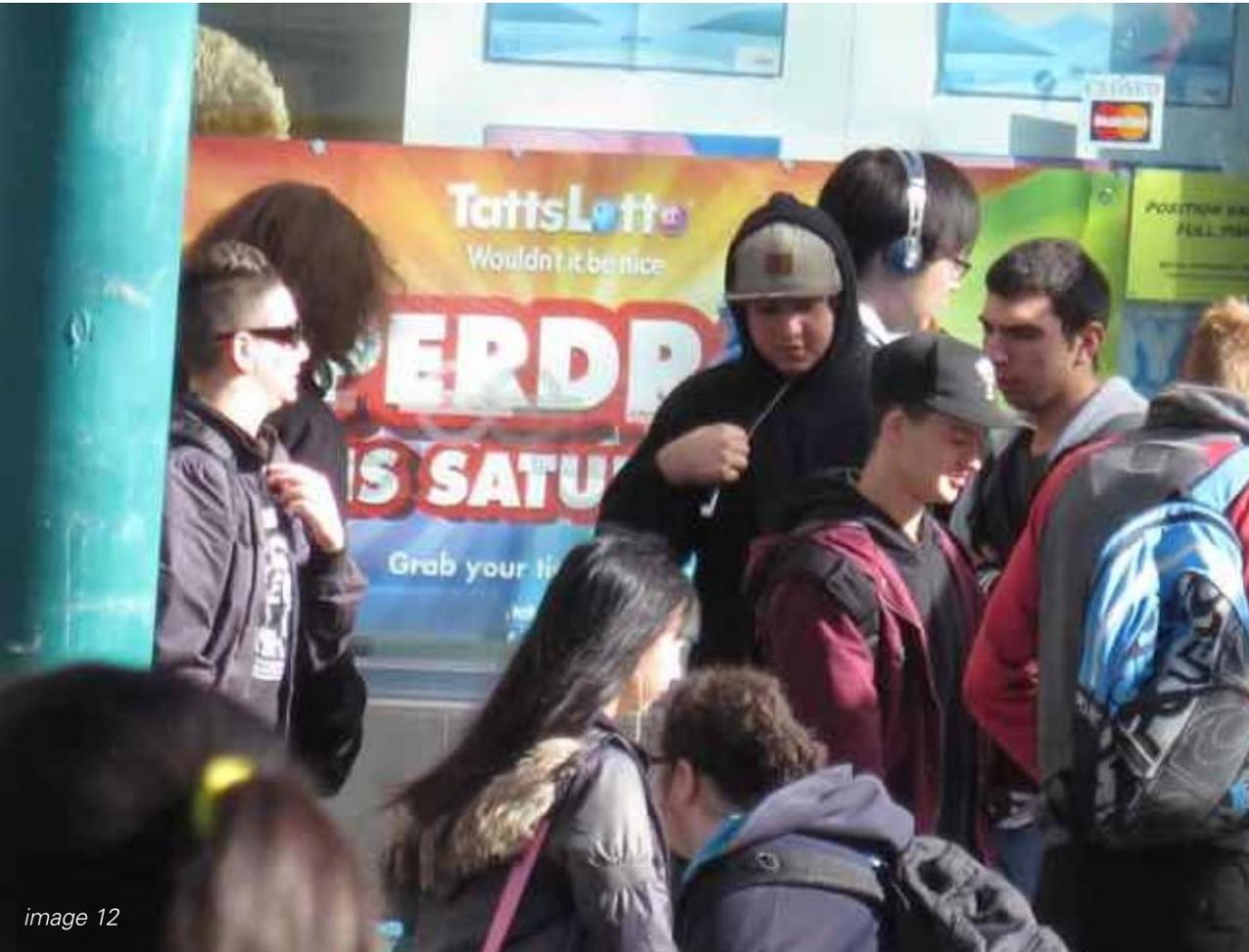
*luckily, yeah  
the guy that died from  
ak  
(20)*

*akak ak*

Sense, if there is any,  
when there is any,  
is never a neutral,  
colourless, or aphonic  
sense: even when  
written, it has a  
voice. (21)

*luckily yeah*





Prattle, blabber, palaver, piffle, prate, tattle, tittletattle, twaddle, gabble, gibber, blab, clack, maunder, chatter, speak, talk, verbalise, utter, blather, blether, blither, smatter, babble (22)

*epepepepepepepe epepepepepepep whee eee whoo  
whee ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep whee eee whoo whee ee-ee-  
ee-ee-ee eep whee eee whoo whee ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep  
eeep eeep eeeowpp eeep eeep whee ee ee ee whoo  
whee ee ee eep-eeep-eeep-eeep-eeep eeep eeep eeeowpp  
epepepepepepepep akak whee whee eee whoo whee  
ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep eep eep eep eep ak ak eep eep ee-  
ee-ee-ee-ee-wee ee-ee-ee akakakakak-eeep eep ee eeep  
eeep eeeowpp epepepepepepepep ee-ee-ee akakakakak-  
eeep ee-ee-ee akakakakak-eeep ee-ee-ee akakakakak-eeep  
epepepepepepepep epepepepepepepep whee eee whoo  
whee ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep whee eee whoo whee ee-ee-  
ee-ee-ee eep whee eee whoo whee ee-ee-ee-ee-ee eep  
eeep eeep eeeowpp eeep eeep whee ee ee ee whoo  
whee ee ee eep-eeep-eeep-eeep (23)*

image 12



image 13

*thanks*

*no worries*

*I think there's a small one*

*hey*

*early today*

*yuh, early (24)*

There are texts that should only be murmured or whispered, others that we ought to be able to shout or beat time to. (25)

*ow ark ow ark  
ow ark ow ark  
waaark*

*what next just up the stairs  
nah just before the stairs right at  
the bottom  
next door  
next door but on the other side  
where are you going  
last shop on the right I think*

*aargh aargh*

*twenny six bucks last Sunday (26)*





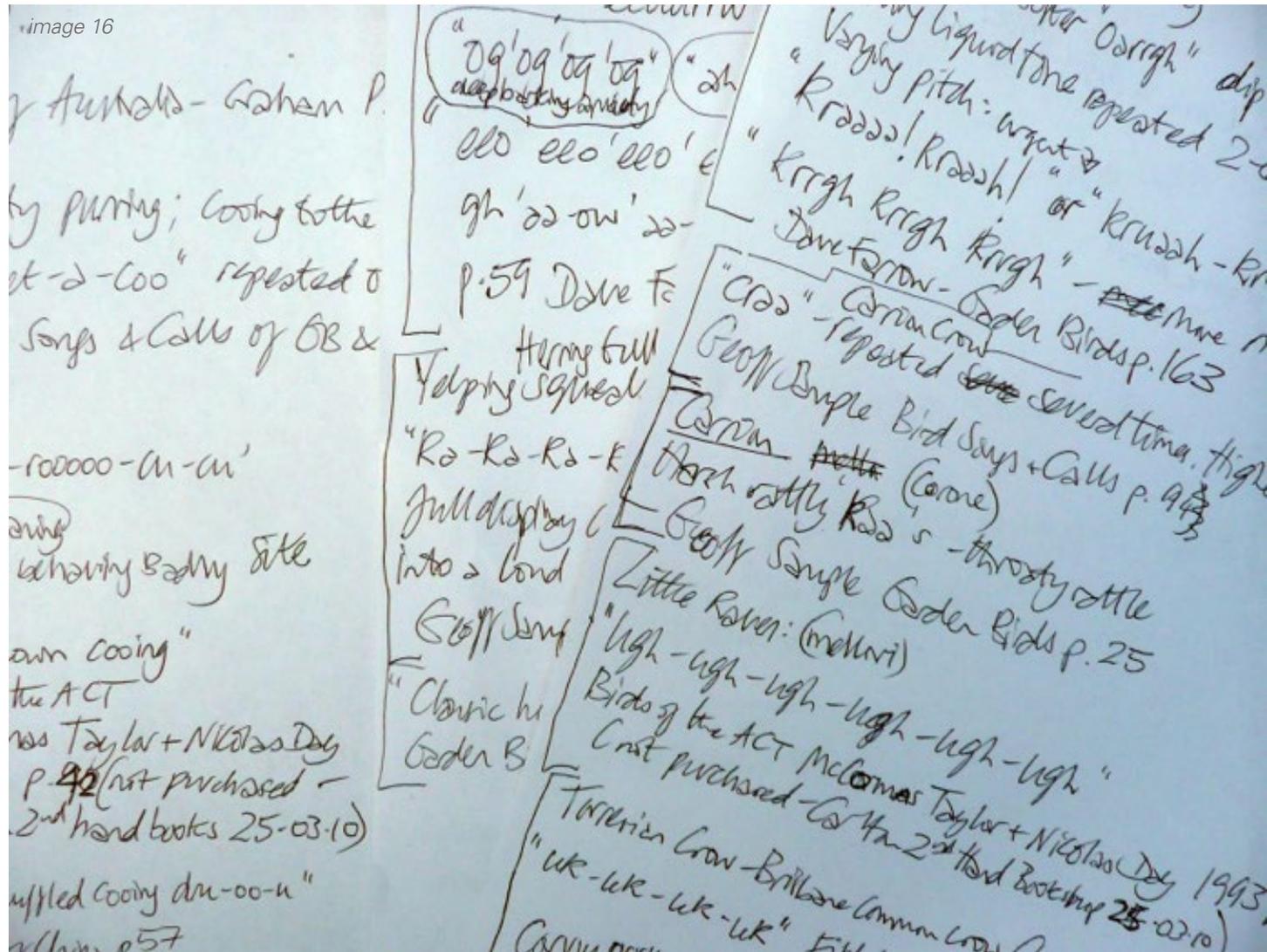
image 15

*what a shemozzle like,  
all this beautiful...*

*you got one of those  
turned upwards*

*yeh*

(27)



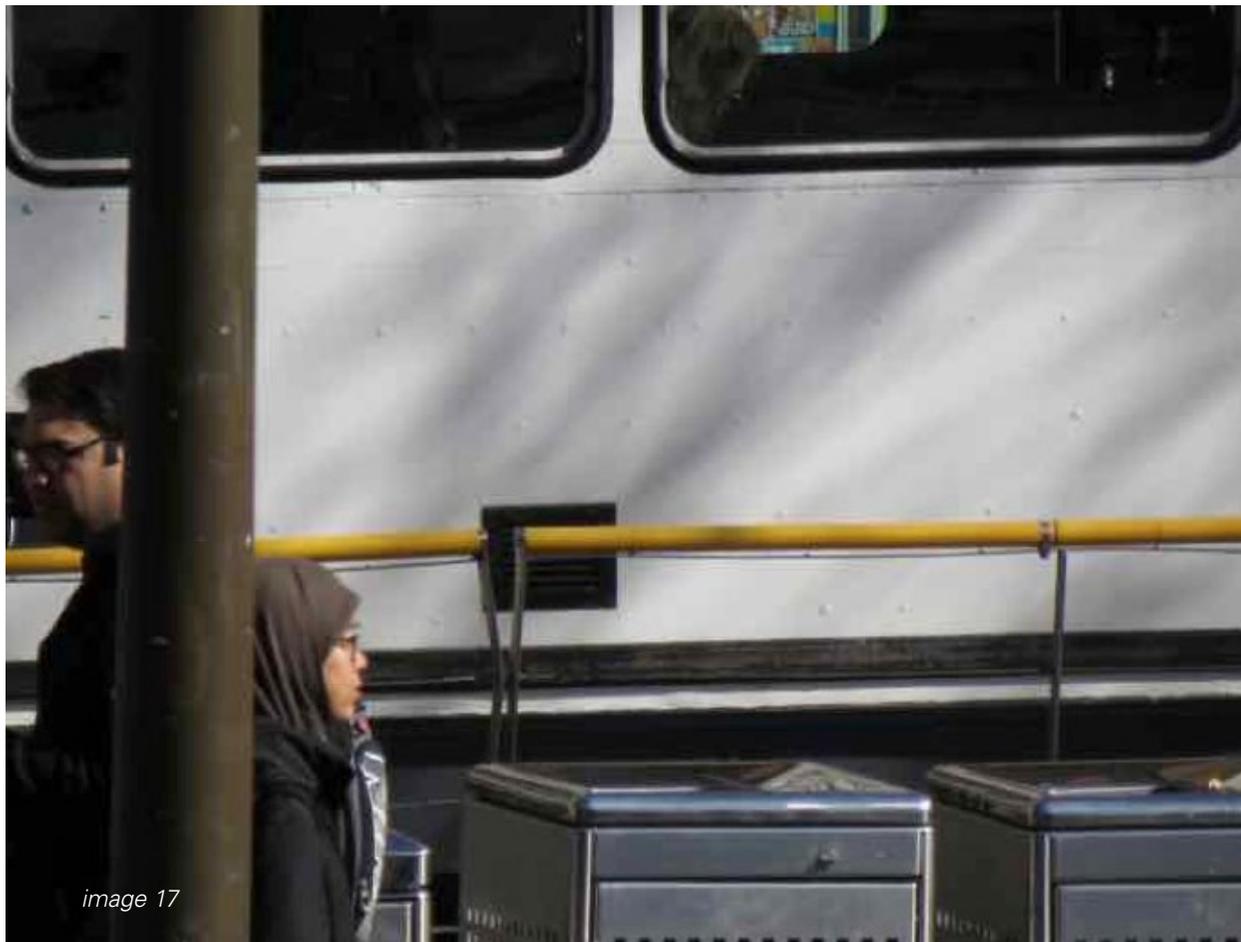
errr yeh  
yeh they are

yeh exactly right

whееееep

what's that

(28)



*image 17*

Improvisation is the key to both natural and cultural creative evolution... culture is emergent in nature, and mind is emergent in body/environment. The patterns which are emergently evolved and established in the one, are rearticulated, worked over, remodelled, repurposed, recombined and emergently evolved in the other. (29)

are all trams just touch off... one of those barriers you to  
tag off            you did not validate your ticket hahaha  
                         so you can shop around when you want to pay for  
something    And forty dollar            expensive yeah  
you could buy another one            yeh            I love  
the colour

do you do gardening    yeh            he's like in the worst  
mood ever    he's crazy    I'm like you know    yeh that it's like  
why do I    yeh there could have been some    oh no no  
no ha ha    I know I've got to    not much    thanks mate  
see ya later    he he he    alright    slow enough    it is  
Blyth Street            maybe she's just

hullo    hullo    oh hello    yeh    yeh good    yeh    yeh oh ok ok  
oh nah I just passed all sorts of things            I'll come get  
it    oh won't you see me    I dunno the game starts at five  
thirty    where are you going    yeh it was good    yehyeh  
yeh    alright    yehyeh            yeh    yeh alright see you  
on Monday bye            bye

(30)

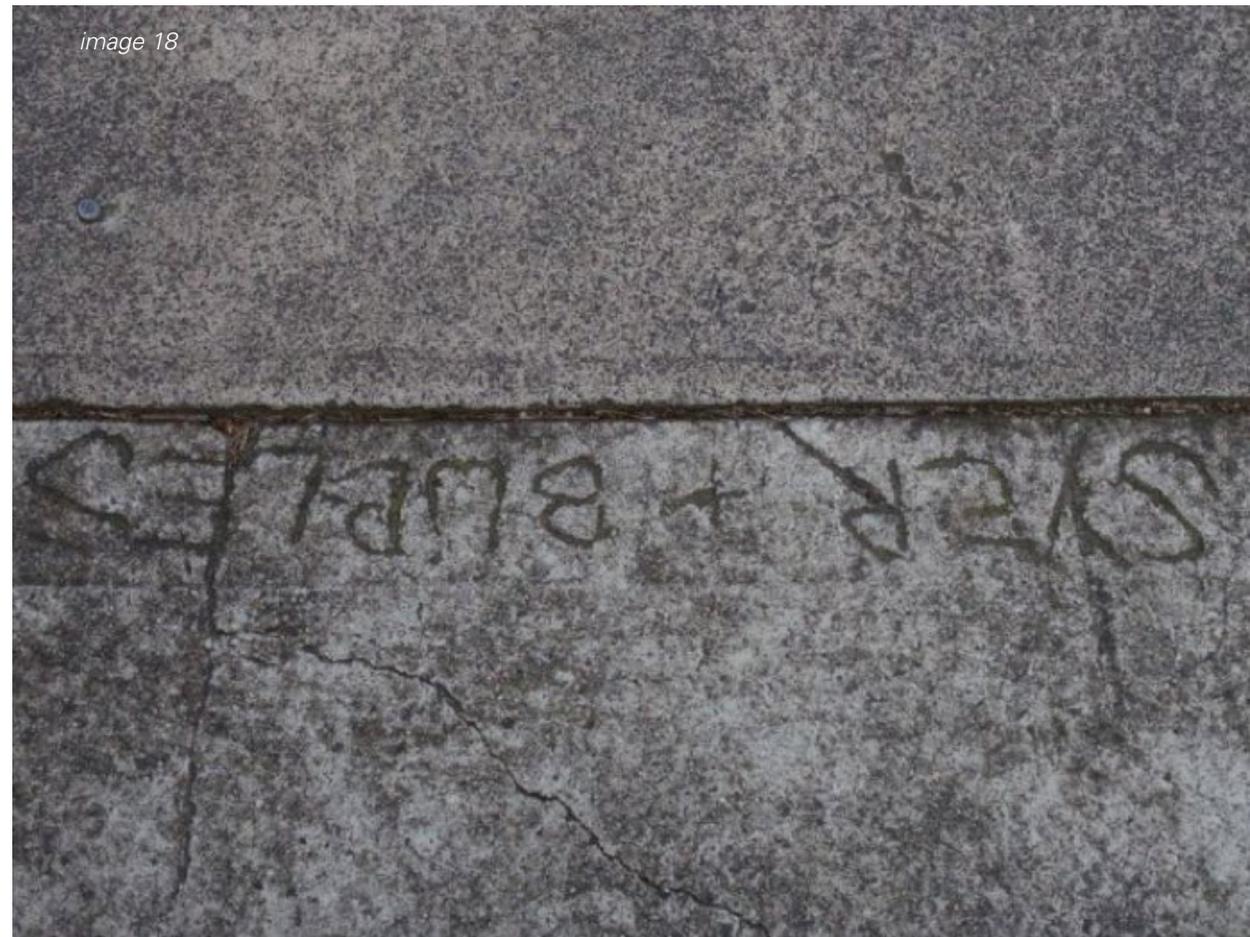


image 19



*allora si si andatay mmm ee si pro no a von  
 mar la porteta si si basam nousavecho  
 ha ha ha ark ark ark aye hmm ah si mm mm, si  
 la mitter bano ak ak owk owk owk owk les hombres.  
 owk owk owk owk owk ahhh ah si quan marie  
 bueno ya ah si ma perforay ma vaross si provero par de  
 desira da co tontay ark akak akakak owk owk  
 da quinto non proviniya ah musici cho queno la mah  
 rasia mei mia fallo si, de la watten si si laman si destrucho  
 no si man vespray shonun que per quo perferto clifforali ha  
 ha ha chip chip chip chip chip chip*

*ahk ahk ahk ahk ahk si, si, eeek eeek eeek ha nbrozo  
 callay bazorah no ahhhh le porquay ee oh luca si si si  
 ah kow o wow ow si pyarto sse quorsa questo si quello  
 allargico ha ha ha sevaro anti malloromo si  
 prow chay ha ha ha d'agostino ah shay*

*cheep cheep cheep chip chip chip que de chentay grazi  
 prego si espresso ya aviranh paulo porkay  
 err bah voh e si quo si que e la perdeechee ah  
 casa tutoh chemee ah m la quiesta  
 sono bravo eeowkawkowk church bell rings  
 porkay san carluchia cuolamenta paola la mie pour  
 see ahhh ehhh*

owk owk owk (31)



image 20

*Sitting in the waiting room yesterday            it was quite funny  
who taught you how to drive thank you    yes please    exactly I  
wish I could make these at home  
Nice    good    same            warmed up            see you  
no no no go ahead    they reversed a major decision  
ha ha fantastic thank you very much            wa (32)*

*fuck me                    LangLang don't say that*  
*kaaar kaaar kaaar kaaar kaaar kaaar kaaar kaaa kaaar kaaar*  
*I know                    till the end yeh*  
*kaar kaar kaaar*  
*oh fuckin idiot yeh yeh exactly*  
*waark waark waark*  
*I love him I know ah*  
*kar kar*  
*that was not very good but other one*  
*ah*  
*eeep eeep eepeeepeeepeeepeep*  
*ow ow ow*  
*eeowp*  
*eeorrr                    eeorrr*  
*orrr orrr orrr*  
*orrr*  
*orrr orrr orrr*  
*ow ow*  
*orrr orrr*  
*ow ow                    ow ow ow*  
*owp owp*  
*this is his bed this is his bedroom owp*

(33)

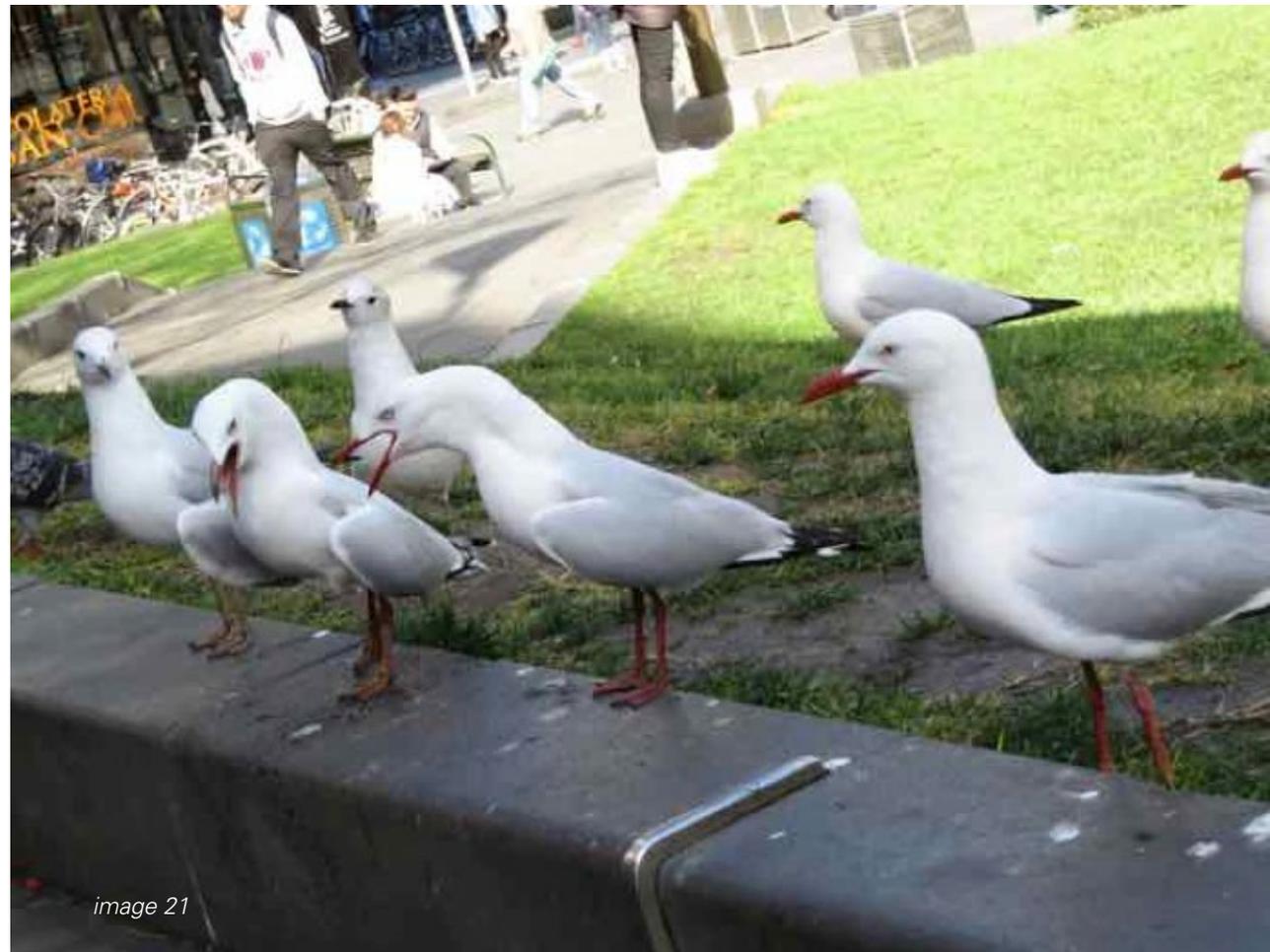


image 21

*they didn't really change*

*haha sorry*

*ha ha ah ah*

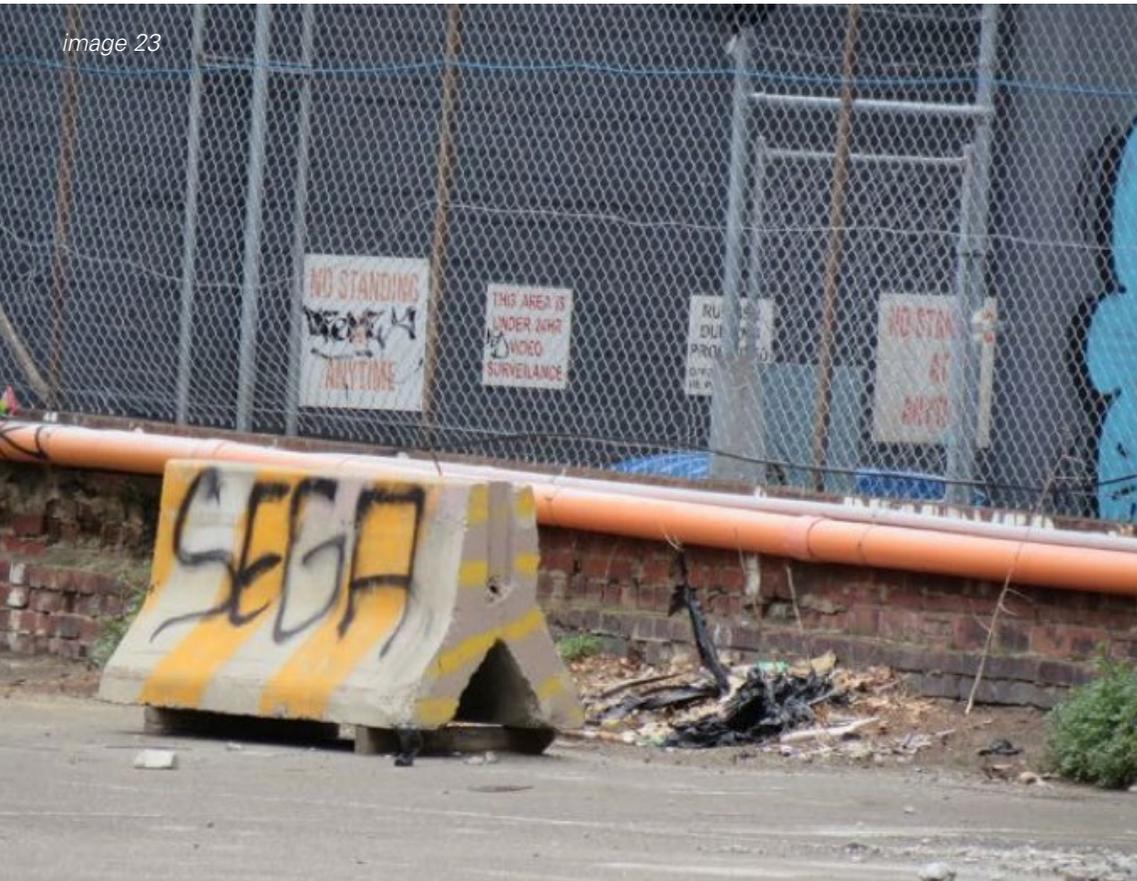
The fanciers, who bring their own birds to the fair and compare notes with acquaintances, do not say very much and are not very demonstrative. There is a reserved, almost melancholy, look on their faces. They suggest the patient listeners rather than the eager talkers. Most of them spend their leisure listening to their own birds or other people's.

(34)



Usually rather silent  
Various harsh notes, including a short jik jik  
A soft call-note and a loud, descending, trilling cry  
Silent, very rarely uttering a low grunt  
A grating currah and a softer note (35)

image 23



sega no standing at anytime this area is under 24 hr video  
surveillance rubbish dumping prohibited no standing at anytime  
cyclist heavy truck  
let's go  
no don't that's too loud okay James where are we going to go  
yeah hello  
not till five o'clock  
yeah  
I'm just gonna see  
buskers it's like  
ooooh  
you right  
okay this is like the free kicks  
yes ha ha  
well yes  
I know it's for it's my favourite building  
  
yeh yeah Sue yeah carrying an extra 12 kilogrammes now yeah  
all the way to Manhattan no they were just saying that  
yes no problem come on ooopshaha

(36)

*wah wah waaahhh eeehhh* Raven 1 calls mezzo forte cantabile  
*wah wah waaahhh wah* Raven 2 answers almost repeated exactly  
*wah wah waaahhh wah* Raven 1  
*wah wah waaahhh waaahhh* Raven 2  
*wah wah waaahhh waaahhh* Raven 1  
*wah wah wah wah* Raven 2 a quick response overlapping  
 a duet  
*wah wah wah wah wah* Raven 1  
*wah wah waaahhh waaahhh* Raven 1 calls  
*wah wah wah* Raven 2 a quick answer  
  
*wah waaahh* Raven 2 then flies off  
  
*wah waaahh* Raven 2 in distance  
  
 Then (37)

The raven has always been accounted a bird of bad omen, whose knowledge of futurity enabled him only to announce calamity. When, among the ancients, the observation of omens made part of religion, the voice of this bird must have afforded ample room for their superstition. The desire of prying into futurity, is a weakness that has

always accompanied human nature. Every action of this bird was deemed momentous; every circumstance of its flight was observed; and no less than sixty-four different inflections of its voice were distinguished by the priests, or more or less portentous of calamity. Every one of its notes had a determined signification, which it was the business of knaves to interpret, and of the credulous to believe. (38)

*yeah but do you want to go home airport when he gets back*  
*nyang wa goe pi hey yeah do it do it but over New Years*  
*yeh could be hahaha yeh mei or more shurr no*  
*go dow a week early ha ha ha I lost my another week I*  
*know uhh ha ha good yeh we went to a bar*  
*club hey*

*probably maybe I don't even know what happened how's work*  
*going oh that's good bas yeh oh how surtsan*  
*yuh tsa tey kora tsowra sha the really oh oh*  
*weh tchar yeh tso mi goh that's good oh tsoh mi chuh*  
*that's what I was going to ask you about how was that*  
*he's like you tran tche rah bang rah tseh rah com che*  
*tsi tsi reh rah tsim tsim hey tsoh tsih bah tsi che ha ha*  
*ha oh mei tsi tsah ren tsi roh ban me I'm like 5 k's is like*  
*it's what hahaha yeah right it's just one of those questions*  
*he was going on about yeh right it was really cool we*  
*ended up like pretty cool ha ha just so amazed*  
*only me Jo and one other chick well kinda it was pretty instant*





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(40) Clover, C (2015). *Transcription from field work – gulls, sparrows, pigeons, raven, people (various languages)* Melbourne

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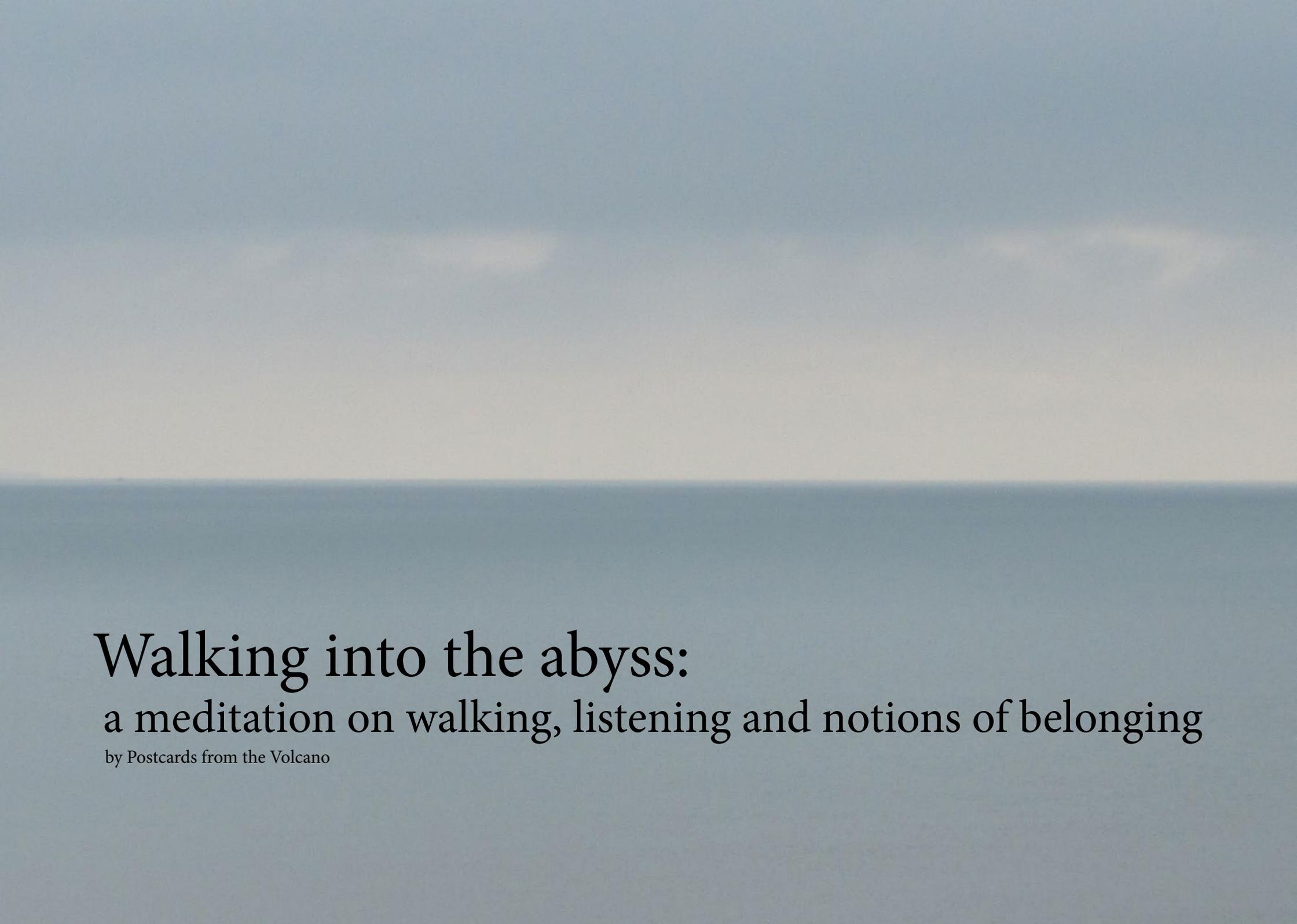
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Walking into the abyss:  
a meditation on walking, listening and notions of belonging  
by Postcards from the Volcano

An hour before sunrise,  
 The moon low in the East,  
 Soon it will pass the sun.  
 The Morning Star hangs like a  
 Lamp, beside the crescent,  
 Above the greying horizon.  
 The air warm, perfumed,  
 An unseasonably warm,  
 Rainy Autumn, nevertheless  
 The leaves turn color, contour  
 By contour down the mountains.  
 I watch the wavering,  
 Coiling of the smoke of a  
 Stick of temple incense in  
 The rays of my reading lamp.  
 Moonlight appears on my wall  
 As though I raised it by  
 Incantation. I go out  
 Into the wooded garden  
 And walk, nude, except for my  
 Sandals, through light and dark banded  
 Like a field of sleeping tigers.  
 Our raccoons watch me from the  
 Walnut tree, the opossums  
 Glide out of sight under the  
 Woodpile. My dog Ch'ing is asleep.  
 So is the cat. I am alone  
 In the stillness before the  
 First birds wake. The night creatures  
 Have all gone to sleep. Blackness  
 Looms at the end of the garden,  
 An impenetrable cube.  
 A ray of the Morning Star  
 Pierces a shaft of moon-filled mist.

Kenneth Rexroth  
 The Silver Swan (excerpt) [1]

### In the beginning there was sound

Working predominantly with the sonic imagination, focussing on critical listening and the site-specificity, socio-cultural- and creative possibilities of sound, *Postcards from the Volcano* is a collaboration between musician, **Stephan Barrett** and artist-curator, **Helen Frosi** (aka. SoundFjord). The pair create works for radio, performance and fixed media, and their eponymous radio show is broadcast once a month on **Sonica FM**.

### A seed is planted

*Postcards from the Volcano* emerged in 2014 out of a deeply embedded fascination with the world around us and our place in it; we are preoccupied with its possible meaning: is place a thought, an object, or both? Why might a location resonate deeply with one whilst being perceived as a desert to another? Can one invent new ways of perceiving place, or can it reinvent itself? Might what is left unseen, or what is unknown, be the key to our understanding of our surroundings?



Exhibit One: "An eye  
 for the miniscule"  
 Image: A company  
 of enthusiasts

### A message beyond time

From a *Wallace Stevens* poem, our moniker resonates with our desire to understand the world around us and to share our mis/interpretations of our surroundings with others in ways we hope unusual or indefinable: to send (sonic) notes from both familiar and unfamiliar places and to bring others to those places, to experience them along with us, “wishing you were here” so to speak. As with *Bas Jan Ader’s In Search of the Miraculous* [2], we look to critique modes of representation of the wanderer-explorer through the materials we use, the context we place our work, and the dissemination of our work.



Read the poem at:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172207>



#### Scenario thirty-one:

*Imagine the sonic contours of the city;  
feel the physical psychological architecture  
of urbanity, the obstacles and other constructs  
placed by society, politics and economy.*

*Do so through a diversity of ages;  
through health and illness;*

*in solitude,*

*and as a group;*

*in love, and in grief;*

*as a pedestrian,*

*and as a commuter.*

#### Exhibit Two:

*“What is open and  
what is closed”*

*Image: A company of  
enthusiasts*



**London sprawl**

We both live in London - one of us born and bred here, the other moving for studies and then staying, enamoured by its vitality - and have a shared interest in the city, both as a place and a metaphor, along with the peri-urban landscape that surrounds it (the latter being a location for the imagination to take control, and a place to breathe; somewhere to escape to). We enjoy swapping literature on the city and environment, ecology and the imagined landscape, and so in the early stages of our collaboration, it seemed only natural to take what we knew into the places we had researched. We are often left awestruck by life in the city, its scale, magnitude and ever-changing nature. This feeling is almost tangible but we are time and again left speechless by it. So it is with this shared inability to articulate, and a feeling of time in everything, that we fall back on the medium of sound (which includes noise, silence, human/animal utterance, natural sounds, music etc.) as a way to explore and communicate beyond the inadequacies of the written or spoken word.

**Scenario twelve:**

*a warm westerly wind blows along and enclosed pathway that is currently acting akin to a wind tunnel. All is the moment before the stillness, the quiet. An half-crushed can dances and frolics over the uneven cobbles, tumbling between noise and*

### Tentative steps

*Cresting the hill of what was once fields, remarking on what once was, what will be, how it could have been and looking down on new and old concrete. Conurbations of steel, cement and brick merge to bring time into an alignment of one enduring, motorised present. History fades and is built anew, a locked cycle of progress and regress. Heard dimly through the traffic noise a gate creaks open and we tiptoe inside among broken tombs and overhanging trees...*

Our first explorations took us from North to East London, linking the locations where we live through routes previously unknown to us. Before setting out we pored over maps of that area, both old and contemporary, layering (human) geography with time in our minds. We set out with the Lea River as our compass, and as the shadows lengthened our conversations punctuated its valley with tales of other expeditions. Our preliminary wanderings stuck close to the towpath but soon strayed from the river road and entered London's hinterlands. We paused on the urban limits, taking in the vast metropolis from unexpected vantages, before navigating away to wider horizons.

*For a moment we are still, intoxicated by the scent of berry and briar. Around our microcosm the world is bustling: we hear the tiny, incessant stridulation of insects; the nostalgic song of summer-visiting birds; the rustling of desiccated leaves, parched and faded. In the distance, a family yelps and giggles, playing with a soft ball. Further away an aeroplane leaves vapour trails that cut the sky.*

During these initial perambulations we discussed ideas of place and belonging linking our thoughts to notions of performance, human geography, material culture, cultural identity and history. As a framework and filter we focussed on the physicality of our bodies and our senses, channelling our attention to the possibilities and restrictions of sound as material (and listening as means for inspiration) to overcome our faltering communicate through the verbal and written word.

*Wandering amongst the spindly beeches we forget ourselves. Travelling far in excited conversation, talking of far off places, music and song. Brought back to ourselves by the cold and intent to record our perceptions as we experience them. Shouting under bridges and celebrating the playfulness of ducks we emerge in frosty sunlight onto the river. Blue skies above us, dark green below. Now, faced by wall capstones, depth gauges, bollards, mooring chains and tracks we see the great ocean liners once bound for northern seas.*

## Reflections on Process

With echoes of [Robert McFarlane](#) and [Nan Shepherd](#) in our mind we wandered in a landscape familiar to us, and yet perceived from an unfamiliar vantage. We became poets, photographers, scientific observers (geologists, botanists); we embodied the landscape – thinking as water, tree, chaffinch; the landscape in its magnitude. In all, we let the world around us do the talking, taking our cues from the landscape which surrounded us at that moment: the gentle lapping of water, the loud, urgent rushing of weirs and locks, the clank and heave of abandoned canal boats, the twittering of birds unseen and the susurrations of poplars in the wind, as well as the odd encounter with others taking a similar path. Considerations of the sounds we heard took hold. Our first desultory conversation, springing spontaneously from wide-ranging sources, soon combined to wind inexorably towards a defined trajectory: audio evocations of specific places of resonance, both real and imagined



*Exhibit Three:  
"The velvet path"  
Image: A company of enthusiasts*

*when the day unfurled,  
the trees became erased by fog  
and life's miraculous  
melded to a muddy insipid.*

*yet the vapid air was teeming; feverish and electrifying.  
as the horizon crackled  
you stopped abruptly, absorbed.  
you were listening keenly  
to the enduring monopoly of drizzle:*

*the pitter-pat-pit of droplets, dive-bombing your head.  
unsatisfied by this aleatory rhythm  
you shrugged down your hood, gave  
your ears some space, let your hair  
form drenched snakes.*

*your forehead became sticky with the urban rain.  
you scrunched up your nose, feeling  
the sting of your sinuses. you were conscious  
of the slippery give between skin, liquid  
and the insatiable pull of gravity.*

*rivulets dripped through your brows.  
you imagined  
(on a micro-scale )  
the hiss of droplets absorbing  
into your donkey jacket;*

*the pleasant, doggy-damp smell that might arise.  
you lifted your arms aloft;  
palms flat, then cupped. the rain  
fell onto your skin  
as the soft patter of feathers.*

*your fingers flickered; filigreed silver by the  
passing storm.  
you raised your ruddy face,  
a blood moon,  
swollen by the cold but receptive  
to this new vantage.*

*your eye sockets became valleys to collect twin lakes.  
your eyelashes fluttered and you blinked, mingling  
rainwater with tears.  
to you the world was a rush  
of watery blurs and echo smudges.*



**Scenario fifty:**

*the twigs wavered and crackled. She stepped out of the hedge, a goddess of the wilderness.*

We watch as the light plays on the surface of the water. The conflict of currents in the not quite river, not quite sea. The wind in our ears punctuated by the cawing of gulls, airborne and stationary on the breeze, suddenly swooping low overhead accompanied by the sighing of grass. Storms pass in moments and the sun emerges inbetween as waves break on the shore and we hear the crick, crack of shingle and broken London brick. Words come to us, snatches of phrases, fragments of old song, caught on the breeze. Hulls shiver and creak as sunken forecasts emerge...

*Exhibit Four: "Shadow tango"*

*Image: A company of enthusiasts*



*[I am a rose, of many guises]*

*I strew orange blossoms across his path  
 [He blushes, lowers his gaze  
 He presses the petals in books, a keepsake  
 for eternity]*

*Thoughts will follow you into your dreams*

*I fill his mouth with Spanish jassamine  
 and vervain  
 [His eyes tell me everything (globes of fire):  
 the stars are enough]*

*Willful promises*

*I knit him a cape of eglantine, forsythia, fern  
 [It billows across his chest  
 He whispers to the sky, "the heart of love  
 never lasts"]*

*Perishing with grace*

*I wrap him in coral honeysuckle  
 [He raises an eyebrow, all else is static  
 The angry heart of white (his silent noise  
 is enough)]*

*I place a crown of dog rose on his head  
 [The petals tumble with ease:  
 "she loves me she loves me not she forgets  
 me I forget her not"]*

*Longing; waiting*

*Solitude  
 I sew white clover and cedar  
 onto his lapel  
 [He does not see its worth  
 A language lost to his sensibilities; a  
 bruise on my heart]*

*[a red spider lily thrown to  
 turbulent waters]*

**Scenario thirty-three:**

*listening to the world at 3.1 mph (5.0 km/h)*

**Poem 4: 09 May**

***Walking in many-layers. A peasant skirt, its strata a daisy stitched to each petticoat. The material gently warms in the sunlight, fading infinitesimally. And yet the shift and shadow of its unintentional choreography ripple and sway into memory. A slight pause and the skirt quakes and composes itself into a vision of the future.***

### Lore of the land

London often appears to be an arcane game, comprised of a set of rules that are constantly shifting. As with Marie and Baptiste's attempts to navigate Paris in Jacques Rivette's *Pont du Nord* we try to keep alert to the smallest clue to our next move. In momentary acts of defiance we occasionally superimpose our own arbitrary laws onto our surroundings. For example, overheard conversations, memories from the past, local newspaper cut-ups or recordings of recent wanderings might be used to devise a randomised text-based score which is then threaded through

interviews, or used simply as a backbone for an abstract piece, not given to narrative or specific meaning. These rules act as focus points and allow us to relinquish obvious associations, finding a clarity of vision in chance operations (see William Burroughs and John Cage's use of the *I Ching*) and the absurdity that life throws at us.



*Read the full text score used by Postcards from the Volcano on their first radio show. Amongst other forms, this score incorporates multiple voices, time sequences, poems, instructional and descriptive texts.*

### Time inside space

We constantly refer back to the construct of "Time" and the notion of space in our practice, especially with regard to how both might be distorted, altered in some way, by human action. Generally speaking, our works are arranged around a sense of time that is not linear and in spaces that consume or meld into one another as much as they might nestle next to each other. For Postcards from the Volcano, space is air, landscape, conversation, memory; it is there to be blown into like a balloon, shaped with

chisels, squeezed and contorted until it become something entirely different. But likewise, it is there to be charted, to be mapped, to be brought together by rules or alternatively to be entirely misread.

*The morning's pink, purple and green wrap around the wind eddies, casting shadows that jitter across sunrise-blazed buildings. A bridge, covered in tarpaulin, flicks and shivers its plastic tongue, concealing and revealing the busy, buzzy construction work taking place in its belly; workers in grimy work hats – pitched high on their heads (revealing deep-set eyes and sandpaper skin) – kick stones and whistle under their breath, the stones a percussion to their nonchalant tune.*

*In the distance – the place where the river runs – Canadian geese complain with abandon: honking and cajoling, stretching their necks and popping their eyes as the unseeable force. They shelter by the silvered willow that usually so sedately tantalises the waters edge, and which now cracks its branches as a whip, whisking detached foliage across the scene in an animated style all of its own; leaving a layered history of leaf detritus to float down stream.*

*A building by the river is shored up. Scaffolding pipes – propped and clamped – rub and clank in the breeze as outdoor chime bars on a giant's scale. These resonant, metallic tones soon fade into the distance, covered over by the blanket sound of commuter trains and the rasping breath of joggers. The reedy peep of a lone moorhen competes with the echo-honk chorus of four mute swans.*

## Movement

Movement is both physical impetus and an intangible concept that runs through our work. Body memory leads us out of the confines of the home: we begin to walk (often before our minds know why) and reflect on things later on. The beginning and end of our journeys frame and contextualise to an extent, but it is the meandering in between where we feel most at home and where, indeed, the imagination is allowed full rein. It is often in the getting lost (see [Rebecca Solnit's Wanderlust \[4\]](#) and [A Field Guide to Getting Lost \[5\]](#)) where the true art may be found. In areas known to us, it is only when we have walked a route many times, seen the seasons change and 'the snow in feathers pass' (see [John Clare](#), specifically, [The Shepherd's Calendar \[6\]](#)) that we feel we might be able to leave our preconceptions behind and look for the mystery that lies around a leafy corner or hidden within a decrepit building, or simply embody what we experience. A work made by Postcards from the Volcano, is thus an expedition of discovery (be it to the interior or the exterior world); and though often traversing an imagined landscape, is nevertheless, rooted in the locations in which we have found ourselves.



*Exhibit Six:  
"The brain  
is in the feet"  
Image: A company  
of enthusiasts*

**Scenario fifty-nine:**

*she walked through the new green of spring undergrowth ignorant to the invisible forces that acted upon her: goosegrass fingers rasped at her dress; a fine filament of gossamer tugged her eyelashes and tickled her lips; tree pollen dusted her cheeks and the sway of juvenile sycamore hypnotised her. And in the air, a fine silt of fungi spores formed coloured clouds in infinitesimal shades.*



*Exhibit Seven: "Parting the long grass"  
Image: A company of enthusiasts*

**People and environment**

The connection between the world and its inhabitants is key to our approach. In more recent works we have expanded our process by inviting others to lead our wanderings, to show us places with which they have a strong affinity, sharing their associated joys, concerns and experiences with us. We invite people who we either know, have researched, or have encountered on our travels, brought together by similar or contrary callings. Typically, they work in, engage with, or take pleasure from the landscape and are open to exploring its wider significance.

The starting point is to record our conversations with them, as well as the surroundings in which they take place. Our discussions have an open structure and drift across a range of subjects, often anecdotal and tangential. Although disparate, these dialogues are filtered through observational, poetic, idealistic or imagined approaches to the significance of place. As with our wanderings through the physical landscape, these conversations are intended as means to delve beneath the surface, uncovering the unexpected and unimagined, allowing the world to enter and change us. The recorded material garnered from these walks is later brought together in the studio. The time between walk and post-production allows for mis-rememberings and other disruptions to shape the editing process. We include other sonic material that in some way has relevance, either to enhance or unsettle the atmosphere, discussion, or the context of the piece. This is then woven in with the recordings from the walk. The intention is to evoke the various moods of each walk rather than to objectively document. In this way, the work is organised to invite the listener on a part-imagined, part-real journey through the landscapes we traverse.

*The overheard*  
*Sonic scenarios*  
*Storytelling (object tales)*  
*Hidden stories*  
*Ethnomusicology*  
*Sharing/gifts*  
*Collaboration (collective action)*  
*Accretion*  
*(Photographic) scores – found text – books*  
*Found sound*  
*(field recording, cassettes, records)*  
*Antiquated equipment/technology*  
*Sonic transmission*  
*Play*  
*Call and response*  
*The performative vs. theatrical*  
*Another point of ear (view) – listening through*  
*other ears*  
*Micro-gestures*  
*Radio – performance platform (the moment)*  
*The line – (human) connection – saami*  
*creation myth*  
*Centring – disbalanced precarious*  
*Disconcertion*  
*Pulling meaning apart at the seams*  
*Listening exercises*

**Key words**

*Poetry*  
*Walking*  
*Echo*  
*Natural phenomenon*  
*Sound and the individual*  
*Sensory realm*  
*Materiality of sound*  
*Sonic imagination Imperceptible*  
*Breath*  
*Disruptions*  
*Actions*  
*References*  
*Divination*  
*Ritual*  
*Portablility*  
*Residue*  
*Remnants*  
*Transmogrification*  
*Magical intervention*  
*Transformation*  
*(internal/external)*  
*Miraculous in the everyday*  
*Transmission – folk (oral and aural)*

**Poem 11: 07/08 May**

In front of her, an array of objects laid out in clusters on a silk pashtamel (sundry selvage echoing the fabric's warp and weft). Across her horizon, objects, omnifarious in shape and form, texture and taste. Connected only by colour; conjoined by a sensation on the eye: red. These effects - unknown in origin and maker - are explored, compelled by a sense of unity, a scrutiny of essence. She fondles corners, caresses planes, glides form over fingertips. Rolling shape over her face, she pauses in this intimacy, breathing in with shallow inspection. Edges are placed in the crack of her mouth; they fall onto her tongue. Closing her eyes, she listens. Contemplating the fire urgency and mania exuded, she resolves to let red be.

**Material stories**

We have collected objects in addition to sonic materials since our first meanderings along London's highways and byways, The objects kept are evocative of each walk in some way. They hold stories, incite our imagination, become the centre of ritualistic attention or act as aide memoires. Some objects act as totems to concepts whilst others are taken to be used as sounding devices. We keep the objects in our homes and live with them for a while. In this way, we learn from the objects simply by being in their presence; they speak to us without us forcing narratives upon them. Should the objects not resonate with our imaginations, we explore each item through related poetry, scientific texts and play. Over time, the objects attract new histories and become entwined in our practice, not quite what they were before. They become changed, become a thing between the physical and imagined world. In some cases, they accrete new uses.

*Exhibit Eight:*

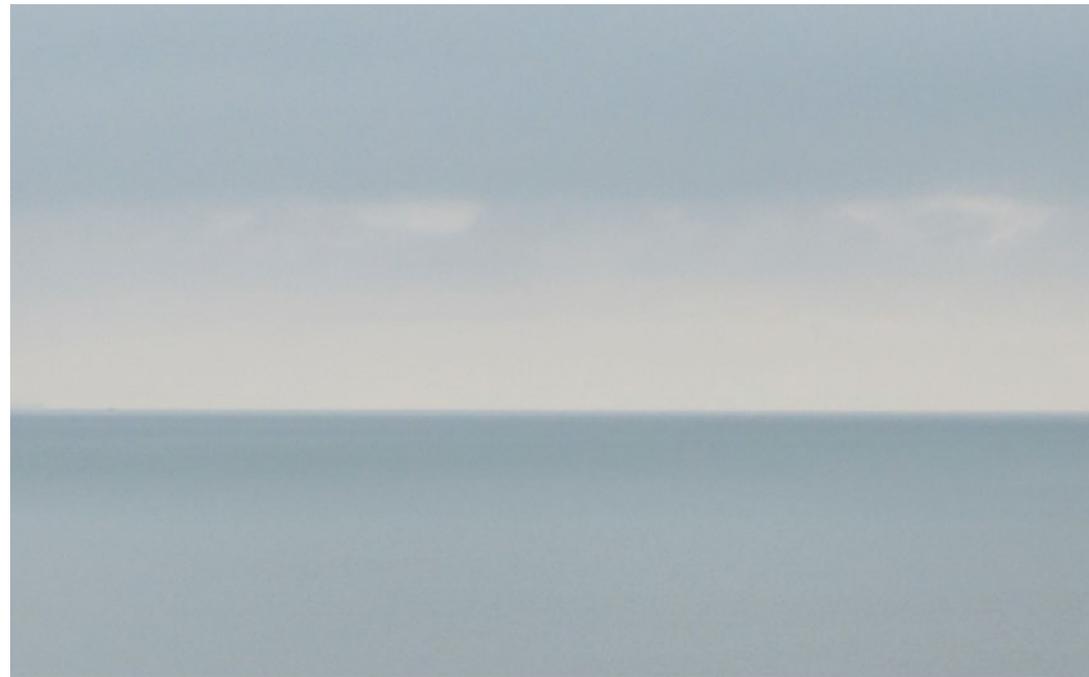
*"To have and to hold"*

*Image: A company of enthusiasts*



VI  
*Caminante, son tus huellas  
el camino, y nada más;  
caminante, no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar.  
Al andar se hace camino,  
y al volver la vista atrás  
se ve la senda que nunca  
se ha de volver a pisar.  
Caminante, no hay camino,  
sino estelas en la mar.*

*Antonio Machado  
Campos de Castilla [7]*



*Exhibit Nine:  
"The line"  
Image: A company  
of enthusiasts*

### **Liminal**

As when the river meets the sea, and in the hushed moments of dusk and dawn we are inspired by the potential of the transitional to transform our perceptions and bring new insights into the way we understand the world. Ambiguous states of continual becoming enable a freedom from the confines of definitive borders. In these fluid landscapes where things are neither one thing nor the other, one can learn by allowing previously held ideas to break down leaving space for new ones to form in their place, as in a river mouth where the clash of currents brings previously hidden shells and other objects to the water's surface.

*Crunching footsteps bounce off the walls of the canal, submerged below street level. Cars pass overhead. Down here their heat and noise become like distant waves, echoing the gentle ripples in the water. Soft disturbances caused by wild ducks diving. A heron, hunched over, investigates the water, his piercing gaze met by flickering reflections in the early dawn light. The moon nestles into the reeds as quietly, tiny sounds emerge from the hushed subterranean stillness. Small vibrations that deafen the city world around them in this brief moment between night and day...*

**Radio now**

Radio offers the perfect medium through which to realise much of our work as it is both situated within a specific place and time - in that it is broadcast from a particular location at a stated moment - and yet it is also timeless and placeless - in that it may be listened to anywhere with the option of multiple playbacks via podcasting. The layering of time is significant: past conversations and events are recorded and edited at various times then placed in relation to the live broadcast. At this point, improvised sounds in the present mingle with those created in other times and which might be stretched, contracted or looped, folded and changed in some way. The work is mixed live. The mixer is conduit, channelling each element of the piece as we see fit - highlighting certain sounds over others, thus enabling impromptu discoveries and keeping the performers engaged as if encountering a previously familiar landscape for the first time. In this way, the point when the piece is aired, becomes an unrepeatable moment which can never be performed in the same way again. The podcast of a show acts as document but also further makes ambiguous the beginnings and endings of each piece, fixing moments but allowing for repeat listening in a variety of locations. As with our initial explorations we allow space within the recorded material for the imagination to wander. And we include live improvisation, which goes some way to open up new entrance points into the material.

These transmissions are postcards sent from locations unspecified, without address; vignettes of other lives, other experiences, left for others to discover.

*Camerado, I give you my hand!  
I give you my love more precious than money,  
I give you myself before preaching or law;  
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?  
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?*

*Walt Whitman  
Song of the Open Road (excerpt) [8]*



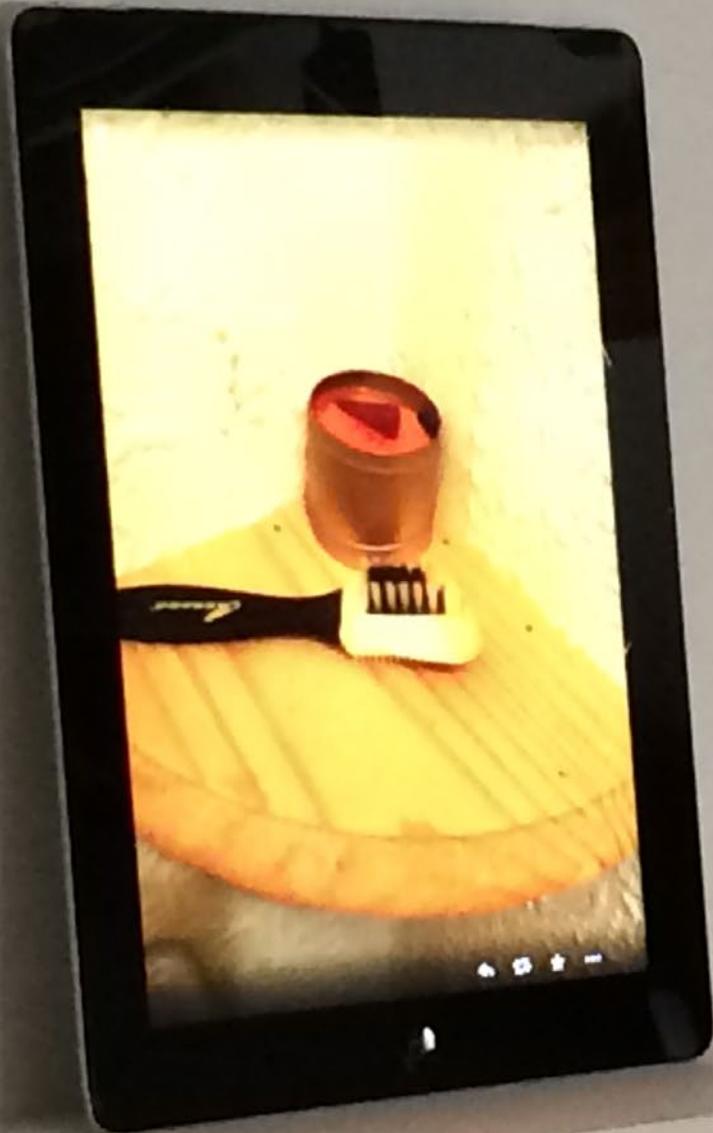
*Exhibit Ten: "Perimeters"  
Image: A company of enthusiasts*

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# Writers' habits

by David Mollin and Salomé Voegelin

David Mollin's work is concerned with ideas of contingency within the professionalized contemporary art world, and in particular with the effect of power consolidation and commodification and those elements of the work that disappear as a result of such a process. This has led to an increasing interest in the use of writing as a process of materialization of an artwork that fails to materialize. Mollin has co-founded with Matthew Arnatt the project 100 Reviews (Alberta Press and Greengrassi Gallery) and, with John Reardon, he co-edited *ch-ch-ch-changes: Artists talk about teaching* (Ridinghouse, 2009). Mollin works collaboratively on text-based sound work with Salomé Voegelin. [www.davidmollin.net](http://www.davidmollin.net)

Salomé Voegelin is an artist and writer engaged in listening and hearing as a socio-political practice. She is the author of *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*, Bloomsbury, NY, 2014 and *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, NY, 2010. While her solo work focuses on the small and slight, unseen performances and moments that almost fail to happen, her collaborative work, with David Mollin, has a more conceptual basis, establishing through words and sounds conversations and reconfigurations of relationships and realities. [www.salomevoegelin.net](http://www.salomevoegelin.net) and <http://www.soundwords.tumblr.com>

<https://twitter.com/mollinvoegelin>

**Preface**

This text is a transcript of a talk, loosely based on the idea of an artist's talk, given by David Mollin and Salomé Voegelin as part of a recent exhibition entitled *Nietzsche Cyclists and Mushrooms* curated by Heidi Brunnschweiler at the [Kunst Raum Riehen, Switzerland](#). It comprises of a text based on writers' written anecdotes, taken from the internet, on how they write, Hindu numerology and the particular numerological time structure of the virtual environment of the computer game interjected by other concerns about words and texts.

The stage for the talk was provided by the physical space of one of the artists' installations shown in the exhibition into whose soundtrack the talk was embedded, borrowing its pace and circularity.

**Writer's habits**

My passions  
drive me to  
the typewriter every  
*day* of my  
life, touch  
the floor  
nine  
times  
I touch the typewriter every  
*day* of my  
life,  
and they have driven me there  
since I was... twelve. I touch  
the floor and make sure it is there  
every day of my life the words emanate from the floor that I touch  
nine times

I never have to worry  
about schedules.  
Some new thing  
is always  
e x p l o d i n g  
in me,  
and it schedules  
me, schedules schedule me by ocean and silver horizon the  
schedules fly  
I don't  
schedule it.  
It says:  
Get to the typewriter right now and finish this!!! !!!  
  
I can work anywhere.

I wrote in bedrooms and living rooms and kitchens  
when I was growing  
up  
with my parents  
and my brother  
in a small  
house in Barry/Los Angeles.

I worked on my typewriter in the living room,  
with the radio and my mother and dad and my brother  
when I was growing up  
all *talking* at the same time.  
Have you seen the Ipad get your homework done why is the virgin  
bill so high you should go and do it now where are my glasses, can  
I have some gems dad? It is Friday...  
Later  
on  
(when I wanted to write my book)  
I went up to UCLA and found a basement  
typing room where, *if you inserted ten cents into the typewriter,*  
*you could buy thirty minutes of typing time.* **1**

I need an hour  
alone before dinner  
with a drink to go over what I've done  
what I've done that day.  
I can't do it late in the afternoon because I'm too close to it.  
Also, the drink helps. They do say though ...

But it removes me from  
the pages.  
So I spend this hour  
taking things out and  
putting other things in. Then  
I start the next day by  
Re-doing all of what I  
did the day before, foll

-owing these evening notes.  
Really working nine times  
When I'm really  
working I don't like  
to go out or have  
anybody to dinner,  
because the mother goddess wages war against  
satanic forces and then I lose  
the hour. If I don't  
have the hour, and  
start the next day with  
just some bad...  
pages and nowhere to  
go, I'm in low spirits. The potent *rakshasas* is upon me

Another thing I need to  
do, when I'm near  
the end of the book, I

**1**

*Sie schreibt am Morgen, schnell, vor  
dem Frühstück, eine halbe Stunde, alles  
erledigt. Warum zögern in gezwungener  
Zurückhaltung und verschwiegener  
Sorgfalt, es sind alles Worte*

sleep in the same  
room with it. The drumming I call it.

That's  
one reason I go  
home  
to Sacramento to  
finish things.  
Somehow the book  
doesn't leave you when you're asleep  
right next to it.  
It talks to you in your sleep, it grows  
In Sacramento nobody cares and the Psycopomp Whippoorwills  
are silent

I can just get up and start typing.

I never listen  
to music

The music brings its own nine varied aspects  
when I'm working  
I haven't that  
kind of attentiveness, and I  
wouldn't like it at all. Its aim is to constantly divert me from the  
path of realization On the  
other hand, I'm able to

work fairly well among ordinary  
distractions.

There's a lot of traffic.  
But it's a bright, cheerful traffic  
My house  
has a living room that is  
at the core of *everything*  
it is a  
passageway to the cellar

Some new thing



is always  
 in the kitchen,  
 and leads also to the closet (where the phone lives)  
 and I often use it as a  
 room  
 to write in, despite the  
 carnival that is  
 going  
 on  
 all around me. A  
 girl pushing a carpet sweeper under my typewriter  
 has  
 never annoyed me particularly, nor has she taken  
 my mind off my work, not even when it is late. I touch the floor  
 nine times and she is gone  
 My wife,  
 thank God,  
 has never been protective of  
 me, not even when the girl is pushing a carpet sweeper under my  
 typewriter not even on those days.

I am told,  
 the wives and husbands  
 of some writers are. They gather.

They sing  
 In consequence, the members

of my household never  
 pay the slightest attention to my being  
 there  
 ignoring the **nine varied aspects of my own  
 negative nature**  
 they make all the noise and fuss they  
 want to.  
 If I get sick of it, I have places I can  
 go

A writer who waits for ideal conditions under  
 which to work will die

never pay the slightest attention to my being  
 a writer  
 for ideal conditions under  
 which to work will die  
 and will die without putting  
 a  
 word  
 on  
 paper  
 the silence of the whippoorwills **2**

I had a ritual once to help these things  
 A ritual of lighting a candle  
 and writing by its light

**2**  
*Er hingegen besinnt sich auf die  
 Form - die Form und das Formen  
 von Buchstaben, Kommas, Punkten,  
 Ausrufe und Fragezeichen, während  
 er den Stift über das leere Blatt  
 bewegt: Sinn Formen vom Innern des  
 Alphabetes und der Grammatik.*

and blowing it out  
 when I was done  
 for the night  
 ... also kneeling and praying  
 before starting  
 I got the idea from a French movie about George Frideric Handel

now I simply hate to write

I'm beginning to suspect  
 the full moon

I'm beginning to suspect  
 a Piscean like myself  
 should stick to number seven;  
 but I try to do nine  
 touchdowns a day, that is,  
 I stand on my head  
 in the bathroom,  
 and  
 touch  
 the floor **3**  
 nine  
 times when I am not near my typewriter  
 I touch the floor with my toe tips, while balanced.  
 This is incidentally more than yoga, it's an athletic feat  
 Frankly I do feel that my mind is

going.  
 So  
 another 'ritual' as you call it,  
 nine reps at 7.5  
 and to pray to Jesus on a slipper  
 I do feel that  
 while balanced  
 on my head I  
 preserve my sanity and my  
 energy  
 so I can help my family: touch  
 the floor  
 nine  
 times  
 my paralyzed mother, and my wife, and the ever-present  
 kitties. Okay?  
 The desk in the room is  
 near the bed,  
 with a good light, w  
 the whippoorwills ever present  
 midnight till dawn,  
 a drink when I get  
 tired, preferably at home,  
 but if I have no home,  
 make a home out of my hotel room or motel room or lpad:  
 peace. Starting tomorrow — if not today why put off today  
 I will get up

**3**

*"Das Leere Blatt"*

*Das, was du jetzt in der Hand hältst, ist beinah weiss,  
 Aber nicht ganz; etwas ganz Weisses gibt es nicht;  
 Es ist glatt, hart, zäh, dünn, und für gewöhnlich  
 knistert es, fließt, knirscht, reißt, beinah geruchlos;  
 und so wie es ist, bleibt es nicht; es bedeckt sich  
 mit Lügen, saugt alle Schrecken auf, alle Widersprüche,  
 Träume, Ängste, Künste, Tränen, Begierden;  
 (Hans Magnus Enzensberger)*



every morning  
no later than eight.  
I will write in the Notebook every day  
I will tell people  
It is meant  
Hence a light green colour

I will tell people  
not to call in the morning,  
or not answer the phone  
let it ring  
I will try to confine  
my reading to the evening

I write with a felt-tip pen,  
or sometimes a pencil,  
on yellow or white legal pads  
light blue denotes them  
by light  
the slowness of writing by hand.  
Slow and white in colour  
then type it up and scrawl

And keep on retyping it,  
Retyping nine times  
each time making corrections

both by hand and directly  
 on the typewriter, until I can't see  
 anymore  
 despite the  
 carnival that is  
 going  
 on  
 all around me.

Up to five years ago, that was it.

Revise by hand  
 a computer in my life  
 until I can't see anymore **4**  
 McCarthy-esque opaque white eyes like McCarthy-esque  
 spiders nests  
 hard-copy drafts from the computer.  
 Foretelling and forestalling in equal measure  
 it goes into the computer,  
 each time making corrections  
 Retyping nine times  
 And keep on retyping,  
 midnight till dawn  
**hence the pale green colour**  
**glow-in-the-dark green**  
 And keep on retyping  
 until I can't see anymore

I write in spurts  
 I write when I have to because the pressure builds up  
 And then spurts  
 something has matured  
 in my head  
 I am nervous about that  
 Losing sensation  
 Until I can't see anymore  
 I can't  
 write it down  
 once something is really  
 under way,  
 I don't want to do anything  
 else.

I forget to eat  
 I watch  
**nine openings appear thru**  
**the emotion of fear**  
 something has matured  
 in my head  
 I'm beginning to suspect  
 a Piscean like myself  
 should stick to number seven

I don't go out, much of the time  
 I forget to eat,  
 I sleep very little.

**4**

*Bis sie getrocknet sind, vergilbt, stockig, grau;  
 Bis es aufweicht, im Regen, zerfällt, im Müll,  
 Immer weniger wird; nur das beste vielleicht  
 an dem vielleicht das, was keiner geschrieben hat,  
 das Beste ist: ein Fisch, ein Salzfass, ein Stern,  
 ein Einhorn, ein Elefant oder ein Ochsenkopf,  
 Zeichen des Heiligen Lukas; das, was erscheint,  
 wenn du es gegen das Licht hältst – hält,  
 vielleicht, tausend Jahre, oder noch eine Minute.  
 (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Das Leere Blatt")*

It's a very undisciplined way of working  
 I am not prolific  
 I am not prolific  
 I'm too interested in many other things  
 Distracted  
 A growing distraction  
 My living room that is  
 at the core of *everything*  
 it is a  
 passageway to the cellar  
 I forget to eat,  
 Remember  
 MORNINGS: 3 and a half minutes.  
 If groggy, type notes  
 and allocate,  
 as stimulus.  
 If in fine fettle,  
 write.  
 AFTERNOONS: 3 and a half minutes  
**The 9th hour of the day**  
**3pm**  
 Work of section in hand,  
 following plan of section  
 scrupulously.  
 No intrusions,  
 no diversions.  
 No growing distractions

Write to finish one section at a time,  
 for good and all  
 no thought  
 nothing maturing in my head  
 EVENINGS: one and a half minutes  
 See friends.  
 Read in cafés.  
 Explore unfamiliar sections  
 on foot if wet,  
 in socks  
 on bicycle if dry.  
 Hi-vis 2 lights white and red  
 Write, if in mood, but only on Minor program  
 Paint if empty or tired  
 Kitchen  
 hall  
 Make Notes.  
 Make Charts  
 Plans  
 Locate myself  
 Make corrections  
 To myself  
 Remove the distraction  
 with the knife if necessary  
*Note:* Allow sufficient time  
 during daylight



to make an occasional visit to museums  
 see stuff  
 divided  
 seven major divisions  
 an occasional sketch,  
 a chart  
 or an occasional bike ride.  
 Library for references once a week. **5**

I'm always in a hurry to get going  
 To leave  
 though in general  
 I dislike starting the day  
 I first have tea and then,  
 at ten o'clock, I get under way  
 work until one  
 look up  
 see my friends  
 at five o'clock  
 I  
 work and continue until nine.  
 Seven major divisions,  
 1 tenth is dusk  
 the hardest time  
 hard to see  
 despite lights  
 red and white  
 I have no difficulty in picking up the thread

in the afternoon.

No, afternoon is fine

### **The 9th hour of the day**

#### **3pm**

I have no difficulty in picking up the thread  
 work and continue until nine.  
 Its dusk one and a half minutes  
 Seven major divisions,  
 One seventh is dusk  
 One and a half minutes  
 I'll read the paper  
 go shopping.  
 Most often it's a pleasure to work  
 Smiling while working  
 If the work is going well, I spend one seventh of daylight  
 reading  
 what I wrote the day before,  
 I make a few corrections.  
 continue from there.  
 In order to pick up the thread I have to read what I've done.  
 I have no difficulty in picking up the thread  
 I see well at this time

When I am working  
 When I am writing  
 When I am at my desk  
 I write every morning  
 as soon after first light as possible

**5**

*Sie hasst den Anblick von Worten.  
 Ihre Handschrift ist ein unleserlicher  
 Angriff auf die Kommunikation. Sie hat  
 höheren Sinn im Auge welcher nicht  
 von der Grafik kommt sondern durch  
 die Aussprache.*



gunmetal  
 Dawn is one seventh of the day  
 There is no one to disturb me  
 No one disturbs me  
 and it is cool  
 or cold  
 pale yellow  
 legal in colour  
 and I come to my work  
 and warm as I write  
 embodied  
 coiled  
 still  
 I read what I have written  
 I always stop when I know what is going to happen next

I foretell  
 I go on from there  
 To forestall  
 I write until I come to a place  
 A small wooden room  
 where I still have my juice **6**  
 and know what will happen next  
 I just know it  
 I try to forestall  
 I stop and try to live  
 through the next day  
 I'm beginning to suspect  
 a Piscean like myself  
 should stick to number seven;  
 but I still try to do nine  
 touchdowns a day, that is,  
 I stand on my head  
 in the bathroom,  
 and  
 touch  
 the floor  
 nine  
 times when I am not near my typewriter  
 I touch the floor with my toe tips, while  
 balanced.  
 This is incidentally more than yoga, it's an  
 athletic feat,  
 7.5 reps  
 Frankly I do feel that my mind is

**6**

*Die Andere die mag Farbstifte.  
 Jeden Buchstaben in einer anderen  
 Farbe nachdrucken, um den Sinn  
 des Wortes in Synästhetischen  
 Wortfarben zu ersticken.*

going.  
 So  
 another 'ritual' as you call it,  
 is to pray to Jesus in my slippers  
 I do feel that while balanced  
 on my head I  
 preserve my sanity  
 when I hit it again.  
 I have started at six in the morning,  
 One seventh of the day  
 and may go on until noon  
 or be through before that.  
 Maybe on to the ninth hour  
 When I stop I am empty,  
 I hate writing  
 and at the same time never empty but filling  
 a pale blue  
**bhava evoked in these nine rasa**  
 Nothing can hurt me,  
 nothing can happen,  
 nothing means anything  
 until the next day when I do it again.  
 It is the wait until the next day  
 that is hard to get through.  
 Twenty minutes  
 I get up at 4:00 am  
 work for five to six hours.

Touchdowns  
 Nine  
 Preserve my sanity

In the afternoon,  
 I run for 10km  
 or swim for 1500m  
 (or do both),  
 120 minutes  
 then I read a bit  
 listen to some music  
 64 bit  
 no less  
 I go to bed at 9:00 pm.  
 Soon after dusk  
 I don't hang around  
 I keep to this routine every day  
 without variation.  
 The repetition itself becomes the important thing  
 a form of mesmerism.  
 I mesmerize myself to reach a deeper state of mind  
 where  
 Words are the pith of humankind **7**  
 I get up at seven.  
 I check my e-mail  
 do Internet ablutions  
 I have a cup of coffee.

**7**  
*Er schreibt an einem offenen Fenster um die Welt  
 in seinen Vokabeln zu empfangen.  
 Das Singen der Vögel, das eintönige Brummen  
 des Strassenverkehrs, das Gerüst am Haus,  
 der Schleudergang der Waschmaschine, tönen  
 zusammen mit seinen Händen auf der Tastatur  
 und dem Geräusch seines Baumwoll Pullovers  
 das was er schreibt.*

Three days a week,  
 I go to Pilates  
 back by eleven.  
 120 minutes  
 I sit down and write.  
 If nothing is happening  
 I mow the lawn  
 I break for lunch  
 come back  
 do it some more  
 And then, usually, a nap  
 Naps are essential to my process.  
 Not dreams, but that state adjacent to sleep, the  
 mind on waking  
 The dreamless sleep  
 A dark place  
 If nothing is happening  
 I mow the lawn  
 The mind on mowing  
 When dreamless  
 At the beginning, I have a five-day workweek  
 Each day 10 minutes  
 each day is roughly ten to five,  
 possibly 8 minutes  
 with a break for lunch  
 and a nap.  
 Naps are essential to my process.

Not dreams, but that state adjacent to sleep, the mind on waking  
 Dreamless  
 dark  
 At the very end, it's a seven-day week,  
 That's 70 minutes  
 Possibly 56  
 and it could be a twelve-hour day.  
 Ten minutes  
 Till dusk  
 One and a half minutes  
 Toward the end  
 the state of composition  
 is a complex,  
 chemically altered state  
 that will go away if I don't continue to give it what it needs. **8**  
 What it needs is simply to write all the time  
 Or sleep without dreams  
 Downtime other than simply dreamless sleeping becomes  
 problematic.  
 Farming  
 I'm always glad to see the back of that.

I write in the morning  
 go home about midday  
 take a shower,  
 because writing, as you know

**8**

*Text wird von Worten geformt - von  
 in Bewegung gesetzten Linien:  
 Bewegungen des Körpers, Bewegungen  
 des Computers, - und von dem Drang  
 und dem Gegenseitigem Willen Sinn  
 zu machen.*

is very hard work,  
so I have to do a double ablution.  
Then I go out and shop  
I'm a cook  
and pretend to be normal.  
I play sane — Good morning! Fine, thank you. And you?  
And I go home  
and a nap.  
Naps are essential to my process.  
Not dreams, but that state adjacent to sleep, the mind  
on waking.  
At the very end, it's a seven-day week,  
That's 70 minutes  
Possibly 56  
and it could be a twelve-hour day.  
Ten minutes  
Till dusk  
One and a half minutes  
Toward the end  
I see the kitchen  
That leads also to the closet (where the phone lives)  
and I often use it as a  
room  
to write in, despite the  
carnival that is  
going  
on



all around me. A  
 girl pushing a carpet sweeper under my typewriter  
 has  
 never annoyed me particularly, nor has she taken  
 my mind off my work, not even when it is late. I  
 touch the floor nine times and she is gone  
 I prepare dinner for myself  
 I have houseguests,  
 I do the candles  
 and the pretty music  
 and all that.  
 Then after all the dishes are moved away  
 I read what I wrote that morning.  
 And more often than not if I've done nine pages  
 I may be able to save two and a half or three.  
 Dusk  
 That's the cruelest time you know,  
 Dusk one and a half minutes  
 to really admit that it doesn't work.  
 And to pale blue pencil it.  
 Yellow legal tinge  
 The pith of humankind  
 I will never speak to you again. Forever. Goodbye. That is it. Thank  
 you very much. And I leave.  
 When I finish maybe fifty pages and read them  
 it's not too bad  
 will never speak to you again

Forever. **9**  
 Goodbye.  
 That is it.  
 Thank you very much.  
 And I leave  
 slip off to dreamless sleep  
 do pushups and sit-ups all the time  
 feel as though I am getting lean and sinewy  
 but maybe not  
 7.5 reps  
 9 times  
 with 50 acceptable pages  
 white  
 light blue denotes them  
 I write every day  
 ... I do my best work in the morning.  
 My passions  
 drive me to  
 the typewriter every  
*day* of my  
 life, touch  
 the floor  
 nine  
 times

**9**  
*Sie mag die Scheinbare  
 Unvergänglichkeit des  
 Geschriebenen und presst  
 daher unverzüglich die delete  
 Taste, again und again und again  
 und again.*

> end of article <

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 THE ARTISTS

# “Tree Radio”

by Magz Hall



Magz Hall is a sound, radio artist and co founder of *Radio Arts*, exploring the artistic potential of radio and its use outside of conventional settings. Her work has been exhibited by the Tate Britain, British Museum, the Sainsbury Centre, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP), MACBA to name but a few. As a former director of the Community Media Association she successfully helped push for community arts radio in the UK and was a founder of London's arts station Resonance FM. She was a finalist in The Engine Room's international sound art competition (2015). Magz holds a PhD from the University of the Arts London and is senior radio lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University.

<https://magzhall.wordpress.com>

<http://www.radioarts.org.uk>



Previous page: "Tree Radio" FM Transmitter circuit hand built into the tree

This page: "Tree Radio" radio receiver

## Introduction

I have been working at the intersection of art and technology, critically examining how radio circumscribes the realms of public and private. My radio art research draws on a hundred years of experimental radio, examining this accumulated history and knowledge in the light of contemporary circumstances. My work is intrinsically participatory, orientated towards provoking social encounters by producing original sound and radio art projects. My practice based PhD entitled *Radio After Radio: Redefining Radio*

*Art in the Light of New Media Technology through Expanded Practice* (Hall 2015) explores the development of radio art in an international context.

In recent years I have developed several research led works which make reference to radio art's rich history. Taking the proposed 'switch off' of analogue radio as a grounding from which to develop new radio art works, I have brought the changing relationship between the analogue and the digital into a politically engaged and imaginative discursive framework which draws explicitly on contemporary conditions of the 'post digital'.

## Tree Radio

*Tree Radio* (2015) was made during an *Art for the Environment* research residency at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP)<sup>1</sup> and enabled me to draw from my research and produce a new sound installation which is currently on exhibition at YSP. The work transformed an oak tree at the Sculpture Park into a micro radio station; a transmitter embedded into the tree relays the tree's reactions to light, motion and moisture via sensors and probes in the tree's canopy. These are heard as a series of fluctuating electronic tones that visitors can tune in and listen to via their own personal radios or mobile phones with an FM receiver while in the vicinity of the tree.<sup>2</sup>

1 Find the Yorkshire Sculpture Park website at <http://www.ysp.co.uk>

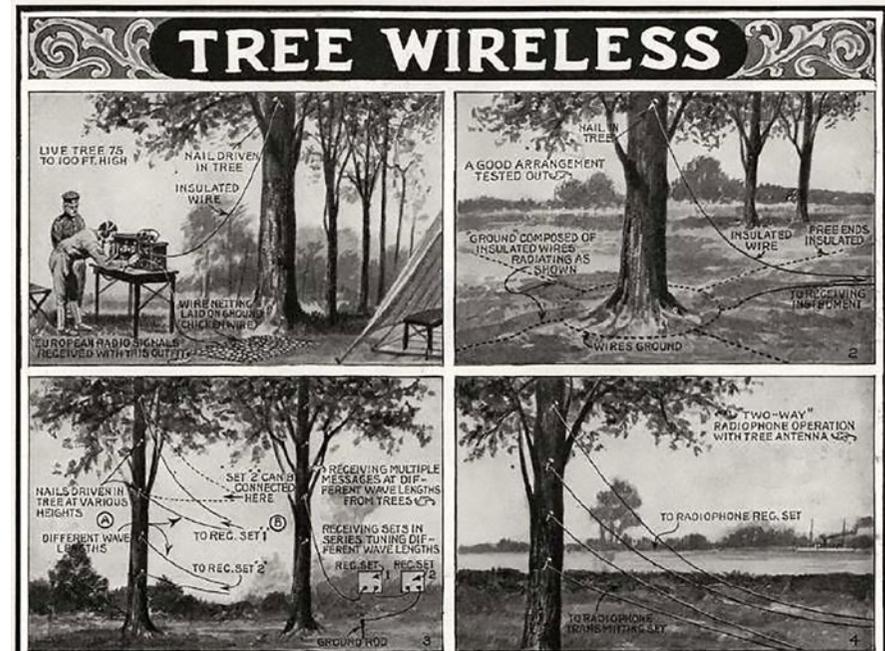
2 Also see <http://www.ysp.co.uk/exhibitions/magz-hall>

*Tree Radio* addresses issues surrounding the rate at which new digital technologies become obsolete, using 100 year old tried and tested wireless technology. I wanted to make people think about trees and the root of all wireless technology: analogue radio; and how simple and green it can be to use - in this instance wireless, free and solar powered. The tree transmitter reveals the hidden facets of organic tree life using simple FM wireless technology.

General George Owen Squire, a U.S. Army's Chief Signal Officer and incidentally the inventor of Muzak,<sup>3</sup> back in 1919 described how "[all] trees, of all kinds and all heights, growing anywhere—are nature's own wireless towers and antenna combined" (1919). He called this "talking through the trees." He used trees as antennae through which to pick up radio signals for the army. However, I wanted to do the reverse, using trees to send out a radio signal and I loved the idea of actually hearing the trees 'talk'.

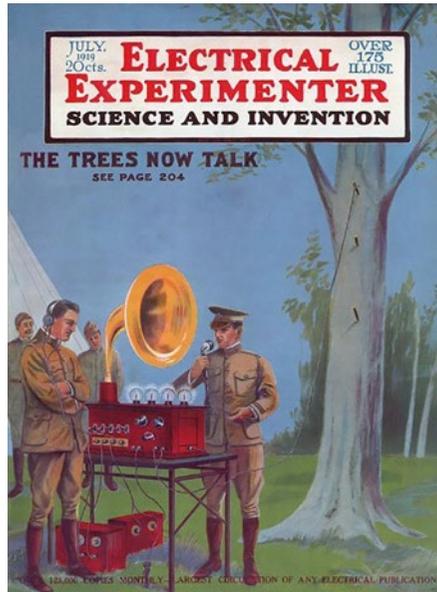
The tree enables its own sonification, it is not trying to conform to the musical techniques charged by Nye as being "emotionally loaded by virtue of sounding "mythical and spiritual" (Nye 1994, p. 5) and what Supper calls an "auditory sublime" (Supper 2012). Instead, *Tree Radio's* raw electronic tones, which are produced by hand built oscillators using the same type of components I have used to make the transmitter, aren't subject to the conventions

<sup>3</sup> MUZAK is the ubiquitous recorded light background music played through speakers in public places.



of musicality which can lead some environmentally-generative works to resemble a form of anthropocentric 'Muzak'. The analogue electronics have their own intrinsic instability; the tonalities and broadcast frequency are subject to the contingency of the surrounding environment.

*Tree Radio* allows people to hear the tree responding to the stimuli of its immediate environment. New digital wireless masts are often disguised as trees and this is a playful way of getting people to think about trees as transmitters as well as revisiting radio's early



military history. The other aim of the project was to connect visitors with radio technology and simple electronics.

### Developing the project

The initial idea for *Tree Radio* was sparked during an artists' residency at the LV21 lightship back in 2013. Since then I had been looking for the right place, time and a commission to put my ideas into action, and refining them into a proposal.

Another work, *Spiritual Radio* (2014)<sup>4</sup> book radio, was also conceived of at the same time and was quickly realised and took precedent. In this period I'd been imagining who would be 'squatting' FM airwaves, as had Geert Lovink who pondered that "We can squat soon (to)-be- abandoned FM and AM Frequencies" (2011). I had taken his speculation a step further for theoretical exploration, as my radio works around this theme - or 'trace stations' as I call them - offered up fictional insights into who might

<sup>4</sup> Find more about the lightship at <http://www.lv21.co.uk>  
For *Spiritual Radio* see <https://magzhall.wordpress.com/spiritual-radio/>

be squatting the FM spectrum in the future. *Spiritual Radio* and *Radio Tree* were the logical conclusion to this process, as they imagined new FM stations broadcasting directly from objects and nature - in this case books and trees. Until recently, piracy laws had limited the artistic exploration of transmitters. However, deregulation on low power FM devices such as car transmitters and baby monitors have made them exempt from licensing, affording me an artistic opportunity to use them.

As I had been mulling over *Tree Radio* for a while, I got very excited when I heard about the call for the *Arts for the Environment* summer residency at YSP. It was ideal place to research and develop the work and in fact it had been on the top of my location wish list. Uncannily, I found the flyer for the call by chance as I was handing in my PhD, and my final words in my thesis are about how I wanted to develop the *Radio Tree* project.

"Someday artists will work with capacitors, resistors and semi-conductors as they work today with brushes, violins and junk." In 1965 Nam June Paik (in Reichardt 1971) predicted a radical and exciting future for artists and technology, this quote sums up something I have been embracing in my own research and recent sound and radio installations. *Tree Radio* enabled me to refine the FM transmitter circuit, which I had started on *Spiritual Radio*. I presented the circuit in its most basic and functional form, revealing its simple geometry. I had moved from merely mastering relevant techniques to being able to adapt it into a functional aesthetic form,

easily understood and read on a tree. Where possible I avoided hard corners and moved away from the breadboard technique of uniform squares to work with the shape of the components and location. At the same time there is an interesting juxtaposition between nature and technology seen in the physicality of the work, for some the fact it was nailed into the tree was read as an act of violence towards nature however for me it is an allegory of the unease between technology and the environment.

### Installation

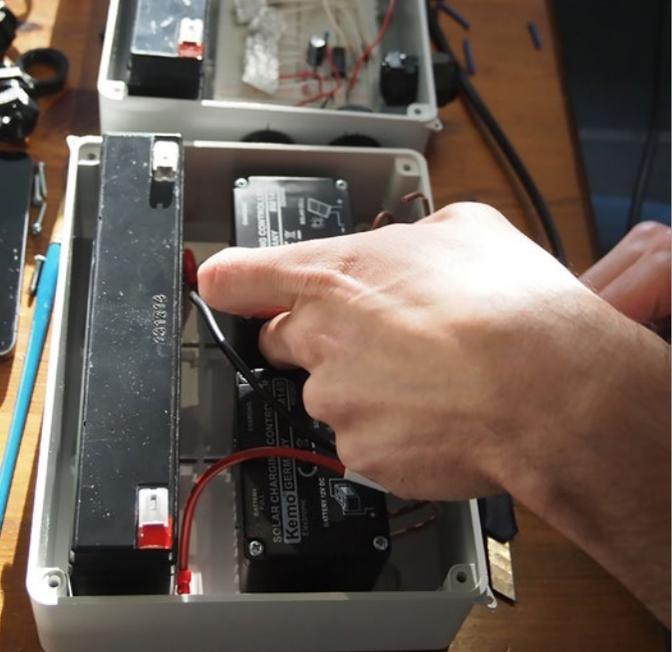
The YSP residency presented the opportunity to adapt the techniques I had honed in controlled, indoor environments to function in the face of the elements. Waterproofing the transmitter became the first essential task; my first week in the sculpture park was a wet and windy eye opener on just how soaked the trees and visitors to the park could get. It was thrilling to hammer the nails upon which I would thread together my circuit into the tree and visitors to the park were very keen to engage with my process. There was something primal, exhilarating and poetic about creating this radiophonic prosthesis on a living organism, the tree as living electrical 'bread board' for its own transmission.

However, in this unprotected form the transmitter was very unstable and after a few days the frequency started to float due to the tree's own moisture and the weather. The waterproof resin I had used to protect the circuit from the elements had the unfortunate side-effect of insulating particular components and



*Bespoke light sensor*

stopping the transmitter functioning. Although it was part of my aesthetic vision to have the circuit exposed, allowing the viewer to follow the transmission circuit and making the process visible, waterproof casing was really the only option in order to keep the transmitter stable enough for long term use.



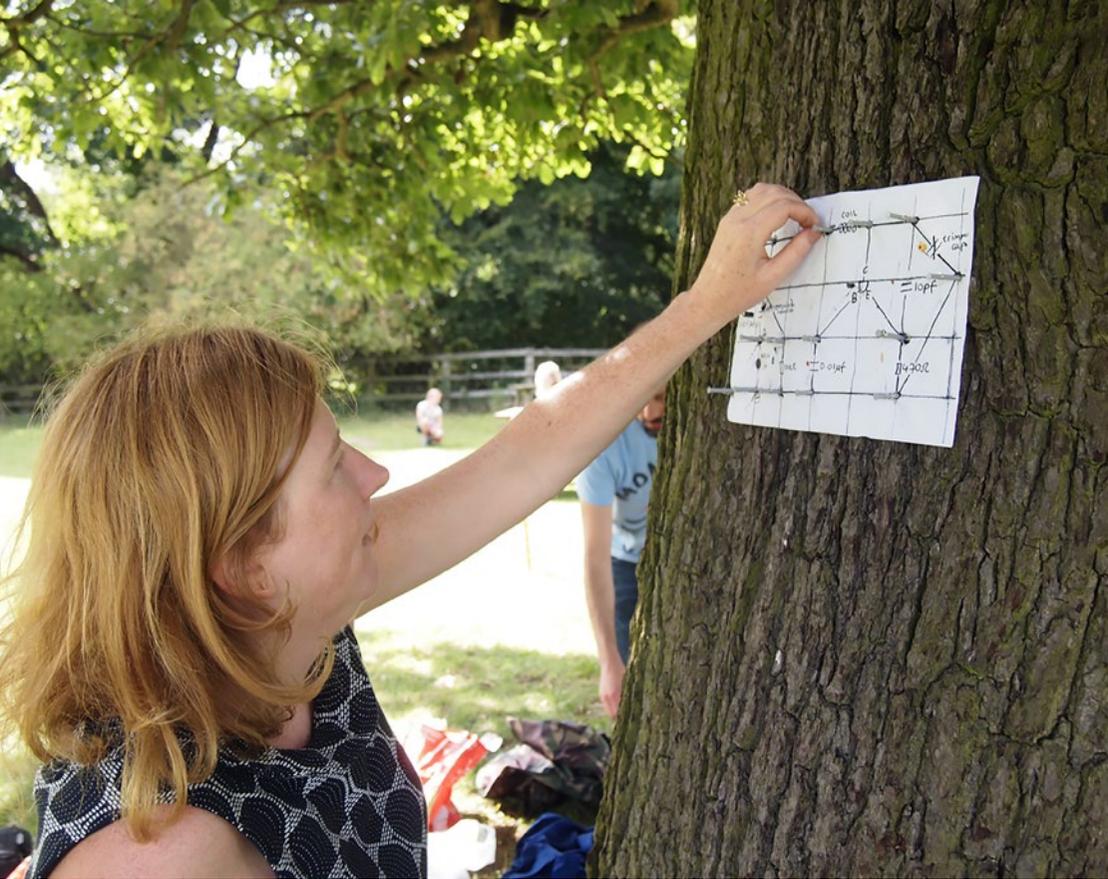
*Hand-built solar panel enclosure and sensors*

I had just two weeks at the YSP site to research the initial idea further, to develop it and put it into practice, which was an extremely short period of time and proved to be a very intense way of working. I invited the sound artist Anthony Everett on board to make the light sensors and resistance probes which would convert the environmental parameters of the tree into electrical impulses that could be acoustically translated.

I really enjoy collaborating and this was no exception; Anthony really helped me to push things forward in the very short time frame we were given, and we both learned a huge amount from each other. The light sensors he produced change frequency as the sun moves through the leaves and branches of the tree and via the tree probes made from a nail, sound is affected by the resistance of water in the tree. Both work through simple

oscillator circuits which change as moisture levels inside the tree fluctuate. These are then micro broadcast as electronic sound signals directly from the tree. They are faster or slower, higher or lower depending on the amount of light and water present. Overall stability needs to be monitored, so we can work out the optimal requirements of all the parts.

The installation needed to be powered sustainably; it would have been not only impractical, but environmentally unsustainable (especially in the context of an arts for the environment residency) to power the work with depletable batteries, so it seemed an obvious solution to embrace solar power. I cased two nine-volt solar panels in sealed perspex and these have so far proved to be resilient. It will be interesting to also refine the light sensors and nail probes further and look into their scientific applications.



Installing "Tree Radio"

It was extremely exciting and gratifying to finally hear the tree broadcasting on 100 FM. A very clear signal was achieved, one which changed continually throughout the tree's day. The transmitter on the trunk remains as a symbol, representing the selfsame process that is occurring, housed in a less aesthetically pleasing watertight box, higher up in the branches. Visitors to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park are able to pick up the gently emitting tree broadcast on their own personal FM devices at around 97.5 FM.

### The future

For me this is *Tree Radio*, Phase One - there is so much more work to do from a sound, scientific and visual perspective as ultimately I want the electronics to be seen, rather than to be hidden as they are at present to keep them safely dry. I am now thinking about refining the set-up and am considering the possibility of building a crystal transmitter which will lock the frequency so it can't shift around as much when affected by coldness and general weather conditions.

The £300 budget was eaten away on this very simple set up and installation and further funding is needed to improve the work and develop long-term strategies. I have just received a research award of £500 from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Canterbury Christ Church University which will enable me to return to YSP to give *Tree Radio* an MOT in early spring

YSP were extremely supportive of *Tree Radio*; it was hugely beneficial working with the curators and the team and it was fascinating to learn about the park. Being at YSP made me connect with traditional sculpture in myriad of ways and generated the seeds for new ideas. This experience will have a lasting effect on my work.

Visitors in front of "Tree Radio"



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# Postscript

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