

ADSR Zine

006



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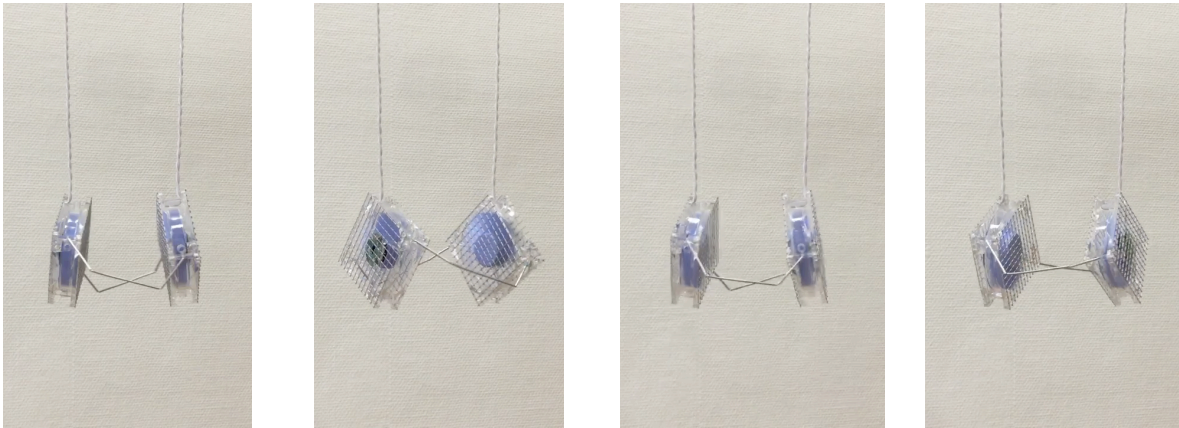
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Approaching loops / Mimi Kind



To put this article in context, here is a video of some of my works in development:

<https://vimeo.com/367900785>

I don't write about my work so much, it's been majorly hands on, ear-based and eye-based, less so expanded in words. But, when thinking about *what* I've been thinking about, I would like to talk about rhythm, as it is an area I always return to or start from, in the form of looping mechanisms. I make mechanical or electronic mechanisms, or alter pre-existing mechanisms, in the majority of my works.

I've spent the last 6 months in Berlin, the first time I've had a lot of time with nothing to do other than work on things. Having a studio here and not having the usual assortment of materials/tools that I'd have in Sydney has been a fruitful deprivation, and I had to look to new materials for works. I started experiments with small fans and I have fallen in love with them, and find myself hanging out with them as much as I can. I'm a true, um, fan.

I like the mechanisms I create to have a life to them, in that the looping is the essence of their operation, their lungs through which they breathe, the feet on which they walk. Because of this 'organic-ness', or 'vital nature' to them, it's natural that there can be environmental and individual bumps and interruptions to their cycles.

Recently I have been drawn to the intrinsic looping nature of an electric fan. The constant rotation of its blades constitutes that of a loop. By connecting multiple fans together, using different materials, it then creates another loop, which can be seen as well as heard. I am particularly interested in the idea of using loops to create loops.

When thinking of loops, I think of cyclic patterns in the finer details that make up living. This is in a large spread of living: falling asleep spooning a partner each night, and then always waking up facing the other way towards the window in your room; the repeated muscular contractions that move earthworms through soil; people dancing to techno (and other music too).

In my works recently, I am particularly inspired by the delicacy in mechanically looped situations, and the interdependency of the elements in the system. In the case of fans, I connect them together with tubes. The length, weight, and geometric arrangement of these tubes determine the ways that the fans interact in their looping systems. Many looped systems are extremely delicate in the conditions that they operate in - for instance bacterial multiplication by cell division, in specific conditions of warmth and food supply, PH and oxygen.

I am definitely not saying that this is what I hope to convey through my works, but more-so thinking that this is what inspires me personally in my fascination with loops - in their occurrence as rhythms in the world around us. As much as I can, I would like to remove myself as an actor in the final product of the piece.

Disassociating and Recontextualising Breath

By Marlene Claudine Radice

Writing about processes that relate to something very personal is difficult. This is mostly why I make sounds into art. I choose not to articulate my experience with words.

My practice explores the voice and breath and how they can be disembodied from their original sound source through repetition and the use of electronics. Through the voice and electronics I explore my own gender dysphoria by disassociating the voice from its original source via electronic manipulations.

My voice and breath can be made into what I want and can be used to convey what I feel or be what I want it to be. In this manner I am able to take ownership of something that I often feel is taken from me which is simply my ability to articulate myself or feel heard.

These ideas began while studying traditional composition where I was exposed to the heteronormative male world of classical composition. Where experimental music began with Schoenberg and maybe went as far as Musique Concrète and Pierre Schaffer. The voices of composers who shared my lived experiences of voicelessness; articulating what it means to exist in a body that was treated differently. Breathing through the purposeful misgendering of Wendy Carlos in lectures, the mockery of the glorious butch identity of Pauline Oliveros*, the strangeness of Meredith Monk, or the softly spoken words of John Cage.

The idea of breathing through disassociation when triggered in public spaces became a normal part of studying. I focused on breath as I felt myself leaving my body to cope with the stress of being a person and the stress of writing and performing.

I recorded a mixtape called [*Melatonin Dreamscapes*](#) which fleshed out these ideas. This work is a triptych comprising of three pieces using spoken word and electronics as a vehicle. Through it I explored my own dysphoria by disassociating the voice from its original source via electronic manipulations. Each of these pieces explores a unique facet of my relationship with my identity and the idea of my voice as an entity that can be disassociated from my body.

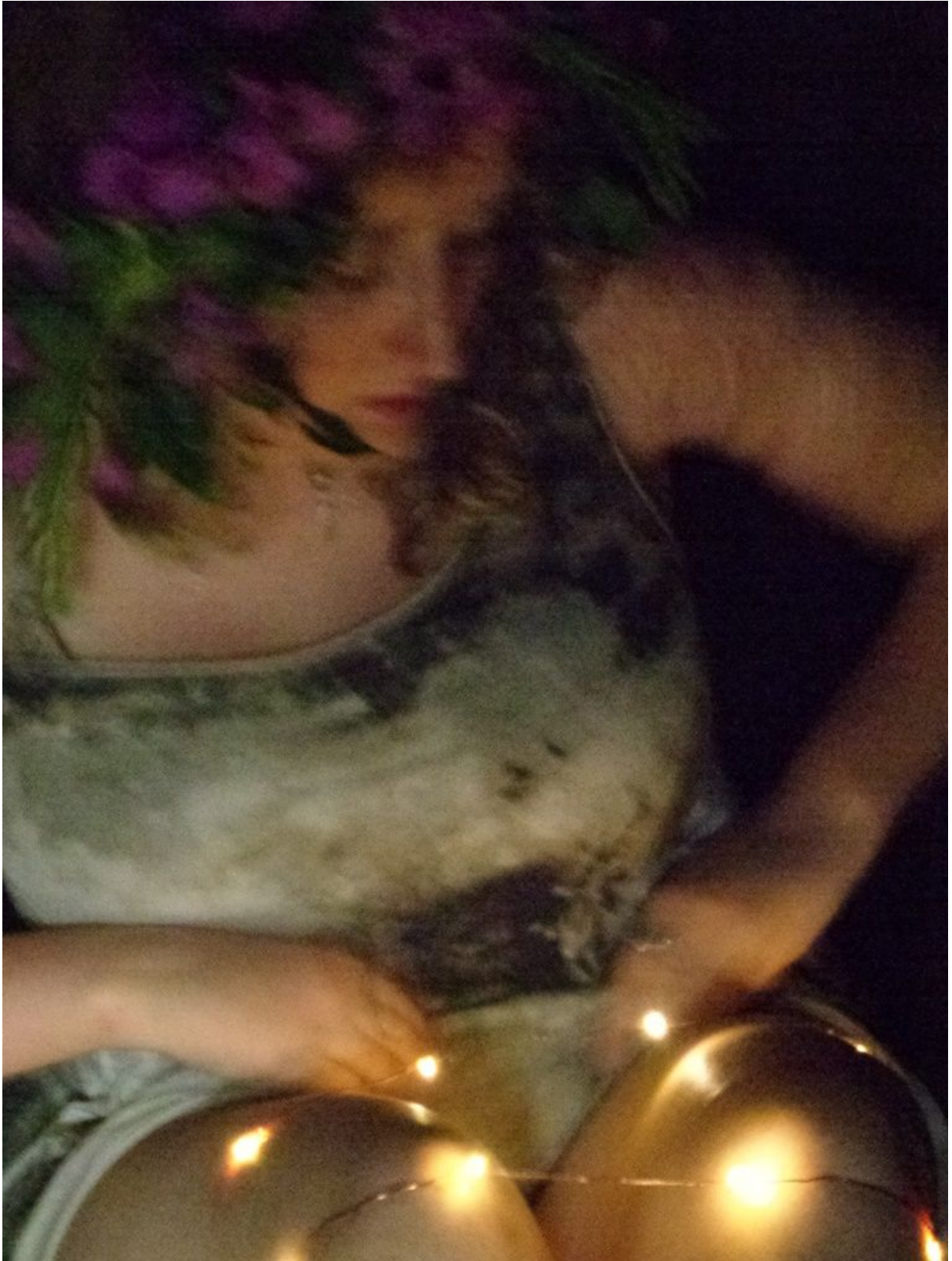
The first piece, [*Scarab*](#), explores the voice as a narrator telling a dream-inspired story. The voice in this track was recorded with a harmony pedal, obfuscating the original vocal tone of my voice. The second piece, [*Netsuke*](#), explores the voice and breath and how they can be disembodied from their original sound source through repetition and the use of electronics. The third piece, [*Tinnitus*](#), is the only work that has no electronic vocal manipulation. The voice is left unedited but is looped repeatedly to create a sound mass that disassociated the voice from its point of origin through repeated loops of the same vocal lines.

These works have been used as a part of an ongoing collaboration with Sydney-based performance artist, Amy Elizabeth Wilson. Where we have combined live performances of semi-improvised versions of these tracks to her work *Persephone's Cocoon*. The work shows the binding of femme bodies (the artist's own) operating in tandem with the looping and dissociation of voice. This work recontextualises the binding of a vulnerable body, giving agency to the voiceless act through music and movement. The looped breath becomes a scream, breathing through conflict as an act of power and peaceful protest.

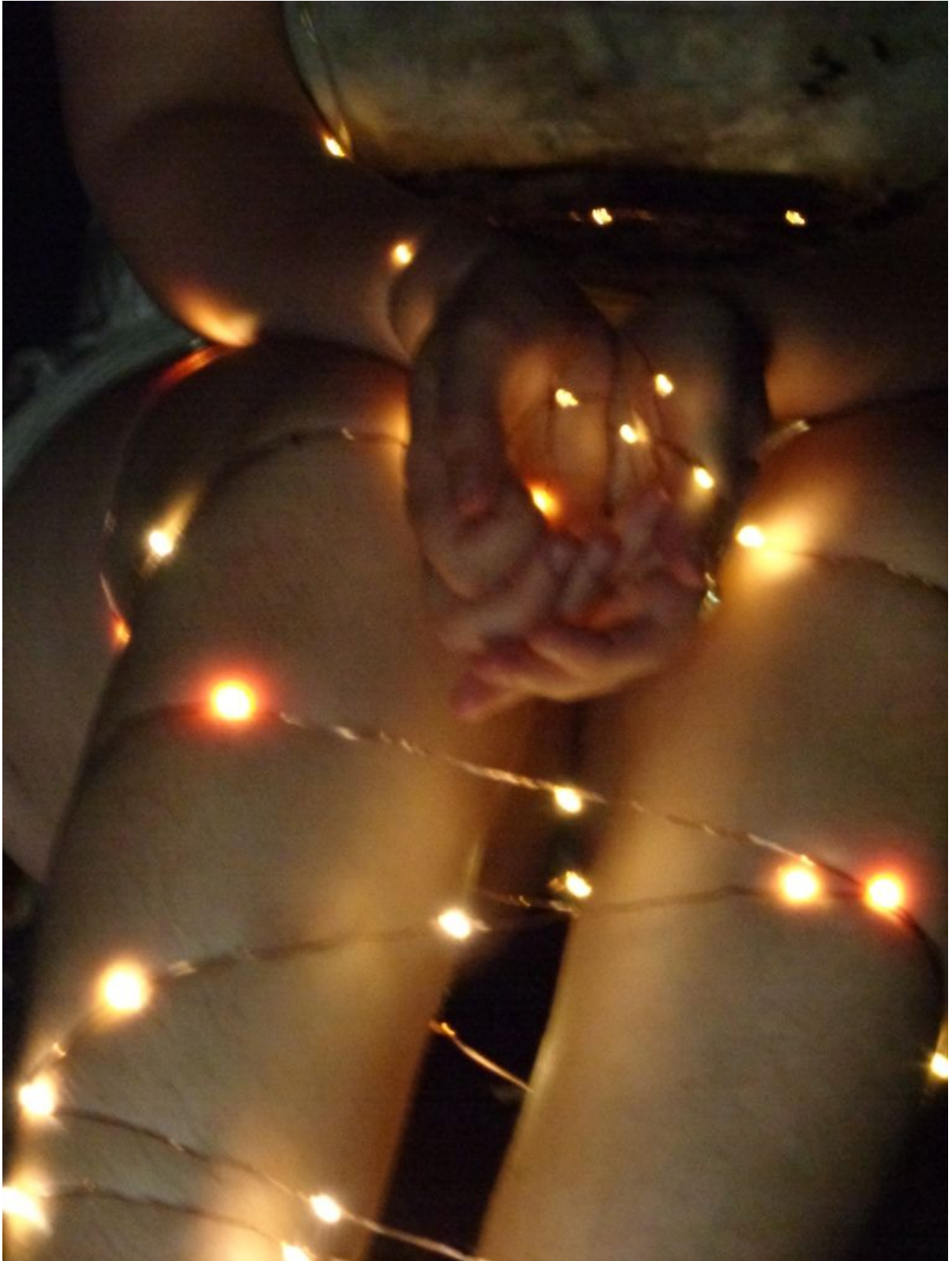
In my performances I try to share facets of my relationship with my identity and in particular, the idea of the voice as an entity that can be disassociated from its body. Coming to terms with my identity and exploring the brutality and beauty inherent to social nonconformity.

*In the words of Oliveros; "Beethoven was a lesbian."









when do i stop ?

when do i stop ? i stop when i feel a kernel of frustration somewhere in the back of my neck. it's like a little internal sigh that doesn't get manifested, it's like ugh, what, no, this—what are you doing ? is it some kind of judgement that gets turned on ? it's a weariness. it's definitely in the back of my neck but also probably somewhere in my stomach region, somewhere, like, in my forehead, where this feeling of frustration—it's like a pressure that's both internal and external. exasperated pressure. and i just don't want to deal with anymore so i just stop. but it sets in and goes away very quickly, it's a split second thing almost before i realise what happens, or what's happening, i've already stopped.

it's rare that it happens in performance. it's very common in practice sessions, even when i'm recording myself. it's definitely something around a self-critical gaze, an internal gaze. i think it comes out of a feeling that i start thinking sometime before the frustration sets in thoughts like 'oh i should do something that's more sensible', in terms of being able to understand, make sense of: legible scale patterns maybe, or at least hanging around less in the particular kind of microtonal language that i find myself in very often. but that self-comment comes some time before, and i push away but something in it still lingers, and then a few seconds to a minute later i suddenly find myself getting that little pressure and just stopping. it's a give-up. because listening back to practice session recordings from a few days ago, i can hear that i'm sort of stopping and starting once i get 10 minutes in, although the ideas aren't bad and they're not getting tedious, like i could still transition from one into the next. but i increasingly just do these blocks of sound where i'm just doing one thing for a while and i don't really introduce other ideas—i develop it for a bit, but not a lot and it doesn't really ever, or rarely develops into something new, it usually stays within its material set. and then i get fed up with it and then i move onto the next thing.

in the recording i am listening to, i was moving on really quickly. i was going from one thing to the next with very short breaks in between. but on days where i'm struggling more with it all, the breaks are longer and the stuff that i'm playing is less vibrant, there's less of a commitment behind it, there's less enjoyment and liveliness to the sound. i'm not really getting excited by what i'm doing. then it starts to feel tired and old and heavy, like i've done it before, and it's really hard to get it moving and moving into something new and shifting, it's a very stuck kind of energy.

there is still another question to ask. when do i continue ?

my practice is an eternal cycle of stopping and returning. i come at it again and again, after a short break, after a long time away. i can't let it go. i lean on my companions to keep me going, or to fill the spaces that my stopping leaves. i have a great resilience and ability to continue when i am soundmaking with others. when i am by myself i stop, when i am accompanied i don't have to carry the terror alone and i use that space to great effect. but leaning on others is not without consequence, for myself as well as for them.

i am alone now much more than i am used to. at the same time, as haraway points out: 'earthlings are never alone'¹. finding company in solitude is the next challenge. is it possible to use the companionship of eyelash mites, of bacteria in my gut, of climate apocalypse PM₁₀ molecules blowing in the open window, of my cat in the next room, of my instrument and its idiosyncrasies, of my body and its failings, of my histories, of speculative future iterations of myself—all this in place of present human collaborators ? can they keep me going, moving forward ?

but, also: why do i find stopping frustrating, or linked with frustration ? what if i just accepted the stops as part of the process, as yet another companion ? i play a wind instrument and i need to breathe (it creates space for me more than for some: circular breathing as yet eludes me). embracing rather than rejecting this need is its own journey—perhaps my need for stops is not so different. there is a moralism around continuation that views every stop as a failure. but every failure is also an opportunity, for growth, for rebuilding, for turning inward, for integrating and expanding on what came before and what comes after.

hannah reardon-smith

¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 58.

Again

I'm going to try and explain how I think the relationship between repetition and meaning works, why I'm interested in it and how I've tried to explore it through music. In order to do this, I need to outline my concept of the way humans react to and process information.

The first reaction to stimulus is the semantic reaction. This is a conscious, analytical response, where the incoming information is parsed for meaning. The subject (i.e. the listener) attempts to order the stimulus along familiar lines, to classify it. Firstly with very broad definitions (e.g. "I'm hearing words sung to a melody in rhythm") then with increasingly narrow specificity. A semantic reaction can include both logical responses (e.g. recognition of statements, summation of statements into concept) and subjective emotional responses (e.g. identifying lyrics as 'joyful', melody as 'sad').

The semantic reaction also includes subtextual analysis, which relies on conscious thought and specific foreknowledge to identify implications, deliberate omissions, interactions between text and medium, and other forms of subtextual communication. Novelty is a crucial factor to having a semantic reaction. When the listener experiences the same stimulus over and over again, they will experience what is known as semantic satiation. This is the experience of a word or phrase losing meaning after a certain amount of repetition.

When experiencing semantic satiation, the stimulus no longer provokes a semantic reaction in the listener, causing them to focus on abstract aspects of the stimulus, (e.g. the sounds used to make a word). The stimulus is experienced in new ways, stripped of ideas or concepts. What was once immediately identifiable and quantifiable sounds foreign to the listener. We can refer to the amount of repetition required to achieve this effect as the semantic threshold.

Once the semantic threshold has been crossed, the listener then begins to have a subliminal reaction to the stimulus. Unlike the semantic reaction, this is not an immediate process and occurs on a subconscious level. During the subliminal reaction, connections are drawn between the stimulus and any other present stimulus of which the subject is aware at that time. This leads to the creation of sense memories, where separate concepts or experiences are tied together in the listener's mind. The crucial implication here is that subliminal reactions are more likely to create long term memories. While semantic reactions are quickly formed and quickly discarded, subliminal reactions seem to create long lasting impressions, and deeper connections between different types of stimuli.

Repetition facilitates access to the subliminal and can be used as a tool to bring a subject into a state which is both numinous and highly suggestible. This is borne out across such practices as hypnotism, religious worship, interrogation, psychological conditioning, cognitive behavioural therapy, meditation, etc. Some of these practices may have positive outcomes while others might not be considered positive or ethical, but the common link between them is that they exploit both the ability and the desire within humans to experience a subliminal state.

The use of repetition to alter consciousness has been a central idea in my recent musical practice. Inspired by the longform works of The Necks and Phurpa, I wanted to create music that, without deference to any particular religion or traditional practice, resonated with the listener in ways beyond the semantic. To this end I collaborated with two other musicians, David Sattout & Evan McGregor, under the name Helu. We spent roughly 18 months writing a piece titled Varisema, which was released in November 2019. We started working with the idea that we would use one rhythm to create a long evolving work which would always be changing, gradually or abruptly, but would never deviate from the central rhythmic pattern.

Varisema maintains the time signature 19/16 over a running time of 35 minutes. Different parts of the 19/16 pattern are emphasised to create the impression of time signature change where none occurs. While the unchanging rhythm creates underlying structure, there are subtle changes in tempo according to the mood and character of the performance. The harmonic content is largely diatonic and is relatively simple compared to the rhythmic aspects, drawing attention away from the time signature manipulations and towards assonant harmony.

This balance of complexity and simplicity is intended to encourage the listener to engage with the piece on an emotional or experiential level, as opposed to analysing technical elements. The overall effect is that the memorable harmony and the impression of rhythmic change engages the semantic reaction and maintains interest, while the repetition of the underlying pattern provokes the subliminal reaction and hopefully leads to a deeper experience for the listener.

Josh Ahearn

An excerpt of Varisema can be found on the [ADSR soundcloud](#)

Varisema is on Spotify, Google Music, Apple music etc, or can be streamed for free at <http://helu.bandcamp.com>

Further listening:

Phurpa - Nag Bdud Ceremony <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSxW58aTu8>

The Necks - Mosquito <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBrTXWXj4kY>



A quiz

[a poem with notes]

by Gail Priest

If listening is a question, is sound the answer?¹

an eager hand shoots upward

Listening seeks sounds and asks of them questions....

*another hand timidly raises
curved at the junction where fingers meet palm²*

Listening wraps around sound,
envelops it in a responsive embrace.
Listening attempts to hold sounds
—not to keep them as treasures in themselves—
just long enough to ask them more questions.

an agitated hand, grasping at the air

Listening is always hungry, ravenous,
has never had enough,
is never satisfied with the ineffable answers
that are all too easily overwritten.

*two hands come together with a force
a clap, a call to attention
that reverberates off the nearest surfaces*

Sound will never answer the same way twice,
never stay still long enough for a second gleaning,
always in transit,
heading for extinction.
Attack, decay, sustain, release.
Attack, decay, sustain, release.
This is the sound of a sound living to its fullest.
A motto to live by?

One question answered by many answers?³

One answer answering many questions?

*a sleight of hand
a coin or a scarf appears from thin air*

Sounds deflect and refract
questions, making more questions.

*an infinite regress of diminishing question marks
in the shape of cupped hands
and curled ears*

* ~ ? * ~ ? * ~ ? * ~ ? *

Notes, asides and unfinished thoughts

1 This piece is a poetic response to the poetic response to listening that is the book by that name by Jean Luc Nancyⁱ.

2 I am thinking of hands holding the invisible shapes of thoughts, shapes of sounds. In Laurie Anderson's recent book *All the Things I Lost in the Flood* she talks of mudras, ancient (mostly) hand symbols used ritually within Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism to focus reflection. As a poor sculpture student and follower of Buddhism (even her deceased dog had a spiritual advisor) she used the pulp of the day's newspapers to create papier-mâché mudras which she saw as 'the negative space of each hand gesture'ⁱⁱ. This gets me thinking about shaping the shape of the absence of thought. What is the negative space of sound? I also think of Yvonne Rainer's hand choreography created when she was physically unable to move her body, her digits expressing the desire of the wholeⁱⁱⁱ.

3 Dabbling in theory makes me anxious. The Socratic method of supposed cooperative argument relies too heavily on territorial defense for me. So this piece is also a response to the response by Christoph Cox^{iv}, to the response by Annie Goh^v, which is a response, using feminist epistemologies, to what she proposes are problematic subject-object, language-matter, gendering of nature issues in Cox's theories on the nature of sound^{vi}. It's very complicated.

Notes within notes

i Nancy, J. L. 2007, *Listening*, Fordham University Press, New York.

ii Anderson, L. 2018, *All the Things I Lost in the Flood*, Rizzoli Electa, New York, p. 271.

iii Rainer, Y. 1966, *Hand Movie*, <<https://vimeo.com/99280678>>, accessed 3 December 2019.

iv Cox, C. 2017, 'Sonic Realism and Auditory Culture: A Reply to Marie Thompson and Annie Goh', *Parallax*, Vol 23, Issue 3, pp. 234-242.

v Goh, A. 2017, 'Sounding Situated Knowledges: Echo in Archaeoacoustics', *Parallax*, Vol 23, Issue 3, pp. 283-304.

vi Cox, C. 2011, 'Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10(2).

Playing Out Improvisation

Sam McAuliffe

In 2018 I began my journey as a PhD candidate at Monash University working at the intersection of improvisation and philosophical hermeneutics. Without going into the details of my project, one of the things I've been thinking about is the different ways people think about improvisation. While the idea of 'improvisation' might suggest varying positive or negative connotations depending on the situation (think of the jazz musician who improvises a complex solo versus the chump lost in the bush who improvises a shelter), I suggest there are two primary ways we can think about improvisation, broadly construed.

The first is the most common. It is when people think about specific cultural practices of improvisation that are positively or negatively valued – the jazz musician, the stand-up comedian, and so forth. The second way, which is primarily my interest, is *ontologically*; suffice to say that by 'ontologically' I mean, 'the general'. That is, what general characteristics underpin any and every instance of improvisation? I am interested in what we might call the fundamental structure that makes those cultural practices that we are all familiar with possible; a structure not subject to positive or negative evaluation. From the player of repertoire, to the free improviser, to the composer, and even the poor sap lost in the bush, in what way are they all doing the *same* thing? In what follows, I want to play out three common musical endeavours – performing pre-composed repertoire, performing free improvisation, and composing (in the traditional sense) – and note the way they each exhibit the same improvisational characteristics.

Doing the ontological work – establishing the general framework or structure that underpins improvisation – will require more words than are available to me here.

Indeed, undertaking that work comprises a considerable chunk of my thesis. For the purposes of the argument I am making here, I will attempt to condense this work into a single sentence. Simply put, the basic structure of improvisation at issue here is this: *Improvisation is a practice that requires a subject to attend to and spontaneously respond to that which they encounter when they are in a particular situation.* (Of course, there is a little more to it than this, but for the purposes of this essay that summation is

sufficient.) It is not particularly difficult to identify this structure in a range of improvisational activities, as follows.

Performing free improvisation

Musicians who engage in free improvisation focus their attention on the emergent work as they create it. As the work itself comes forth the players are responsive to 'the needs' of the work – perhaps they feel the work needs to increase or decrease in density or volume, for example. And what they are engaging with (the work) is *there* – they must engage with the situation that they are in.

Performing pre-composed repertoire

The performer of repertoire necessarily fills in the blanks of any given score. They interpret the fluidity of the rubato sections, the dynamic changes in the crescendos and decrescendos, the duration of the fermatas, and so forth. While the pitches, at least in a traditional composition, remain fixed from one performance to the next, these other more fluid areas of the work require the performer to improvise, at least to a degree.

Traditional composition

As one begins piecing their composition together, they are attending to and responding to the work as they create it, in a manner not dissimilar to the performer of free improvisation. The traditional composer spontaneously plays with possibilities, responding to what they have thus far composed in order to compose some more.

...shall we consider a few non-music examples of how this basic structure of improvisation works in different situations?

Making a shelter

The person lost in the woods who surveys their surroundings searching for an appropriate location to build a shelter also improvises. They place materials in an order that reflects their pre-existing knowledge of such an activity, and they respond to the shelter as they create it just as the composer responds to their work as they compose it. As the person begins laying the foundations and assembles the basic structure of their shelter, they respond to it, deciding what to do next and how to do it. They may also

respond to it by realising they might be better off disassembling part or all of the structure and re-doing it in a different way, leading them to improvise again.

Stand-up comedy

Like the performer of pre-composed repertoire, the stand-up comedian pays attention to the room and subtly adjusts their pre-composed performance to suit the audience, gauging how best to deliver their material. Perhaps they pause for effect here, give a smile there, and crescendo for the punchline. The delivery of such a performance, while largely pre-composed, requires the comedian to be attentive to their audience and respond to the situation in which they find themselves.

Conversing with another

We equally improvise during verbal conversation. Just as in each of the above examples, during conversation we attend to and respond to a particular subject matter. The subject matter is comparable to the 'work' that free improvisers engage with. One interlocutor can never be sure exactly how their words will be interpreted by the other, so one can never be certain as to how the other will respond. Therefore, the conversation depends on one's ability to improvise – to respond to the subject matter as it occurs in the situation.

Playing it out

It might be interesting, here, to play out a few scenarios of how improvisation might be valued within a particular cultural or social construction with respect to performing pre-composed repertoire, performing free improvisation, and composing. Let us now consider the differences between these three practices. As a point of interest, I want to assume the position of 'improvisation advocate' with respect to each topic, as opposed to assuming the viewpoint of someone who ascribes a negative connotation to the term 'improvisation', as this provides some interesting insight into each practice.

Performing free improvisation

Having posited that improvisation is essential to a wide range of activities, we can imagine someone who may want to argue some privileged status that accords free improvisation over the performance of repertoire, for example. This might arise

because free improvisation embraces and explicitly demonstrates an engagement with a structure of musical experience that is in some sense a fundamental feature of the way we engage with the world. Perhaps their argument would sound something like this: 'The reason free improvisation is so interesting is because what is manifest in free improvisation is this fundamental character of human engagement in the world. Free improvisation acknowledges that the basic structure of one's life is this attending to and responding to the world. And rather than downplay this character, like some other musical practices do, free improvisation puts it on display, it makes sonorous and calls into question our everyday being-in-the-world'.

Performing pre-composed repertoire

The performer of repertoire might respond to the advocate of free improvisation by arguing that the free improviser does not have the monopoly on improvisation. The performer of repertoire might retort: 'What you've done in free improvisation is take up a single mode of creative practice and focused on only that thing. What we do as performers of repertoire is acknowledge the essential role of improvisation in our performance, but we also account for the way in which improvisation works itself out in terms of much more stable and fixed forms. While improvisation is clearly important for our everyday lives, so too is working within pre-existing structures and forms. What is in evidence in performing pre-composed works is a "dialogue" of sorts – an improvisational structure – that is present between the "rule governed" form and structure of the composition and "free form" of the improvisation. This much more accurately resembles the broader human situation in the world.'

Traditional composition

The composer, like the free improviser and the performer of repertoire also has a claim to improvisation, perhaps as follows. 'While free improvisers and performers of repertoire display their improvisational process to the world, demonstrating their success and failures, composers acknowledge that not every spontaneous response is the most fitting for the situation. Thus, we improvise away from the public eye and present only what we deem to be the most appropriate and considered responses to the creative process in which we were engaged. Rather than offer just one improvisation,

we offer works that are the culmination of many, highlighting the essential role of improvisation in creation of art.'

Final thoughts

Above, I have presented each point from the perspective of the 'improvisation advocate' who is aware of the role improvisation plays in their practice. Of course, there is an entirely separate category of arguments that exist where improvisation is not portrayed so positively. What is important to acknowledge however, is that for the most part all facets of the argument have validity, because they are all based on cultural forms and structures. In some cultural practices improvisation has a negative connotation, in others a positive one. But if we look beneath the cultural with a view to uncover the structures that provide the foundation for each cultural perspective, then we begin to notice that the advocates for improvisation as it relates to performing pre-composed repertoire, performing free improvisation, and traditional composition each have validity, but none of them can be completely right.

We can only notice that they each have a degree of truth about them, with respect to their cultural or particular viewpoint, when we have outlined the general nature and structure of improvisation itself. It is only when we have this general structure and have articulated a position that doesn't take sides – a position that does not construe improvisation as either positive or negative – that we can begin to notice the primacy of improvisation in a wide range of activities, played out in different ways. In this way, an argument for improvisation shouldn't rule out formalistic classical practices of creating, for they aren't working any differently to free improvisation, for example. It is simply that the forms or modes in which each artistic practice is manifest, because they are culturally determined, give emphasis to different elements and are therefore articulated differently.

Tina Stefanou: Excerpts from *GRAZING ON THE GRANDMAOCENE*

Get off your high horse

A child of the Greek civil war, my grandmother came to Australia as an economic refugee in 1954. She began her Australian life in the rural immigration camps on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. Throughout her life, she encountered multitudes of sonic ecologies, such as the changing environment from Greece to Australia. The air, forests, water, plains, birds, and insects which constructed the geography and climate of her life were fragmented. John Berger calls emigration a type of dismantling of the center of the world, a movement “into a lost, disorientation of fragments.”¹ I contend, that in listening closely to my grandmother's voice I will hear these fragments and traces of her ecological stories.

Grandmother's voice is paradoxically metaphorical and literal; it is immediate and at the same time it is a cultural constitution. My grandmother has a relationship to the environment and sound, and also a direct relationship with me through the character of her voice. Her voice leaves an imprint on me and informs my microcosm of making and composing. This effect is similar to the way the ecological soundscape imprints and impacts the experience of the listener. Through a system of archetypal sounds like bird song, cicada rhythms, and the ocean—the sense of self and soundscape become inextricably linked.²

Andrew Whitehouse unpacks this psychological effect of sound and selfhood when speaking of sonic disappearance. He references the account of a farmer's experience when encountering the absence of bird song after a spraying program was implemented to control fire ants in his town. The local residents experienced a shock that was “unexpected and unnerving.”³ Their lives were accompanied by these familiar companions and highlights the emotional effect of changing sonic ecologies on the listener. Whitehouse argues that there are “symbolic and moral connotations of listening to birds in the Anthropocene that follow from their iconic and indexical grounding in places.”⁴ This produces a series of *anxious semiotics*, where even positive affiliations can have “uncertain implications.”⁵ I feel these implications when listening to my grandmother's voice as I witness her eventual disappearance.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth

Everything has a voice, when you tap a table or shut a door, your earlids open to the *voice of things*. Among these voices there is an opportunity for sonic play which extends the voice into an instrument of praxis.⁶ In his philosophy

¹ John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 57.

² Lawrence Kramer, *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 91.

³ Andrew Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene, The Anxious Semiotics of Sound in a Human-Dominated World,” *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, (2015), 55. <http://www.environmentalhumanities.org/arch/vol6/6.3.pdf>.

⁴ Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene,” 56.

⁵ Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene,” 56.

⁶ The voice as an instrument to think and make with.

of listening, Don Ihde describes sonic play as a “kind of music to the things of the world,”⁷ where “high or fine art is a refinement of the discovered possibilities in the voice of things.”⁸ This discovery is not limited to mere language of words but rather, the material qualities of voices themselves. The voice transports modes, methods, relationships and systems from one location to another. It is a direct device for moving knowledge across materials and places. Furthermore, songs have the power to transfer information and language, reformulating the “same phenomena in different vocabularies.”⁹ Voices of the animal kingdom are more than material qualities of voice, they are instead expressions of “action and emotion.”¹⁰ This mode of expression is exemplified in whale song. After listening and recording whale song for years, acoustic biologist Katy Payne discovered that each aspect of the songs was continually evolving. Furthermore, she suggests that “all the whales in the ocean or in that singing population were changing their songs in the same way.”¹¹ Through a process of migration and imitation, one phrase can evolve over a five-year period. This sonic migration is an example of cultural evolution in a non-human animal, where voice is at its center.

This slow continual becoming and unfolding of song speaks of other time conditions that are outside of human histories; where Earth and other animals operate within different time ecologies. Furthermore, the term *deep time* describes a course of slow geological events that shape and shift the Earth. The terms *deep time* and *deep space* ask humanity to listen for and confront the limits of our understanding.¹² When I listen, perhaps I can hear these deep ecologies of time and culture as constitutive aspects in my grandmother's voice.

Horsepower

I recorded my grandmother singing [You're the Voice](#) again today and witnessed the shift in her physical energy and voice. She was tired and dry, as opposed to the first time when adrenaline propelled her voice forward with a shocking revelation that she could sing. With her tired voice, she could still sing but I could hear the struggle, the years compounding in her vocal cords. From the hoarse voice of my grandmother I transition to being with horses at Jockelbeary Farm. As an uninvited guest, I walked into the center of the paddock and played a percussive wooden instrument. I started singing and experimenting with sound textures and wondered how the horses would respond to my presence. Suddenly, all the horses turned from their grazing to look at me. I closed my eyes and slowly the horses came closer and closer. They began interacting with my body. One horse placed his head underneath my armpit, while another made noises and began kissing the back of my neck. Suddenly, when I opened my eyes there were six horses surrounding me - an ensemble of large resonating bodies. A sound-making-through-kinship begins, where physicality and metaphorical presence becomes the medium.

⁷ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 192.

⁸ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 192.

⁹ Lingus, *The First Person Singular*, 27.

¹⁰ Ihde, *Listening and Voice, Phenomenologies of Sound*, 192.

¹¹ Katy Payne, “In the Presence of Elephants and Whales,” February 1, 2007, In OnBeing, produced by Kristin Tippet, transcript of podcast, <https://onbeing.org/programs/katy-payne-in-the-presence-of-elephants-and-whales/>.

¹² Billy Griffiths, *Deep Time Dreaming: Uncovering Ancient Australia*, (Carlton: Black Inc., 2018), 5.

The metaphor can highlight qualities in “bio-organisms and biodiversity,”¹³ that the habitual eye bypasses. Deleuze refers to this as *Becoming-other*.¹⁴ Furthermore, Braidotti describes *Becoming-other* as something that does not approximate itself with “pre-established normative models.”¹⁵ Instead, it dissolves binaries and becomes rhizomatic: nomadic zigzags full of flows and intensities that fold into “alternative figurations.”¹⁶ Figurations that Braidotti sees as a departure from traditional modes of thinking (i.e. theory and politics).¹⁷ Singing with the horses invites me into new figurations and types of presence that signals a *becoming-other*.

Horses for courses

Grandmother’s voice is an infinite series of accumulated objects and techniques, “through which *culture* is always already constituted.”¹⁸ This moves away from the notion of technology as a set of mediations constructed at particular places and historical crossroads.¹⁹ My research conceptualises a sonic history that is not perceived through a linear set of conjunctures, but rather, a narrative of jagged and tangled lines that live among various practices and peoples. Through these sonic explorations, I am aware of a neo-colonial narrative around sound that enforces a Western influence, an influence that is felt through the audiovisual litany in Western audio technologies.²⁰ Instead of viewing the distribution of sonic material and experience in terms of “efficiency, inexhaustibility, and increasing isolation of the listening subject,”²¹ I seek to understand the deeper social and phenomenological implications of the Western ear. I am calling for a more open sonic terrain, where boundaries between “premodern, non- technological humans, and modern, technological ones” blur.²²

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride

After I witness the traumatic vocalisations from my grandmother, directly after she crashes her car into a tree on the farm, the elephant calls of life and death return again. In my grandmother’s wounds, vocalisations ripple and increasingly amplify through the valley. As the pain becomes more and more conscious, I witness and hear it in real time. Like a wounded animal, the voice of grandmother’s cries are moans for help. I charge across the clearing to be of aid.

Alphonso Lingus speaks of the process “by which a wound, a pain gives rise to vocalization”, something he calls “consciousness backed up to itself.”²³ The rising of pain becomes a situation one is unable to flee from, there is nowhere to retreat. The pain is total. Grandmother is praying through the whimpering and sobbing, thanking god it

¹³ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 73.

¹⁴ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4.

¹⁵ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 73.

¹⁶ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 73.

¹⁷ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 73.

¹⁸ Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 11.

¹⁹ Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 11.

²⁰ Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 7.

²¹ Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 12.

²² Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 12.

²³ Lingus, *The First Person Singular*, 13 and 58.

was her and not me. Now grandmother needs to learn a new vocabulary. In order to live “the sufferer must acknowledge her debilitated or surgically mutilated body.”²⁴ She will need to bring to voice “her shock, her fear, her hopes and despairs.”²⁵ Like the lyrics in *You’re The Voice*, she will have to find the will to *turn the page over*.²⁶ All I can think of is the journey she has ahead – the pain, the ageing body and death.

Unstable Conditions

As I approach the public hospital, I encounter an interweaving matrix of body parts living and dying together. I am confronted by the focus and quick movement of the nurses – all women in monochromatic polycottons. I see toxic waste bins, trays of food, an old man being wheeled off to surgery with a black leaking eye. Then there is my grandmother, a tentacular body hooked up to beeps and cords that run to and from her body. She has bags of fluid that read like texts, inner monologues of the corporal. Nurses come in and extract her body data, drawing blood from veins and pumping antibodies in. The depths of her bile are being drained and the plastic wrapped waste bags ornament her bed chamber. Her room feels like a thoroughfare for her biometrics – organ data being dispersed to departments, computers and labs to be read like tarot cards. What will be the fate of my damaged cyborg grandmother? The giver of life now being given life through mechanical means. I see her as a metaphor of old ecologies, as felt through the chthulucene, where the vital grandmother entity is the body of the planet. A body exploited by capital and machine practices, and yet it is the machine that can sustain her. A life beyond the human body she once knew. A new grandmother ecology emerges: Borgmother. Neither artificial, nor organic.

Is this the future of the body/Earth? Biomechanical combinations to sustain life under the effects of the Capitalocene? Transfusions take place, transference of stories through blood thinners and hydro lights. Voices begin to collapse, and the discarded treatment of an ageing population mixes into an O positive blood machine. Here the Grandmaocene is precarious and all consuming, hanging on by a thread, made up of voices, bodies, machines and stories travelling together into unknown futures.

Coda (exit music):

Every day I hear you call trelo pouli. The poulia come and eat straight from your hand. They know your phonie. I was so happy when you were singing Esie to Phonie. You were worried that I would get a bad mark because your voice isn’t kala. You were laughing so much when I asked you to do it. You sounded wonderful like a real tragouthristria. The sound of your phonie was like a national anthem for grandmothers. I tried to imagine your yiayia’s voice when you were your singing. Like an aloyo you galloped into the song. I loved taking you out of the farma and into the gallery where people listened to you. Your phonie espace to krio of the white walls. You echoed in the space like a mountain singer. When I look in your eyes, I see this young bird in you. Do you remember when you said to me otan

²⁴ Lingus, *The First Person Singular*, 59.

²⁵ Lingus, *The First Person Singular*, 61.

²⁶ Farnham, “You’re the Voice.”

pethenis you want to come back as a garden? People always comment on how mikri eise and as a child I felt safe with you because of that. You are so meyali in your love. I thought filming ta aloya would honour that.



Grandma and Buster, 2019, documentation. Photo by Tina Stefanou

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URGENCY OF TAKING TIME (Or: Could laziness save the world?)

What I have been thinking of while thinking about durational opera *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, winner of this year's Venice Biennale.

Laziness and boredom are loathed terms, but Walter Benjamin suggested that "BOREDOM IS A THRESHOLD OF GREAT DEEDS." → It creates "emotional openness that is the condition for being affected and transformed, for being interested and surprised by one's desires, attractions and imaginations."¹ ← So what happens when we stop being lazy and bored, which is to say when we don't take 'time off'?

Take the scenario presented by *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, a durational opera that won the top prize at this year's Venice Biennale, as an example.



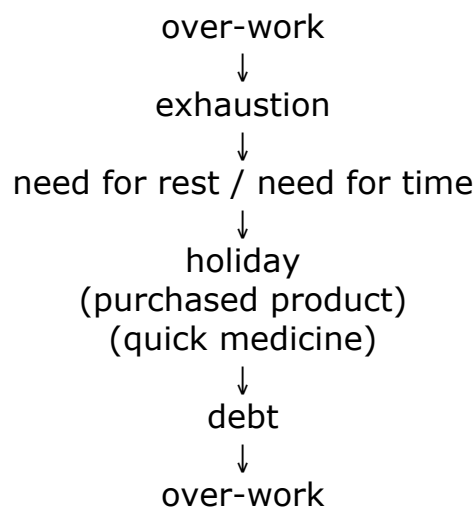
A sandy beach, filled with people of all ages, splaying out on their towels, eating watermelons, cooling themselves with hand-held spinning fans. Surrounded by plastic and waste, they scroll through their I-phones, play cards, and complain about the unusual weather. A familiar scenario, a ready-made of a sort.

¹ See Jonathan Flatley, 'Allegories of Boredom//2004,' in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Boredom*.

Their apathy and resignation are distressing, but they are not so much a result of laziness as of **exhaustion**. The chorus sings....

*People have been planning all year long; their ten days
of vacation, which they only take once every year,
now sitting all sweaty in the airport waiting room...*

'Free' time is commodity, sold as a product called 'holiday', earned by losing time.



These people are customers, buying rest/buying free time but only to immediately fill it up with entertainment included in their 'holiday' package. They fear boredom and laziness. They fear taking time.

The exhausted workaholic sings:

*I really don't feel that I can let myself slow down,
Because my colleagues will look down on me.
[...]
And I'll become a loser in my own eyes.*

*Exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion...
Exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion...*

[...]

*And at work there are unwritten rules, we could call them etiquette:
Don't complain when things get difficult,
When you are lacking sleep,
When you are under the weather.
Even if you run out of gas – just keep smiling...²*

And so we do – we run out of gas but keep going, numbing feelings with entertainment, making/thinking/moving ever faster to avoid sensing anything. Meanwhile the Earth slowly cracks under our feet. We don't notice, we move too rapidly to perceive.

Environmental crisis, like any other change, enfolds gradually; invisible to the fast-moving eye. It takes durational looking³ in order to be seen, the sort of attention one gives to a painstakingly slow movie. But how many of us can bare it; slow down and take time to watch?

Sun & Sea (Marina), an eight-hours long opera is much like that. An "aesthetics of slowness;"⁴ a rebellion against our current **culture of haste**; it asks for our time, in order to be properly seen/heard.



² For all lyrics of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* see: <https://sunandsea.bandcamp.com/releases>

³ Mieke Bal, 'Activating Temporalities: The Political Power of Artistic Time'

⁴ Mieke Bal, 'Activating Temporalities: The Political Power of Artistic Time'

With time, underneath the surface of frivolous whinging, we reveal songs of contemplation and realisation. Those who are not distracting themselves with cheap entertainment (cards, phones, fashion magazines), but gaze into the abyss and rest in boredom, experience awareness slowly sipping in.

Of course, lying on the beach, thinking, is hardly enough. But lying on the beach is not what will bring the world down, as some have suggested. In fact, the lack of it might. Because loss of laziness is loss of time → time taken away from us and then sold back to us (for a short period of time).

The fact is that more time we have, less things we need. Stillness created in slowness, created through resting, is a shield against the onslaught of marketing. Because capitalism breeds on our **rest**lessness. On our need to 'fill in' time with content. On our fear of boredom. And there is a link between exhausted people and exhausted Earth.

Exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion...
Exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion...

Ira Ferris

why do we still care about art when the world is on fire?

Ineke Dane

As a curator with a background in Indigenous and climate change law, I am constantly questioning the currency of art to assuage self-doubt with this course. But I believe in the following statement -

While scientific, economic, and technological research is essential to the stewardship of humanity, the emotional motivation for people to change their behaviours can best be shared through art.

The world is on fire. Literally. Metaphorically. At the time of writing the entire east coast of Australia is burning, while Venice is experiencing its highest acqua alta since 1966. As politicians (most but not all) argue and dance around the accuracy of scientific climate analysis, artists, particularly those working cross-disciplinary, are agitating for new ways to operate in the world through greater acceptance of and equality with 'the other', and imagining practical models that embrace, or revert to, a way of living that considers a legacy for future generations.

Art then proves its currency because it provides hope and solutions in an era (or forever) where resourcefulness is the only answer. It provides an entry point into understanding and therefore untangling otherwise existential knots.

Stéphane Hessel, diplomat and member of the French Resistance, wrote *Indignez-vous!* at the age of ninety-three, ending with the provocation –

TO CREATE IS TO RESIST
TO RESIST IS TO CREATE

That was 2010, just before the Arab Spring. The photos accompanying this piece were taken in Cairo in May 2012 in the week leading up to the first democratic election post-Mubarak. My partner at the time was interested in experiencing and documenting what it took for a people to revolt. I was too.

Somehow, always, both before and after I read Hessel's *Indignez-Vous!*, I've wrestled with a similar sentiment and tried to manifest it through projects and with communities in many places. Maybe it has something to do with witnessing the 2004 tsunami in Thailand, or, months later, the 2005 bombings in London. One gains an acuteness in reading the world around them and a piercing reality check when seeing the base line every one and thing is reduced to.

.....

I work day-to-day as curator with UAP, a global public art studio with outposts in Australia, China and New York. Public art is an interesting beast: unlike galleries, people do not choose to cross a threshold to view and experience. Rather they come across it in the everyday, like a hiccup.

Independently I'm working on two projects. The first is centered on an experimental exploration of Critical Spatial Practice – finding new ways to define the political, social and cultural potential of architecture. The second aims to galvanise under the umbrella theme: 'Adaptation and Mitigation: Artists as Heroes'. Subtext: learn how to live responsibly within a rapidly altering climate as its changes are affecting the services that keep us alive as humans: air, water, and comfortable temperatures.

These projects hopefully ask artists and art to make a future possible, showing the every person, in ways small and large, how.

.....

For example –

If we question the architecture that comprises our habitat, can we begin to 'read' the political, cultural and economic meaning and forces behind it? Will this lead to different forms of empowerment?

Or –

If we see art and nature in the fabric of all we wear, see and do, can we begin to reshape the narratives that inform our consumption choices and behavioural patterns towards an ecological mindset?

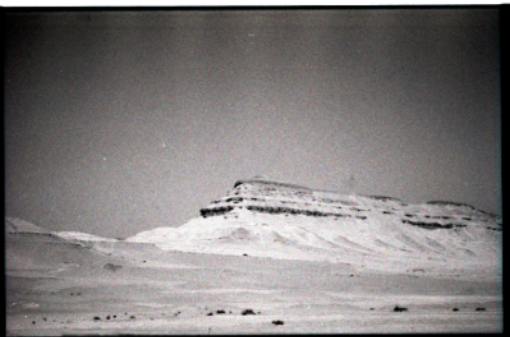
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Then, as land is both sinking and on fire, I wonder if it matters at all. Archives, or the compulsion to store things in boxes, confuse me. Because at the edge you'll see the sun go down and know it rises, and when it does, seconds stop and bones float. So where is the world?

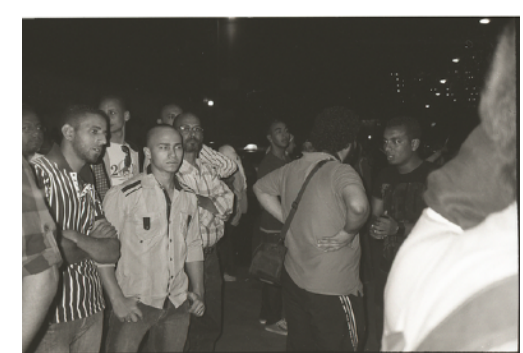
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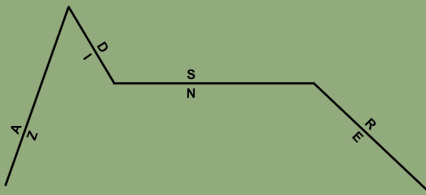
December 2019

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ADSR Zine

[attack, decay, sustain, release]

ADSR Zine is an online platform established in November 2018 by Elia Bosshard, James Hazel and Sonya Holowell. It is a bi-monthly publication that features writing from contributors who are, or who work with contemporary practising artists. We value the process of reflection, translation, interpretation, critical response and active engagement with Australian art and performance.

We believe that the artist is not only an expert in their field, but offers an important voice beyond the scope of their primary discipline. Artists are welcomed to move beyond this scope to embrace naivety, presenting the sweep, the details, or a combination of both.

As a magazine with a strong interdisciplinary focus, the online format allows for the delivery of written, sonic and visual resources to present, support and facilitate discourse between practising artists.

WHAT WE DO

ADSR Zine offers a 3-part conceptual scaffold that is designed to evoke experimental and non-formalist approaches to responsive writing and media within a contemporary arts and performance context.

OUR POINT OF DEPARTURE

ADSR Zine is a platform for discourse that encourages experimental approaches to discussing visual, performative and sound art. Functioning from an 'art begets art' premise, we offer contributors significant creative license.

We are influenced by the wave of 70's and 80's experimental music and art publications (NMA, Sounds Australia) which were platforms for creative and innovative solutions to writing and conceptualising experimental work.

TEAM

Editors = James Hazel, Sonya Holowell, Elia Bosshard
Cover art, website design = Elia Bosshard

