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Sonic Commentary: Audio Series Volume 29

Manfred Werder, Casey Anderson, Travis Just, Kara Feely, Natacha Diels,
John (Jack) Callahan, Carolyn Chen, Sarah Hennies

Leonardo Music Journal, Volume 29, 2019, pp. 100-103 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press

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Sonic Commentary

Audio Series Volume 29

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MANFRED WERDER: 20160 & 20170 (13:18)

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Composition: Manfred Werder.

Actualization: Andrew C. Smith and Mustafa Walker (20170), Manfred Werder (20160), 8 February 2019, Santa Cruz, CA, *Language as a Wilderness* by Indexical, Radius Gallery, concert recording (section).

Concurrent actualization by Andrew C. Smith and Mustafa Walker (20170) and Manfred Werder (20160).

20160 consists of 3 rolls of semitransparent paper, each sized 10 cm × 22 m, trisected from a found paper roll. Since January 2016 I have been inscribing the first roll with typewriters found on site. The first performative presentation took place in Ciudad de México on 9 February 2016. I've been tracing the world onto the roll—words and text found in poetry, philosophy and the world. In the act of writing, the world operates on the unveiled paper, impregnates it and so actualizes the score, and once the paper is rolled up again, its veiled transparency lets the world's abundance manifested on the paper mingle into ever-new possible compounds.

20170 consists of approximately 400 sheets of old found paper. I've been inscribing the paper since April 2017. Wandering through the world and dwelling on their intrinsic realities, I insert the paper in the typewriter and find myself writing.

Writing the score coincides with its actualization and allows for ever-new instances.

There is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now.

—ROLAND BARTHES, 1968

MANFRED WERDER, *composer and performer. His performances, both indoors and outdoors, aim at letting the world's natural abundance appear. Within an intrinsic practice of derive, he writes with a portable typewriter on found paper, actualizing words and sentences found in poetry, philosophy and the world. Earlier works include stück 1998, a 4,000-page score whose nonrecurring and intermittent performative realization has been ongoing since December 1997. Lives in situ.*

CASEY ANDERSON, BENT DUO:

"PAGE 7" FROM *GHOSTSES* (3:26)

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Composer: Casey Anderson.

Performers: Bent Duo (David Friend and Bill Solomon).

ghostses is a computationally generated deconstruction/distortion of W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* for two readers with a battery of instruments (tuning forks, AM/FM radios, harmonica/accordion, kitchen timers/bells and toy percussion). It was commissioned by, and written for, the NYC-based Bent Duo (David Friend and Bill Solomon).

The corpus, (almost all of) Chapter 1 from the Sebald, is separated into multiple layers via a Python program, where each layer shows only one part of speech. Only nouns (printed in red) are visible on the noun layer, for example, and all other text is invisible (though still technically present), ensuring that stacks of multiple layers align properly to reproduce the original text. A reader's part is created by stacking two or more transparencies on top of the background layer, containing all unused parts of speech from the Sebald and printed on white paper. Performers are free to arrange and rearrange their parts from performance to performance.

When performing the piece each player silently reads the entire text of the Sebald "through" the transparencies. When they encounter a colored word on a transparency, they may read that word, and (optionally) a few adjacent words, aloud. Simultaneously, pairs of colored words cue the beginning and end of instrumental activity, where each instrument is assigned to a different part of speech/layer. Players may begin radio activity, to list only one possible example, when encountering a noun on a transparency while silently reading a page. This radio activity continues until a subsequent noun is encountered. The performance of the piece, then, is dictated both by the individual decisions of each performer as well as their personal, internal reading rate.

CASEY ANDERSON is an artist working with sound in a number of media, including composition, improvisation, electronic music, saxophone, text and installations. Performances,

exhibitions, and residencies include MOCA Los Angeles (CA), ISSUE Project Room (NY), STEIM (NL), Atlantic Center for the Arts (FL), Mass MOCA (MA), The Walker Art Center (MN), and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA (CA). He co-founded, and coedits, the Experimental Music Yearbook and owns and operates a wave press. He currently lives in Los Angeles, California, and teaches in the Media Design Practices and Humanities & Sciences departments at ArtCenter College of Design.

OBJECT COLLECTION:

"ATTACK THE TWO-TIERED HEALTH CARE SYSTEM" (4:47), "WHY AREN'T YOU GUYS DANCING" (5:18) FROM IT'S ALL TRUE (EXCERPTS)

Contact: Travis Just.

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Composed by Travis Just. Written and directed by Kara Feely. Performed by Catrin Lloyd-Bollard, Avi Glickstein, Daniel Allen Nelson, Deborah Wallace (voice), Taylor Levine, Josh Lopes, James Moore, Brendan Randall-Myers (electric guitar), Shayna Dunkelman, Owen Weaver (drums). Recorded at Gravesend Studios, Brooklyn. Mixed by Travis Just and Philip White. Released on Slip Imprint. Commissioned by Borealis—a festival for experimental music. Presented in collaboration with Bergen National Opera. Composition commission with the support of Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation.

It's All True was made using material from Fugazi's Live Series archive: recordings of nearly 900 concerts from 1987–2002. Only incidental music, text and sounds were used, none of Fugazi's actual songs. This includes random feedback, drum noodling, preshow activist speeches, audience hecklers and police breaking up gigs—in total, around 1,500 hours of live-concert detritus.

Travis: I listened to the entire archive and logged all the incidental material that I could potentially use, noting the date/track/time of the possible material (sometimes just a one-second guitar chunk or a single snare hit). This took months. Then I went back through and made audio clips of all this potential material.

Kara: We did the same process for the text, listening through and jotting down anything that seemed of interest. Then I went back and began transcribing the text that interested me into one long document. I wanted to represent the kind of subjects and situations that the band was addressing in their shows, and I think the opera touches on most of them. I was interested in the range of voices that were present on the recordings—not just the band but also audience invited up on stage, hecklers and preshow speeches from activists and organizers. The text really spans all of that. Unsurprisingly there was a lot of repetition of things that the band said or situations that they would encounter with

the audience. I was interested in how those conversations changed and evolved, and later I would group those together into sort of dislocated dialogues.

Travis: Then we decided on a durational structure (a single concert from Vienna in 1992). We used this to determine not only the duration breakdown of our final piece but also the character of each section. A single section might contain material from 20 different concerts from all periods of the band, maybe 60 clips in total, layered on top of one another.

Once the collages were done, I decided that standard notation was the only way the ensemble could stay coordinated and also keep the character of the original material—which is counterintuitive given the nature and circumstances of the original casual, incidental source material.

The transcription took another several months. I transcribed the material manually with an acoustic guitar in my lap, which was its own challenge: I can't play guitar at all—I am a saxophonist.

Kara tailored the libretto around the finished collages, placing text at specific points in the music. The vocal music was then composed, though this was done more freely than the instrumental music. I compose for voice without specific pitch or rhythm, using pitch areas (high and low), rates of delivery and a few choice notations. The result is a notated type of speech (non-bel canto), though I very much consider it a sort of singing.

A question is where exactly the point of composition took place, as the collage stage was purely provisional, and the transcription stage was purely technical. I prefer it to be inconclusive.

TRAVIS JUST (*composer, codirector of Object Collection*) is a composer based in Brooklyn, NY, U.S.A.. His work often uses text, objects and gesture in addition to instruments, voice and electronics. He has composed six operas: *Problem Radical(s)* (2009), *Innova* (2011) and *NO HOTEL* (2013), *cheap&easy OCTOBER* (2015), *It's All True* (2016) and *YOU ARE UNDER OUR SPACE CONTROL* (2019). Travis received a BFA from the Mannes College of Music/New School University while studying with Andrew Cyrille. He received an MFA from California Institute of the Arts and studied with James Tenney, Wadada Leo Smith and Michael Pisaro.

KARA FEELY (*writer/director, codirector of Object Collection*) is a writer, director, designer and performer for experimental theater and interdisciplinary performance. Her work draws inspiration from experimental writing and music composition strategies, and combines a variety of materials, from found text fragments and landscapes of objects, to recorded interviews and radio broadcasts. Additionally, her texts have been published in *Antennae*, a journal of experimental writing and performance, *PLAY A JOURNAL OF PLAYS*, and the Japanese imprint *futow*. Kara currently teaches and advises design in the theater department at Barnard College/Columbia University.

NATACHA DIELS, ZACH MOORE, AND SAM SCRANTON: PLEASE DON'T GO (8:48)

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Installation at Radius Gallery, Santa Cruz, February 2019.

Please Don't Go invites the visitor to experience every passing millisecond as a weighty and tangible substance. In order to construct such an experience, *Please Don't Go* offers multiple strategies for prolonged contact with “the now.”

One such strategy involves the active reconstruction of fleeting phenomena and our relationship to them. While insect noises or bird song can be recorded or played back, they can also be resynthesized by hand, lovingly rebuilt, in an attempt to discover their interior qualities and to provide an incessantly repetitive reminder that each second is precious. Houseplants become a symbol of the domestic reconstruction of “nature.” In *Please Don't Go* the houseplants are both literally alive and animated with servo motors.

The installation takes up the best intentions of Dr. Frankenstein without the devastating consequences; or maybe there is something tragic in the desire to hold on to the transient.

The concept of slowing down time contains implications of the surreal or supernatural—these are enhanced through corporate spiritual projections coupled with miniaturized space imagery and vastly magnified ordinary miniatures—popcorn or tiny insects, for example.

Spiritual guides encourage the visitors to engage in time-consuming, endless and circuitous games—the end is never far from the beginning.

Another strategy for slowing down time emerges through a directionless music. Often our listening is anticipatory, goal-oriented; through an immersive solid-state-static soundscape, one can refocus the mind on present activity.

Performers offer words of gratitude, as gratitude itself is an act of savoring the present or recent past. Rounding out the experience, *Please Don't Go* uses projections, scented mist and a reconstructed waiting room to provide the visitor with an alternative timeline for the visit, one that moves slowly or perhaps timelessly. An oversized water clock measures the time passing, slowly and erratically. Other physical rebuilds reestablish missed connections with the world we've built around us.

NATACHA DIELS's work combines choreographed movement, improvisation, video, instrumental practice and cynical play to create worlds of curiosity and unease. Recent work includes *Papillon* and the *Dancing Cranes*, for construction cranes (2018); forthcoming is a TV miniseries with the JACK quartet. With a focus on collage, collaboration and the ritual of life as art, Natacha's compositions have been described as “a fairy tale for a fractured world” (FOCI Arts/Music We Care About). Natacha is a member of the composer/performer collective *Ensemble Pamplémousse* and the performance duo *On Structure*. She teaches composition and computer music at UC San Diego.

DIE REIHE: 106 KERRI CHANDLER CHORDS (9:56)

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Recorded live at ISSUE Project Room on 4 May 2019.
Composed by Kerri Chandler. Arranged by John (Jack) Callahan.

In 2016 I began a project of sampling chords from house music tracks from the early 1980s to today. House music has its roots in the harmonic language of modern jazz, which I studied for many years, so the idea of a popular dance music with a sophisticated sense of harmony is intriguing to me. This endeavor resulted in the piece *Housed*, a living archive of 850 chords of varying length from over 150 artists. I realized a large percentage of tracks I sampled were produced by Kerri Chandler, a legendary producer and DJ from New Jersey who got his start in the late 1980s. I decided to take all the samples from his tracks, 106 in total, and transcribe them. Over the years the piece has taken the form of a string quartet, piano and chamber pieces, a jazz lead sheet and more. This version was recorded with a Roland SVC-350 vocoder, Max/MSP and a Shure SM57. It consists of Max/MSP playing the chords as saw waves (as the carrier signal) through the vocoder and the speaker (me) activating them by reading the name of the chord (as the modulator signal). Once a name is read, Max/MSP detects a pause and triggers the next chord. The process is repeated ad nauseum.

JOHN (JACK) CALLAHAN is a composer and sound engineer based in New York. He primarily works under the moniker *die Reihe*, taken from the journal edited by Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen. With this project he has released music with labels such as *Anomia*, *Ascetic House*, *NNA Tapes* and *Salon*. In 2013 he founded *Bánh Mì Verlag*, an imprint dedicated to contemporary experimental music and culture. As a composer his music has been performed and recorded by ensembles such as the *S.E.M. Ensemble*, the *Wet Ink Ensemble* and the *Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra* in such cities as New York, Amsterdam and Zürich.

CAROLYN CHEN: THIS IS A SCREAM (12:26)

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This Is a Scream is an audio essay that began as a program note on an ensemble piece about a scream. It begins with an enigmatic clip from Kanye West's *Monster* that inspired me to write a through-composed piece for chamber ensemble dissecting and reassembling that scream, slowing it down to search for the feeling and the music in it. The essay traverses how I hear this scream, how I tried to remake it and how I try to learn to scream myself, accounting for my cultural upbringing.

CAROLYN CHEN *has made music for supermarket, demolition district and the dark. Recent projects include a hug quartet and commissions for Klangforum Wien and the LA Phil. Her listening is informed by playing the guqin, the Chinese zither traditionally used for private meditation in nature. Described by The New York Times as "consistently alluring . . . a quiet but lush meditation," her work has been presented in 25 countries and supported by the Berlin Prize, the Fulbright Program, ASCAP's Fred Ho Award, Stanford University's Sudler Prize, Soros Fellowships for New Americans, MATA Festival and impuls Festival.*

SARAH HENNIES: QUEER TRASH (15:40)

Contact: Sarah Hennies.
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Composed and performed by Sarah Hennies. Recorded by Cara Tolmie on 10 February 2019 at Fourth Edition Festival, Fylkingen, Stockholm.

Queer Trash is a lecture/performance piece consisting of an essay and semi-improvised music on a variety of cheap bells found at thrift stores and flea markets. The piece's text discusses traditional Western gender roles as they relate to drums and percussion, and explores these through the lens of transgender identity. Because drumming is considered to be "for boys," it is widely considered to be an expression of power and masculinity, when in fact percussion is a vast spectrum of queer potential. *Queer Trash* explores ideas of trans representation and percussion as a queer practice, and examines how predominant trends in drumming and percussion erase women and gender-nonconforming individuals and strictly limits what can be achieved through percussion.

SARAH HENNIES (b. 1979) *is a composer and percussionist based in Ithaca, NY, whose work is concerned with a variety of musical and sociopolitical issues including psychoacoustics, love, intimacy and queer/trans identity. She is a recipient of a 2016 fellowship in music/sound from the New York Foundation of the Arts and a 2019 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists Award. She is currently Visiting Professor of Music at Bard College during the 2019–2020 academic year.*