

Why Not Our Voices?

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Abstract

Using three case studies of work by Hildegard Westerkamp, Janet Cardiff and Jasmeen Patheja this paper investigates how women sound artists use the speaking voice in their work to create a 'sonic persona' that directly challenges historical and contemporary cultural assumptions about both women's voices and the male normative in sound arts practice.

The paper traces the starting points of this research through a small project investigating work by female students at London College of Communication. One of the most significant findings of this was that many female students used voice, mainly speaking voice and often their own, in their work. It goes on to consider 'common' cultural assumptions about women's voices from a number of sources and then moves to a detailed analysis of the three works.

While not directly referencing the content of the Her Noise Archive, this paper owes its impetus to, and is part of, the development of a feminist sound studies which has been activated by the establishing of the Her Noise Archive at London College of Communication.

Starting points

In 2008 I conducted a small research project within the Sound Arts department at London College of Communication (LCC)¹. The project entitled 'A suitable job for a woman? Using creative work to challenge perceptions of Sound Arts and Design at LCC and widen participation'² arose from my observation that, since 1998 when Sound Arts was first offered as an academic field of study at LCC, the type of work produced by female students was significantly different from that produced by male students. The research focused on two main areas: the experiences of female students when they were at college and the work that they produced. The main research questions that I asked about their work were:

1. Can the work be said in any way to be gendered? How is gender difference represented in the work?
2. Can we talk about the techniques of sound work as being gendered?
3. How is voice used in the work?
4. Can our knowledge of the artist's gender inform our understanding of the work in any way?
5. Do women talk about their work differently from men?

Many issues and conclusions arose from this enquiry but, for me, one of the most significant findings was that many female students used voice, mainly spoken voice, in their work, often their own. Hannah Bosma has observed that

there is a tendency in computer music to use male and female voices in different ways: the female voice is associated with (traditionally trained) singing, often without words and often live, and the male voice is more often associated with spoken language.³

While this was not corroborated by my research, other observations of Bosma's were similar to my findings.

...Various ways of singing, speaking, non-linguistic and linguistic female voice sounds, written text and electronic sound manipulations are often combined by women composers to create different stories about femininity in words and sounds.⁴

As were Elizabeth Hinkle Smith's ideas about women's use of voices

in a way that provides an empowering element to her composition and an autobiographical insight into her creative process.⁵

The Her Noise Archive at LCC

This research project was one of the contributing factors to Electra⁶ choosing London College of Communication as a home for the Her Noise Archive. The physical archive now shares the shelves in the Archives and Special Collections at LCC with materials from Stanley Kubrick, Edward Bawden, Tom Eckersley, Thorold Dickinson, John Westwood, Robert Fenton, John Schlesinger and Jocelyn Herbert and provides a material anchor for the online archive and research collection⁷. Together they have driven the development of dialogues and further practices related to feminism and sound arts and provided a context and material for individual and collaborative ongoing scholarly and practice based research⁸ This enquiry into the use of voice is one of those areas.

Maria Tamboukou has described the archival researcher like a lighthouse revolving light into the greyness of the archive bringing into vision the possible⁹. This foregrounds the researcher as an activator of ideas that lead her to interrogate the archive and recasts the archive from that of a closed sealed entity to a springboard for new ideas and possibilities which allows the opportunity to "make elements of this past live again, to be re-energized through their untimely or anachronistic recall in the present"¹⁰ with the aim of moving "us to a future in which the present can no longer recognize itself."¹¹ Since the Her Noise Archive arrived in the academy we have worked to open it to intervention and questioning with the aim of extending and activating academic and musicological research, new practices and syllabi¹². We have used it to help us explore the present reality of sound arts practices for us and our students, as it is in the institution here and now. Our aim in anchoring our research to the small chunk of cultural memory represented by the Her Noise Archive is to re-mobilise and re-mediate past feminisms and sounds and to form new understandings of the sonic worlds that exist as well as inhabiting sonic worlds that do not yet exist.

The search for an authentic voice in sound arts practice

Within the wider field of sound art an almost surprising number of women have become prominent, many of whom use voices extensively in their work, in many cases their own voices¹³. This paper investigates some of the ways in which female artists are using the voice to directly challenge historical and contemporary cultural assumptions about both women's voices and the male normative in sound arts practice. In order to do this I will discuss a piece of sound work by each of three

different artists and consider them against the background of 'commonly' held views about women's voices.

Women's voices

At various times and in many cultures women's voices have been compared with all that is animal, lowly and venial. "They screech like fishwives, laugh like drains, shriek like hyenas, nag like sirens, cackle like hens"¹⁴ The other side to the base, animalistic qualities of women's voices relates to sexual temptation and seduction. Sirens are said here to nag but they are more commonly thought of as *femmes fatales* who lead men astray, a byword for the seductive female voice that leads to death and corruption.

The Judeo-Christian world has long considered the voices of women to be indecent and a temptation to lust. They were forbidden from speaking in church.

Not only were women disqualified from liturgical singing, they were also banned from sermonising. When they did begin to take a more public role they were often ridiculed as freaks. "A woman's preaching," remarked Dr Johnson, "is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

Similar criticism, or worse, has routinely been hurled at the suffragettes, at women activists, trade unionists and campaigners.¹⁵

And as Ellen Koskoff has observed

Lubavitchers share with other orthodox Jews the belief that a woman's voice is a serious distraction to the real purpose of a man's life, namely the study of Jewish law and the fulfillment of a deep relationship to God. Any situation that might encourage a man to become sexually aroused or to be *ervah* (sexually promiscuous) outside the sanctity of marriage is forbidden. The ancient Talmudic scholars cited Solomon's song of Songs, "For your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful" (Jones 1966:2:14) as the source for this prohibition.¹⁶

The animalistic, unnatural and seductive aspects of women's voices are based on specific qualities such as pitch and texture. Recent studies have suggested that in order to get on in life women need to speak like men.

Want to lead like a boss? Then speak like a man. And by that I mean literally speak like a man. Study after study has suggested that low voices, "masculine" voices, are an asset to those seeking leadership roles, in politics and beyond. ... We prefer low voices because, we assume, voices say something far beyond the words they convey: We perceive men with lower-pitched voices to be more attractive and physically stronger--and also more competent and more trustworthy--than their less burly-voiced peers. And we perceive women with lower-pitched voices along the same lines (though we also tend to perceive them, tellingly, as less attractive than their Betty Boop-y counterparts).¹⁷

Even now, as Sally Feldman points out

Practically every woman in politics, now, affects more or less the same modulated, measured, alto tones of the normal, say-it-like-it-is speaking style.¹⁸

Maybe as a result over the last fifty years women's voices have on average dropped in pitch.¹⁹ However women with relatively high pitched voices tend to be seen as attractive with voice pitch a cue for advertising her health and fertility,²⁰ indeed women's voices are said to rise and fall according to her fertility cycle.²¹ As Ann Karpf has observed "pitch has become a weapon in the gender wars"²²

Vocal timbre is equally significant. Soft sweet girlish voices, possibly a hangover from the time when women had to wear restrictive clothing suggest innocence and demureness, it can also signal a kind of sexy helplessness, especially when it carries a note of breathiness. This, Anne Karpf suggests, is because during orgasm the mucus in the larynx changes consistency and makes it vibrate less effectively. So the breathy, baby-doll voice perfected, albeit with a heavy dose of irony, by Marilyn Monroe manages to be both sexually inviting and tantalisingly virginal.²³

Mediatized women's voices

On British radio, women's voices were thought to be monotonous, sharp, unpleasing and unsuitable for the microphone. In the early days of the British Broadcasting Corporation there were no women broadcasters at all, and although this gradually changed "there was a very long established prejudice against female voices in certain areas of radio: sport, news and, most particularly, music."²⁴

the history of women's exclusion from broadcasting represents perhaps the most blatant example of prejudice against women's voices.²⁵

There are, in the UK however, places where mediatised women's voices are commonly heard. Public announcements on trains, at airports, on the underground, on buses, in supermarkets, from card payment machines and on computers all use women's voices. It is possible that people have been used to getting help from a disembodied woman's voice stemming from the historic preponderance of female telephone operators.

Nina Power as made the following points about the ubiquitous disembodied female voice in the diminishing 'public' realm.

The first is that the ubiquitous often pre-recorded disembodied female voice of spatial control or containment operates in direct proportion to the absence of an expressive female voice in the same not quite public realm. Secondly that the utopian potential of the technologized female voices has for now been co-opted into a set of sonic securitisations but nevertheless retains a revolutionary potential.²⁶

Power suggests that electronic equipment holds a utopian promise for women, the female voice de-coupled from her physical body is at once a reminder of that body and a way of moving beyond it. It holds utopian promise in its relationship to a

possible body that has not had to conform to the cultural pressures of the real world. It is what Salomé Voegelin has called the ‘gendered sonic body’²⁷ that questions and implodes those norms and is possibly in a position to do this more strongly than through imagery or indeed by being associated with an image. Chion claims that

“Isolating the voice as they do, telephone and radio posit the voice as a *representative* of the whole person”²⁸ maybe this is a womanly whole that isn’t fractured by being subjected to the gaze and allows for Power’s “utopian potential of the technologized female voices.”²⁹

However it all comes down to who is in charge of the means of production and, in the case studies below, the composer or artist is in control of her own voice or the voices that she works with.

Artists’ practices with spoken word

There is not scope in this paper to conduct an extensive or detailed survey into the intermittent history of artists’ practices with spoken word and voice since the dawn of the last century. However I suggest that this area of work is essentially political, finding creative ways to counter accepted cultural norms and usages and create possibilities that both celebrate the extraordinary richness of everyday communication and extend beyond the limits of language. Over this time artists have used language to mimic the sounds of the worlds that they have heard around them; invented languages that attempt to transcend national boundaries; explored the alchemy of the spoken word; promoted the physical properties of speaking; celebrated the speech, realities and everyday lives of ordinary people and places and de- and re-constructed language through a huge inventory of techniques realised in performed and recorded works.³⁰ They share a desire to show us what the spoken word could be in an attempt to liberate it from the boundaries and restraints exerted by the culture and politics of any society and carry within them an embedded utopian intent.

Case Studies: the spoken voice in sound art by women

Research, both mine and that of others, has established that women artists working with sound frequently use voices, often their own. This, as we have discussed above, forms part of a tradition of artists working with sound who have used spoken voice in many ways for variety of activist or political purposes, however women artists using voices contend with the additional widespread social, cultural and religious prejudice against women’s voices in the public sphere. How are women artist engaging with these ideas in their work and in what way are they using them to subvert and challenge ways of thinking about the world?

In the course of her research³¹, including the Her Noise Archive, Holly Ingleton has developed a set of questions to help the analytic listener investigate the languages and codes that artists and composers may use to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world specifically as related to gender difference. The discussion of the works in the following three case studies will be informed by three of these questions:

1. How does the work problematize the patriarchal /phallogocentric presumptions that govern the field of electroacoustic and sound arts?
2. Does it challenge the position of a singular universal authority, assumed to be normatively masculine?

3. Does it generate new modes of thinking, being and/or becoming that contest the regulatory limits and constraints currently at work in the field?³²

I suggest that in keeping with the now long established traditions of artistic practices that use the voice and language to challenge dominant cultural, sociological and political beliefs, voice has become one of the most important tools that women sound artists use to undermine the “patriarchal /phallogocentric presumptions that govern the field of electroacoustic and sound arts” and the “position of a singular universal authority” in order to “generate new modes of thinking, being and/or becoming”. In the following three case studies I will analyse how each of the artists do this by looking specifically at their use of some of the aspects already discussed. These include the type of voices used (speaking or singing); whose voices are used (male or female; the artist’s own voice or voices of others); the quality of the voice (pitch, timbre, intonation); the relationship with technology; the space that is created with the voice; suggested vocal identity and how these compare with commonly held perceptions of women’s voices; language and subject matter. Through this I hope to be able to show how each artist create a ‘sonic persona’ through which the technologised female voice regains revolutionary potential.³³

The Prophetess and Seer:

‘Kits Beach Soundwalk’³⁴ - Hildegard Westerkamp

“Luckily we can just go into the studio and forget about the city, pretend it’s not there”

‘Kits Beach Soundwalk’ is a well known work made by German/Canadian composer Hildegard Westerkamp in 1989. It starts with an environmental recording of the gentle lapping of water at Kits Beach, Vancouver. Hildegard enters at the centre of the scene, her disembodied voice guiding us around the heard but unseen environment, low, controlled and well modulated. Talking about why she took the relatively unusual step of using her voice in environmental recordings Hildegard said that she wanted her voice to be

... a bit like that of a sports announcer - the mediator between the environment and the audience with the voice filling them in on things that they couldn’t otherwise know. It would place them more squarely inside the recording context, inside their own listening, so I imagined. I would talk about the weather, the seasons, things that were going on and might be audible but not necessarily identifiable.³⁵

At just over a minute into the piece there is a gear change. The commentary changes from the general to the personal. Hildegard’s voice gains more pitch variety and expression as she places herself more fully in the ‘acoustic frame’ recounting her experience within that listening environment “The city is too loud to listen to the small sounds ... it interferes with my listening. It occupies all acoustic space ... “. Hildegard tells us that “it seems too much effort to filter the city out” while she is standing there at Kits Beach, but she has access to the technology of the studio “luckily we have band pass filters and equalisers. Luckily we can just go into the studio and get rid of the city, pretend it’s not there. Pretend we’re SOME WHERE FAR AWAY”.

The change of emphasis and pacing on these words suggests a turning point. The voice changes again becoming soft and intimate as she discusses more internalised experiences, "I often hear these tiny sounds in my dreams, those are the healing dreams". Hildegard describes four dreams - of women in a mountain village weaving a silky fabric which sounded like tiny voices; of a stone cottage with four generations of a peasant family eating and talking; of bullets tinkling

"... a man was pursuing me with a gun, I was frightened, but the bullets tinkled - metallic, tiny, seductive semen tinkling all around me like in Xenakis Concret PH made from the sounds of the discharge of smouldering charcoal tinkling all over the Brussels Pavilion."

and of the sounds of glass heard when sitting in the car with a woman friend "on the car radio they announced that it as Mozart". The dreams are 'healing', 'energising' and offer an alternative (sound)world to the 'monstrous' city, and once again Hildegard recognises the utopian promise of technology noted by Power, "as soon as I make space to hear sounds like this or to dream them then I feel the strength to face the city again or even to be playful with it, play with the monster, then I can FACE the monster".

'Kits Beach Soundwalk' is unusual in its use of verbal description to contextualise sound, but it does far more than this. Westerkamp uses her commentary to suggest an unbalanced world where individual voices are silenced by an imposed authoritarianism manifested through sound. The work allows her to rebalance this by promoting a change of listening habits and the regaining of an individual's inner voice (Kolber) "For Westerkamp, Kits Beach Soundwalk is a way to reclaim her voice as an individual. She stands back and distances herself from the dominating external voices and worlds"³⁶.

Writing about listening to 'Kits Beach Soundwalk' with a group of students Andra McCartney reports a piece of feedback on the use of the voice

Cooil (30m Queen's electroacoustic composition) associates Westerkamp's voice with an intimacy that is almost invasive: "the talking made me feel that I was spying on her or reading her diary." This comment indicates a degree of discomfort with intimacy, perceived as an invasion of privacy.³⁷

McCartney notes that there is little comment on the subjects or language of the dreams "Jon (22m, Waterloo composition) says "comparing bullets to semen. Discharging, other sexual imagery".³⁸ This is the only comment on the remarkable sequence where Westerkamp describes a scene where a man pursues her with a gun, then links this directly to Xenakis's 'Concret PH', the work made in 1958 from the sounds of charcoal for playback over 425 loudspeakers in the Philips Pavilion, Brussels. Is Westerkamp's dream making a connection between male aggression and Xenakis's music or maybe the 'monstrous' city and the huge amount of speakers used for the playback of 'Concret PH'?

Brandon LaBelle has suggested that 'Kits Beach Soundwalk', in common with much acoustic ecology is about the rejection of 'noise'. "Westerkamp's work ...

oversimplifies the sound world by reducing it to such binary terms, making the journey into sound resolutely quiet, withdrawn, dreamy and private”.³⁹ This is an oversimplification, Hildegard does not simply reject noise and embrace silence but reclaims her voice and technology to suggest that by rejecting the “monstrous city” (and possibly the monstrous ego of the male composer) and making space for the small sounds of domestic activity, a wider range of being and belonging in the world can come into being.

“The idea to use the voice in “Soundwalking” had everything to do with the radio context. But I also think that I was literally trying to find my own voice, as a composer / artist and as a woman in the face of having worked with five guys. I had researched for Schafer’s book but during the productions of our early WSP documents I mostly watched my colleagues and listened in on the process. Yes, I learnt a hell of a lot at that stage. But I was just a huge listener and didn’t know my own creative voice yet – in a way the ‘perfect female’: listening intensely and not asserting her own voice – yet. The radio programme allowed me to continue listening in an intense way, but also to explore voicing and expressing, creating and producing.”⁴⁰

Throughout “Kit’s Beach Soundwalk” Hildegard modulates her relationship with the listener through the modulation of her speaking voice. Through the piece she metaphorically moves from leading us from the front to standing behind us pointing the directions of the future. She guides us from a critical investigation of what is to a auralized vision of what could be, casting herself, in the process, as a prophetess who reveals new possible alternative futures.

The Siren and Seductress:

‘Louisiana Walk 14’⁴¹ Janet Cardiff

‘Louisiana Walk 14’ (1996) is one of Canadian artist Janet Cardiff’s early sound walks. It is designed to be listened to wearing headphones while walking around the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. Like most of her sound walks it is recorded binaurally.

Janet begins by placing us in an internal environment and her voice immediately establishes intimacy through her tone, her words and her proximity. She whispers in your ear, a close friend or lover inviting you to follow and stay with her wherever she leads. You, the listener, are not addressed as an audience but as an individual, you are required to respond “Do you hear me? I want you to walk with me to the garden. Let’s go outside. ..”. Her voice carries a sense of urgency. In contrast to Hildegard’s peaceful modulated tones, Janet speaks in short clipped sentences, business-like and slightly breathless. She gains your trust and invites you to couple with her sonic body, “Try to walk to the sound of my footsteps so that we can stay together”. Once she has you with her, she starts to weave the web and mesh you in her sonic fiction noir. It’s another dream but, while Hildegard’s dreams are only experienced by her and retold to you, Janet’s dreams enfold you, she tempts you in with her voices and you are there with her right in the middle of it. Janet doesn’t explain or critique the environment you are both in, it is a backdrop to the action that is shared between you and her. You walk with her on a path through changing environments. Janet’s voice changes. The fiction involves similar characters as in Hildegard’s dreams. There is an older woman, in this case

the grandmother, “I’ve told you about her before” she assumes a shared past with you. As you walk around with your headphones on your reality becomes the disembodied unreality of the fiction rather than the here and now of the present. This fiction takes on a number of different guises. It is cinematic, the music sounds like something you have heard before, maybe from an old detective or murder mystery film. You move to an expanded and populated experience of the site encountering an acousmatic accordion player, dogs, a child, all strongly suggesting a scene very different from that which you must see around you. You pass a woman talking about the art displays “a sculpture is like a journey when you return your view has changed.” You are on a journey, seeing and experiencing things with Janet in her different guises. The speed picks up. “There’s so many things I want to tell you about” Janet intones, but they don’t make sense - “The head of a cow floating beneath the water. A man hanging from a tree in front of a fire”. We don’t know whose the male voice is but it adds to a building sense of mounting fear. We swap between times and places – from Denmark to Toronto “I am walking along the path in a park in Toronto right now. I walk here every day with my dog. I’m a bit later than usual tonight. It’s a bit scary.” Like Hildegard, Janet refers back to a dream where she was scared, “Last night I dreamed a man chased me. I don’t know what he wanted. I woke up and tried to finish the dream the way I wanted it to end, shooting him with a gun”. A male voice enters, whispering, warning, “Look behind someone’s following you”. Is he warning Janet about someone who is following her or us about Janet? Gradually her voice, the male voice and the sounds and a sense of paranoia around builds up. it carries on, she is sometimes scared, you are scared, she plays with a builds up host of identities calling on popular culture and cinematic conventions. We are wrapped in a dream of her making.

“Like a science fiction, a dream vision or an experimental short story. Louisiana Walk 14 breaks with any consistent notion of time, past, present or future. Seconds seem to slow down or speed up with each scene, creating strange windows of time independent from the present. Place is treated in an equally disorientating manner: the narrative is at times grounded in the actual landscape but at times evades it ⁴²

We have been seduced, possessed, as if by the sirens. Circe advised Odysseus to plug his ears and those of his companions with wax but we have been infiltrated and penetrated sonically through our ears by her sonic body. We are lost and find ourselves in a different reality, dreamlike and nightmarish

As time passes, the closeness of the voices, especially Cardiff’s presumes an intimacy of a known companion and penetrates your body: her will and thought merge temporarily with you While you are all ears she is all voice⁴³

Like a mythical siren Janet destabilises the known and seduces and inhabits the listener to journey with her into the unknown. It is impossible to grasp who or where she is or what is going on, you have no choice but to follow her through a fragmented dreamlike world of both inner and outer experience. Both she and the world around you shape-shift and change, it is impossible to know her or where she leads you and you get lost. You are lost, possessed by her voice. The listener’s

relationship with the known and the 'real' have been fractured and they are placed into a surreal and uncanny world with an uncertain future.

The Medium and Priestess:

'Moments of a Long Pause' - Jasmeen Patheja

'Moments of a Long Pause'⁴⁴ is an audio text piece extracted from a 2-channel video installation. It is based on interviews with men and women on the streets of 5 Indian cities; Delhi, Agra, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Calcutta. The online work consists of audio and words on screen which are often English translations of the Indian languages of the speakers. Sometimes the words on screen are also used to emphasize aspects of the sound through use of color (red from black and white in times of anger) or when words pile upon word rendering them incomprehensible.

The piece opens with a male voice "Hi. Can I know your name? ... Don't you want to be my friend?". A female voice interjects "I say NO". He persists, "It doesn't matter if you don't want this. I still want to be your friend. ... It's up to you if you don't want this but I'm going to be meeting you every day ...". The woman replies in English "What makes you think you have the right to come up here and talk to me like this just because I happen to be here alone?". Another male voice sounds, "You're looking so pretty ... Bus train girl are available at every station. Do you think anyone can refuse me after I shave?", after a while he also receives an angry reply from the same woman, "You think I'm good looking. You think I'm ugly. Whatever the hell it is keep it to yourself ...". A succession of male voices continue to make statements about how to approach women. "The right girl will never accept a friendship proposal immediately. If a boy understands that she's not one to say yes at first he will try again. He will try 2 or 4 or even 10 times ...". After two minutes a succession of women's voices enter, "I feel scared of men. I am scared of nothing else. ... We've used everything from blades to pepper spray...". Interjections from men continue as women tell of their experiences of street harassment "... It happens often not just with me but with everyone ... I like walking but I can't walk because of the boys ...". After another two minutes a litany of the offences that have been committed are recited by a variety of women's voices, "whistling, comment passing, touching, touching at the wrong organs, brushing against, bad languages" the list grows. We return to the men who recount, without apparent guile or guilt, the details of how they harass, "... if the girl gets scared we will have a good laugh, the girl will look at us in fear, it will be good time pass ...". After a while we hear more specific stories about how women have reacted to their harassment being driven to acts of violence, "I'll take off my sandals and hit him on the head ..." and their methods of avoidance. These are interspersed with women claiming they have never experienced harassment. As time goes on every so often a statement produces applause from others, we hear the street in the background and there is no doubt that they are genuine voices telling of real experiences, often angry and emotional. It is a public forum. Men's angry outraged responses all pile in on top of each other, "Why do women wear clothes that provoke gents to tease them? ... "the girls these days roam around wearing short clothes ...". The translation screen turns red and words are piled on top of each other. We cannot make them out any more and indeed cannot understand them, the words become sounds freed of specific meanings but we understand the intent full well. Male and female voices are speaking at the same time, telling their tales in a kind of orchestrated debate except that neither is speaking to each other or listening, and we cannot understand either. There is sonic binary that cannot hear and cannot listen.

The talk turns to Indian traditions, the influences of both Hinduism and Islam and of women's ties to the home. The full inequality between men and women regarding freedom of movement emerges and the talk turns more directly to the possibility of rape, "... her entire family suffers. It will be insulting for us. ... the reputation of the girl will be spoilt. Everything will be spoilt ...". The piece ends with a male voice putting the blame firmly on women for the way that they dress and the way that they look. The talk has turned full circle back to women's roles as seducers and temptresses. The women in this work are far from that however, their voices are angry, often defiant and outraged. While it is unclear whether we hear the voice of the artist herself is, it is clear that, like a medium she has channeled these multiple voices, old, young, male and female speaking of their experiences and building up a disturbing picture of the lack of understanding between the sexes through the testimony of real people. Over its duration the piece juxtaposes the vocalised evidence to build up an alarming picture of what men think of women and their availability, pitting it against women's stories of their experience of aspects of domination and repression through the variety and amount of massed vocal responses confronting the fear based relationship women have with their cities. Jasmeen is both the high priestess and the judge presiding over this mixture of public trial and confessional.

When talking about her project "Blank Noise" Jasmeen says

The project began from a space of anger; of wanting to do 'something' about personal daily experiences of street harassment and not having the space or the vocabulary to do anything about it. There was a sense of normalcy and acceptance around street sexual violence.⁴⁵

Video and sound pieces such as this are some of the ways that Blank Noise triggers public debate by collecting testimonials and dispersing them back in the public. Other include public events and actions on the web and on the streets of various cities. The world depicted in 'Moments of a Long Pause' is not so much a dream of the utopian future but a voiced nightmare of a lived urban reality. There is no escape. The use of the massed voices reveal two divided and opposing 'sides'. The voices themselves are not intimate but they speak intimate thoughts and we are pulled into them through the sheer weight of speakers and words. These female sonic bodies are the innermost reflections of the physical body and, placed in juxtaposition with the leering entitled male sonic body they start to form a massed chorus of sonic dissent, a sonic body that fights back and hopefully, in the hands of its priestess, empowers the physical bodies in the lived environment.

Conclusion

The act of using one's own voice and language in one's own way is a radical move within electroacoustic music and sound art and women sound artists use voices, their own and others, in ways that subvert commonly held historic, socio-cultural prejudices against the existence of women's voices in public spaces. Sound art, maybe because of its relatively emergent status as a genre, or maybe because of its essentially ethereal, disembodied, non-material nature, provides a space in which women feel that they can be and have a right to be heard. The recorded speaking voice is de-coupled from the physical body and becomes 'liberated' allowing women sound artists to explore their own voices, to both critique existing political and cultural realities and to create visions of new sonic utopias. Within these new sonic worlds women sound artists have employed a wide palette of vocal usage and language to construct new sonic identities (prophetess, seer, siren, seductress,

medium, priestess) which allow them to challenge the material world, the commonly held prejudices and social and cultural norms that they inhabit daily, and to suggest other, more playful, more balanced realities. In the three case studies above each of the artists has built a 'sonic persona' using the pitch, texture, intonation and volume of the voice and language and used the construction of that persona to map, relate or change their and our relationship with the immediate lived environment. They use the microphone as a microscope to study the social and cultural scene around them and then repackage it in their work, presenting a new world in which they have put back the missing voices, revealing the world as they see it as Westerkamp says, "listening in an intense way, but also to explore voicing and expressing, creating and producing."⁴⁶

¹ London College of Communication (formerly London College of Printing) is one of the colleges of University of the Arts London.

² Unpublished paper available from the author

³ Bosma H (2003) "Bodies of evidence, singing cyborgs and other gender issues in Electrovoical music" *Organised Sound* 8:1

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Hinkle Smith, E. (2005) "Hear Me Now: the implication and significance of the female composer's voice as sound source in her electroacoustic music" *eContact!*, 8:2
<http://cec.concordia.ca/econtact/>

⁶ Electra is a London based contemporary art organization which curates, commissions and produces projects by artists working across sound, moving image, performance and the visual arts. Electra curated the original Her Noise Exhibition the materials of which form the basis of the Her Noise Archive. For more information see
<http://hernoise.org/documentation/introduction/>

⁷ Her Noise Archive at hernoise.com

⁸ This research includes the papers by Dr Holly Ingleton and Lina Džuverović in this issue

⁹ Tamboukou, M. "*Heterotemporalities: imagination, memory and histories of the present*" paper delivered at

Thinking Through Time and History in Feminism, Birkbeck College, London, March 2012

¹⁰ Grosz, E (2004) *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*, Duke University Press, p117

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² For more information see hernoise.com

¹³ Examples include Hildegard Westerkamp, Susan Phillipz, Pamela Z, Janet Cardiff, Laurie Anderson, Maggi Payne, Laetitia Sonami, Brenda Hutchinson, Sue Tomkins, Cara Tolmie, Iris Garrelfs, Ellen Moffat, Katharine Norman, Jasmeen Patheja, Imogen Stidworthy, Viv

Corringham , Salome Voegelin, Laurie Anderson. There are also a number of notable women vocalists working in the field of experimental music, contemporary composition and free improvisation including Antye Greie (AGF), Maggie Nichols, Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, Maja Ratke, Diamanda Galas.

¹⁴ Feldman, S. (2008) "Speak up: Why do women screech when men shout?" Rationalist Association, <http://rationalist.org.uk/articles/1858/speak-up> accessed 1.12.13

¹⁵ Feldman, S. (2008) *ibid*

¹⁶ Koskoff, E. (1989) "The Sound of a Woman's Voice: Gender and Music in a New York Hasidic Community" in *Women and Music in Cross Cultural Perspective*, University of Illinois Press p 218

¹⁷ *The Atlantic* 18.12.12

<http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2012/12/why-we-prefer-masculine-voices-even-in-women/266350/> accessed 19.12.12

¹⁸ Feldman, S. (2008) *ibid*

¹⁹ Lowen, L. <http://womensissues.about.com/od/fewerwomencontrolmedia/a/Voice-Pitch-Women-Authority.htm> accessed 11.1.13

²⁰ O'Lunaigh, C. *Guardian Weekly* 16. 07.10 "Researchers at Aberdeen University have confirmed that women are attracted to guys with deep voices – as long as they say nice things. But it seems a woman's preferred pitch in a man's voice depends on the pitch of her own voice. ...

"We have shown in previous studies that women's voices with relatively high pitch tend to be judged as attractive," said Ben Jones of Aberdeen University's Face Research Lab, who led the study. Voice pitch indicates a woman's average oestrogen levels and so might be a cue advertising her health and fertility. The pitch of a woman's voice is highest at ovulation and her preference for men with "masculine" traits is also at its greatest.

"<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2010/jul/16/women-high-pitched-voices-men> accessed 11.1.13

²¹ Sample, I. *The Guardian*, 8.10.08 "Women's voices rise and fall in tune with their fertility, according to research by psychologists.

Recordings of women taken at different times in their monthly cycle show that the female voice rises perceptibly a day or two before ovulation, when women are most likely to become pregnant.

The findings are the first to point to a link between voice and fertility and build on recent studies which support the idea that humans may be similar to other animals in displaying outward signs of fertility.

Greg Bryant, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who led the study said that by raising the pitch of their voices, women might be perceived as more feminine at the most fertile time in their cycle.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/oct/07/ovulation.voice/print> accessed 11.1.13

²² Karpf, A. (2007) *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent*, Bloomsbury, p 155

²³ Karpf, A. (2007) p 168

²⁴ Feldman, S. *ibid*

²⁵ Karpf, A. (2007) p 157

²⁶ Power, N. *The Dystopian Technology of the Female Voice Her Noise:*

Feminisms and the Sonic Symposium, Tate Modern, London, May 2012. Available as audio at <http://hernoise.org/interactions/feminisms-the-sonic/symposium/>

²⁷ Salomé Voegelin said in private conversation with author.

²⁸ Chion, M. translated Gorbman, C. (1999) *The Voice in Cinema*, Columbia University Press p125

²⁹ Power, N. *ibid*

³⁰ For example Gysin, Marinetti, Ball, Kruchenykh , Mayakovsky, Tzara, Arp, Schwitters. Isou, Dufrene , Gil, Artaud , Schafer, Chopin, Heidsieck:, Cobbing, Greenham, Hodell, Burroughs, McClure, Lansky, Wishart, Dufrêne, Reich, Reynolds, Monk, La Barbara, Anderson, Bodin , Hanson, Johnson Lora-Totino, Ruhm, Wolman etc.

