

Making Spaces: Feminist Contexts in Sonic Arts.

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Introduction

In this dissertation I will explore the possibilities of combining feminist and post-feminist theories with sonic art technologies. I will explore the ways in which the use of noise and music may have been used to create an illusion of the one, perfect voice and how this may have been used as a method of cultural conditioning. If social constraints can be displayed and upheld by rigid musicologies maintained by Western patriarchy, then I will discuss how a hegemonic culture has maintained this power through the teaching and practice of sonic art, and how this can change through a re-definition of electronic music and sonic art¹.

Why does there appear to be there no feminist discourse in sonic art? There is a feminist discourse within the field of musicology (see Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*) and in popular culture analysis (see Angela McRobbie's, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*), even if only recently. The technological sphere espouses a feminist discourse, from 'techno-feminism', to 'cyborg politics'. But my research has drawn a book-blank when it comes to a feminist, let alone a post-feminist, critique of sonic art. Andra McCartney, a Canadian electroacoustic composer and academic, is one of the few voices to explore a feminist approach and a re-evaluation of music and technology in the genre of electroacoustic music through thesis papers and articles available from her web site. As such the investigation of a feminist discourse on sonic art appears to be a new direction in a relatively new discipline. Compared to the radical feminist art movements of the 60's and 70's, I believe that feminism in the recording studio has been largely non-existent. Therefore, I maintain that a re-assessment is long over due and I will argue that the field of sonic art in Britain in the twenty-first Century needs to be updated to bring it in line with the social and cultural movements of the recent past and the present so that it has a viable chance of becoming truly contemporary.

¹ For the moment I am using the term "sonic art" generically to encompass electronic and electroacoustic musics, their sub-genres and sound as art.

Trevor Wishart in his seminal work *On Sonic Art* published in 1985, detailed a new way of thinking about sound. Whilst the influential scope of this work is not in question, in the present day I believe it is dated and the ideologies it expounds are presented from an unmistakably white, patriarchal perspective. In *On Sonic Art*, Wishart begins by questioning what sonic art *is*. He includes music and electroacoustic music, along with text-sound and sound-effects as the elements of sonic art, which he calls *music* (Wishart, 1985:4). Of the eight examples cited by Wishart in the opening chapter, all are by white European and American men who form the backbone of introductions to malestream sonic art education in Britain. He states,

From the final quarter of the twentieth century, it now seems clear that the central watershed in changing our view of what constitutes music has more to do with the invention of sound recording and then sound processing and synthesis than with any specific development within the language of music itself. (Wishart, 1985:5)

Following him, I would argue that the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century undoubtedly saw a change in music production that was largely to do with technological innovation. But the social context of this time was a radically changing world, moving from modernism to post-modernism, feminism to post-feminism, colonialism to post-colonialism, from the age of industry to a communication-fuelled age of technology, to name just a few of these changes. Wishart addresses the stereotypical preponderance of an industry obsessed with the technological expertise required for sound recording, processing and synthesis, with form rather than content, along with a continued inquiry into the construction of language. It is a view of the stereotypically accepted modes of musicology that explore the notions of musical knowledge gained only from structural analyses and empirical research. Paradoxically, in this book, Wishart opens the playing field by questioning what sounds can constitute as music and the ways in which meaning and signification can be expressed through language. Wishart does raise valid and necessary issues to challenge the popular conceptions of the times. He questions set structures: ‘...what might be the effect of ordering sounds in one way rather than another, and what might be fruitful avenues for exploration?’ (Wishart, 1985:3). But, Wishart never questions the basic signifiers of musical language in any way other than that from a

standpoint of masculinist essentialism. By this I mean that his enquiry about the signifiers of musical language stem from unstated reference points that implicitly attribute to all members of the group, in this case sonic artists, the (masculine) characteristics of a dominant subset of that group.

As Susan McClary emphasises in her book *Feminine Endings*, traditionally we have never been allowed to ask *why* or *what* any of this analysis or research of the signifiers of musical language means. (McClary, 1991:4) In this dissertation I will endeavor to explore what the unstated reference points are, and how the signifiers of sonic/musical language have been developed.

As I understand it, Wishart and his contemporaries explore avenues of structural change and formations of language from a granted seat within a patriarchal system that does not explore any aspect of wider cultural significance than that which is created by such modes of language. I believe that it is from within this social structure, that Wishart does challenge the hierarchical traditions of music, and debates the values of meaning from the vantage point of the classical binary of speech and writing. His analysis opens the sonic playing field to admit entry to all sounds by highlighting the traditional conception of ‘the ultimate triumph of a newly-expanded secular scribthood’, whose triumph is due to the abolition of significant meaning for non-verbal sounds through the spread and domination of writing and notation (Wishart, 1985: 22). This analysis of the *significant meaning* of non-verbal sounds is the basis of Wishart’s investigation of musical architecture.

Wishart writes of the historical ideology of speech and writing and the formation of language of a notationally heavy civilisation. During this discourse, Wishart uses the he/she pairing for human reference, particularly to linguistic philosophers (Wishart, 1985: 42). When he begins to speak of the composer, it is only a man who is mentioned through the use of ‘he’ and ‘his’. The composer for Wishart is definitely male. This is further demonstrated by the fact that of all the composers that he mentions, none are women.

I believe that it has been necessary and entirely valid to open this debate about the aesthetic ideologies of music, of what can constitute music. However, though Wishart raises the issue of the context of music, it is only to open up to a musical acceptance of all sounds. He states that:

A fundamental thesis of this book is that, to understand and control the musical continuum, we will have to appeal to time based notions of gesture and not only at the level of the individual musical event...the control which the computer will give us over this inner [sound] architecture makes the control of the details of gestural structure a compositional possibility for the first time. (Wishart, 1985:43)

Thus he clearly outlines his main intention as the understanding and *control* of the musical continuum. As such, Wishart sets out not only ‘a fundamental thesis of t[his] book’, but also a compositional strategy which is primarily concerned with the ‘*control* which the computer will give’ him for ‘the *control* of the details of gestural structure’ (Wishart, 1985:43). I believe that Wishart’s desire to control the ‘inner architecture’ of his sound world is borne out of his complacency to a traditional view of western epistemology that is primarily concerned with *control* of the elements and structures of the world for the shaping of society.

Wishart’s assertion of musical experience as being beyond social control, ‘...musical experience, even where apparently constrained by clearly explicable notation-based procedures, is ultimately irreducible to verbalisations and hence beyond any direct social control’ contradicts his own desire for the control of sound, both musically and notationally through the weight of his text. (Wishart, 1985: 38). He admits that music is a cultural construct but does not deeply question how or why such a culture is constructed (Wishart, 1985:47). Wishart’s investigation does not deeply question the cultural system and institutions from which his choices and decisions have been developed. As a female student in an academic institution, I find myself as an outsider to this system. Wishart does not question whom it is he is writing for. Nor does he question the role of technology in his work, though his techniques clearly require the abilities of a computer. I believe that these are fundamental limitations to an otherwise brilliant account of the changing attitudes to music and the emergence of sonic art at the end of the last century.

Thus, Wishart's investigation can be taken as a starting point for a further critique of the cultural aspects of sonic art, to discover what the signifiers are and why they are, in an effort to not only open the playing field to include the spectrum of noise, but to also include a heterogeneity of composers.

My explorations are based on a desire to understand the social context of sonic art and the ideologies that shape it: particularly how this social context may have been designed for control and the inherent behavioural conditioning which may re-enforce such social structures. I would argue that one of the ways in which man has asserted control and power in the world is through cultural ideologies and systems. That many music ideologies and systems have been designed to maintain the illusion that music is formally self-contained plays into the conventions of traditional western epistemology. This is an area that I want to open up to the more recent tradition of the post-modern practice of questioning binary constructions in traditional epistemological knowledge claims (McClary, 1991:26). As such, what I believe is required is a move beyond theoretical dichotomies. Yet the purpose of such a field of research is to raise awareness of such issues to facilitate change. To this end, I will address the issues of musicology and technology, and their relation to a construction of sonic art. By this, I mean that I will explore how musicology and technology have been brought together to form a new discipline, but I will also argue how the inherent western patriarchal ideologies of these two areas have influenced the current state of this new discipline.

I am not alone in my experiences of the apparent differences between women and men practising sonic art. McCartney in her thesis of 1997, *Creating New Worlds for My Music To Exist* interviewed fourteen practicing electroacoustic Canadian women composers whose educational experience portrays these differences. I wish to highlight similarities between my experiences of Sonic Art in Britain with the experiences of these women in Canada. In this paper I will explore how these differences have come about and what can be done to overcome them.

The most well known women who have achieved recognition within sonic art appear to be working within particular social contexts. For example, Laurie Anderson, Pauline Oliveros, Hildegard Westerkamp, and Katherine Norman all have very strong associations with using concrete, or as Norman call them, ‘real-world’ sounds in their compositional work. I will examine this trend to uncover the significance, if there is any, of women composers using real-world sounds in their work. If this is the case, then why is it so? Are women drawn more to this way of working than men, and why might that be the case?

I’ve always thought that women make excellent social critics. We can look at situations, especially those involving power, and size them up fairly well; since we don’t have much authority ourselves, we don’t have that much to lose. (Anderson quoted in Norman, 2004: 105).

In this quote Laurie Anderson says, ‘women make excellent social critics’, and I believe that many women composers may be employing the strategy of social critique, like Anderson, through their work in an effort to re-assert an authority for themselves. Due to the fact that women are often denied equal authority in ‘situations, especially those involving power’, the avenue for a social critique to re-address the discrepancies in social constructions, could be made possible through compositional techniques employing ‘real-world’ sounds in differently constructed contexts. In this dissertation I will explore the possibility that women have used real-world sounds as a compositional strategy to ‘size up’ social situations, in order to facilitate a dialogue for social change. I will discuss abstraction and subjectivity in light of the formation of structures of gendered roles that are maintained and re-enforced through the institutionalisation of culture, and how these structures shape roles of masculine and feminine and subsequently some men and women’s choices in sonic art, particularly in electroacoustic composition.

In particular to this last point, I will investigate why there are more successful women composers in the field of soundscape composition in Canada. It could be due to post-colonialism, as much as post-feminism, in a country where more radical, social aspects of sonic art have been expressed by the World Soundscape Project and the World Forum of Acoustic Ecology since the 1970’s. Issues of post-colonial ideologies hint at a society in

which class, race and gender are not defining in the same ways that they are in old Europe².

I believe that the discipline of sonic art emerged out of a combination of the fields of music, technology, and fine art. Elements of each of these three disciplines have joined and evolved to form this relatively new area of artistic research. This multi-disciplinary approach to sonic art leaves room for many interpretations, which I would argue is one of its strengths. Even so, though sonic art may be ‘epistemologically open’, many of its current forms run the risk of inheriting pre-determined ways of thinking, especially in the fields of technology and ideologies drawn from western art music practices.

I wish to highlight the socio-cultural significance of the ideologies employed by the composers of traditional European electroacoustics and compare these ideologies with those espoused by the electroacoustic community in Canada. If the traditional European school of electroacoustics has been established along the lines of traditional western epistemology, and maintains gendered hierarchies that place value in compositional objectivity and the sound object itself, is it possible for a feminist dialogue to operate through these structures? I will argue that to this end, a deconstruction of epistemological hierarchies and a critical feminist re-evaluation is necessary. This will aid me to articulate what strategies have been used to overcome these obstacles of gender difference and to understand whether women composers who reclaim the subjective narratives, for example in some soundscape compositions, overcome these obstacles or re-enforce gender stereotypes.

The principal question of this dissertation then is, how women can more equally enter and maintain positions within the field of sonic art in the 21st century? Typically, women in such traditionally male dominated environments have been left with only a few choices of operation. If, as Judy Malloy states in her introduction to *Women, Art & Technology*, ‘The choice is essentially, to either go along with the thing and strap on the virtual

² Yet, post-colonialism, whilst possibly being a shaping element of an emergent identity for a practice of a new sonic art is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and can perhaps be better addressed at a latter date.

phallus, or drop out entirely', then this choice results in a denial of gender (Malloy, 2003: xvi). I believe that this denial of gender may be a common way of attempting to overcome issues of gender difference, enforcing the attitude that we are all the same. Yet, I argue that as a woman in a male dominated environment, this attitude is untenable. I feel that neither of the positions presented by Malloy offer a suitable answer to the dilemma. I believe that the problem is doubled when women are faced with trying to gain a foothold in both of the stereotypically male domains of music and technology at the same time. Therefore my research aims to investigate the possibility of finding the space inbetween, where women neither have to 'strap on the virtual phallus, or drop out entirely' (Malloy, 2003: xvi).

Educational Experiences in Britain and Canada

I believe that for a feminist discourse in sonic art to exist, women must first succeed in education. McCartney interviewed fourteen Canadian women composers in her master's thesis written in 1997. The results of the educational experiences of these women reflect aspects of my own educational experiences, such as the interviewee Pascal Trudel, who notes the phenomenon of female students dropping out after an introductory course: 'All of the women who started at the same time as me dropped out after one or two years' (McCartney, 1997:91). From her study of fourteen women composers, McCartney notes that:

All of my consultants had been in a minority as students, and many perceive the environment as a difficult one for women. Wende Bartley describes the electroacoustic studio course as "a very macho environment. It's a much more macho environment than composition." Seven composers mention having been the only woman in their electroacoustic studio course, while five women speak of having attended classes where there were one or two other women (in a total class size of ten to fifteen students). (McCartney, 1997:90).

My own experiences reflect these findings. I experienced intense isolation at an introductory level to sonic art. Without any previous technological training or awareness of electroacoustics, and only an interest in music, I found myself in a minority in an environment populated by many more confident men. Whilst I have been encouraged to continue my studies and have received help and support whenever requested, the standard issue of white men as primary role models, as composers and lecturers, and the completely foreign and to my mind, masculinised and often 'macho' landscape of digital technology has tested my resolve on many an occasion during the first two years of my studies. All but one of my female colleagues had disappeared by my final year. These experiences echoed by the women that McCartney interviewed, could suggest that educational practices may not be addressing the needs of women sufficiently.

Gender Socialisation

The imbalance of women in sonic art is not due to open discrimination: today the university doors, electronic studios, computer and composition classes are open to all. That this hasn't always been the case has been noted by Marcia Citron who explains that composition classes until late in the nineteenth century were closed to women, and that this lack of access was both a result of, and a means of maintaining, the gendering of composition (Citron, 1990:105-6). Over one hundred years later, though the picture has changed, there is still a lack of women as students, teachers and visible practitioners. Sherry Turkle in her analysis of computer culture states that discrimination takes place 'not by rules that keep people out but by ways of thinking that make them reluctant to join in' (Turkle, 1990: 132). Perhaps this can also apply to the field of sonic art.

I believe these ways of thinking are partly entrenched in our society through socialization that takes place from childhood. A childhood experience of Elisabeth Keathley echoes the problems encountered by many women with an interest in the masculinised worlds of western art music and technology:

...a defining moment of my high school education happened in this wise: in my chemistry classroom, before the beginning of class, a small group of boys gathered around the teacher and laughingly tried to persuade him to sign a petition requesting that Walter Carlos come to our school to play all of the Well Tempered Clavier on the Moog synthesizer. Thinking that that sounded pretty neat, I offered to sign the petition. "You don't know anything about Moog synthesizers," the alpha boy sneered. "Yes, I do." "Then you don't know anything about Bach." Thus dismissed on both technical and musical grounds—surely because of my gender—I was unimaginably delighted in the late 1970's when Walter became Wendy (Keathley, 2001) [online].

Women today are usually no longer explicitly denied entrance in the areas of music and technology. But a legacy of discrimination, as demonstrated by Keathley's experience, is still evident in the conditioned attitudes of society and its approaches to socialise

acceptable gender roles for men and women. Elizabeth Keathley's experience relates the double discrimination in the fields of music and technology that women have been faced with and demonstrates that this socialisation, encouraging specific gender conformity, often begins in childhood. Some women may have found it difficult to make inroads within sonic art because of the conventional dismissals on both technical and musical grounds because of their gender. I believe this can be better understood through a critical investigation of the dominant ideologies that may have had an impact upon the shaping of codes of childhood socialisation.

My understanding is that many aspects of childhood socialization take place through mass medias such as television. Studies of gender and television have shown that gendered behaviors still exist in television advertisements and programming, and are prevalent in advertisements directed towards children (Sobieraj, 1998). Research indicates that advertisements for toys show boys as 'strong, independent, athletic, in control of their environments, adventurous, and aggressive' (Sobieraj, 1998). Girls are shown as 'giggling, gentle, affectionate, fixated on their physical appearance, and extremely well behaved' (Sobieraj, 1998). Further, in commercials for action figures, boys are shown, 'manipulating action figures to shoot guns at one another, fight with knives, punch and kick, and inflict harm in various other ways' (Sobieraj, 1998). These findings relate to socialization codes that encourage girls to see themselves as passive, warm, soft, and caring, relating to soft toys and dolls, and for boys to see themselves as active, cool, hard, and warlike, manipulating tools and machines ranging from cars to robots, as the experience of Elizabeth Keathley in the above quote demonstrates. Advertisements directed to children rarely break out of stereotyped expectations for boys and girls. As Elizabeth Whitelegg notes in *The Changing Experience of Women*, 'Girls are taught to relate, and boys to tinker' (Whitelegg 1982: 179-180). I believe that this gendered socialization that takes place early in life and through such pervasive mediums as television, is based upon binary distinctions inherited from classical western epistemology that state that men are objective and rational and that women are subjective and emotional. A result of such binary thinking is the construction of hierarchies in which objectivity is valued more than subjectivity, resulting in gendered hierarchies in

which the attributes of men are valued more than the attributes of women. These distinctions are often disseminated through avenues of culture to socialise people into gendered roles of behaviour, which structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss revealed as lying at the foundations of western thought. I believe that as a result of this socialised gender typing and the binary hierarchies of sexual difference, women have been socialised away from machines and technology. McClary expresses this view of the conventionally acceptable roles for men and women in technology:

For it is supposed to be *Man* who gives birth to and who tames the Machine. Women in this culture are discouraged from even learning about technology, in part so they can continue to represent authentic, unmediated Nature. To the extent that women and machines both occupy positions opposite that of Man in standard dichotomies, women and machines are incompatible terms. (McClary, 1991:138)

I believe that these ‘standard dichotomies’, woman/nature and man/machine, have been pervasively enduring in the electronic music studio environment. Given that such an environment typically involves a level of technological knowledge, McClary’s statement of the discouragement of women ‘from even learning about technology’ highlights the often unquestioned conditioning that takes place through socialisation to maintain these traditional distinctions of suitable gender roles for men and women. McClary identifies the conventional beliefs that women are not suitable for the application of technology due to their association with ‘nature’, which functions in a distinct binary opposition to ‘*Man*’ and the rational ‘Machine’. She demonstrates the supposed exclusivity of binary distinctions that places women and nature on one side in a fixed position contrary to the fixed position of man and machines. The assumption of this dichotomy operates as a locked door that women are denied a key to, making women and machines ‘incompatible’. Yet this incompatibility is dealt a blow by the assertion of Judy Malloy, who in the preface for *Women Art and Technology* states: “By it’s weight...this book does not need to reinforce the stereotype that women are not interested in technology...” (Malloy, 2003: xvi). The emergence of ‘cyborg politics’ and techno-feminism also contributes to the dismantling of the notion of any incompatibility between women and machines through a dismantling of epistemological binaries. I believe that this

conventional conception of woman/nature and man/machine which stems from classical Pythagorean epistemological binaries is untrue and has been developed through a masculinist signifying economy. By this I mean an economy that promotes universal claims ‘based on a common or shared epistemological standpoint’ (Butler, 1999:19). These universal narratives are based upon such assumptions as woman/nature and man/machine, in which the masculine is accepted as the central point of reference and the only source of validity and authority.

That the exposure of such epistemological, ontological, and logical structures has been a main focus of much feminist analysis can be noted through the work of Luce Irigaray, Donna Haraway and Judith Butler amongst others. One of the focuses of a feminist epistemology is to unmask the power relations that generate and shape knowledge and to re-instate that *who* is doing the knowing is important. Lorraine Code in her text about epistemology and subjectivity argues that ‘who knows’ is as important as ‘what is known’, and that *what* and *who* are dependant on each other for existence. Krista Scott-Dixon in her analysis of Code’s text, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* notes that ‘in fact the impartial, objective knower is a very particular, specific, interested knower who represents the concerns of privileged white males’ (Krista Scott-Dixon)[online]. As a result mainstream (or malestream) epistemology, operating through the pretense of fabricating unbiased information, ‘subordinates the concerns of all those who are not part of the elite group of knowers, and makes invisible the conditions under which knowledge is made’ (Krista Scott-Dixon)[online]. This deception of the *neutrality* of knowledge can be read as a method employed in the production and maintenance of power, the reason being, as Carol Stabile states, that ‘Knowledge, if not synonymous with power, produces power’ (Stabile, 1994:17). From the perspective of knowledge as power, it is possible to understand that the control of knowledge has been instrumental in sustaining this socio-cultural value system and elitist power structure.

The application of technology as a foundation of knowledge is a testament to the importance it has been attributed in a society in which it has been thought of ‘as the keys

to salvation in western culture since the late middle ages', and where technology is used in the 'quest to transcend the natural world' (Wajcman, 2004:57 & 1). This importance of technology is highlighted by Dot Griffiths who writes about the masculinisation of a technology concerned with control:

Modern technology has become symbolic of male domination. Technology, far more than science (in which women are better represented), is about control. Harnessing nature to serve *man's* needs, exploiting natural resources, diverting the flow of rivers, manipulating the physical world – all of these are controlling activities. And in our world, control and domination are masculine prerogatives. While the shape of rockets is no doubt, based on sound aerodynamic principles, the phallic symbolism is hard to ignore. (Griffiths 1985:60, quoted in McCartney 1997:48)

Griffiths argues that the 'masculine prerogatives' of 'control and domination' have shaped the way that technology has traditionally been gendered as masculine. As I understand it, her view is that western technology itself embodies patriarchal values, and that its project is the domination and control of women and nature. For Griffiths, the control of technology is a symbol of male domination. From this perspective, the control and domination of technology has been necessary to create and maintain the masculinist signifying economy that equates women with nature, not technology. If technology has been thought of 'as the keys to salvation in western culture since the late middle ages' as Wajcman asserts, then Griffiths' assertion of a male domination of technology highlights the gendered division imposed by classical renditions of epistemology in which the 'keys to salvation' are in the hands of men (Wajcman, 2004:57). In this sense, control and domination are masculine prerogatives: they are not aspects that women are traditionally encouraged to develop. Therefore, I believe that technology may have been gendered masculine as a means of controlling both whom is able to apply it and how it is applied. This would result in the possibility to understand that women have been socialised away from, and that men have been socialised towards technology and machines through stereotypical gender traits promoted by a civilisation based upon the epistemology of a masculinist signifying economy.

I believe that these social aspects of music and technology have developed along the lines of western epistemology and as a result, culturally we have inherited a value-laden system that often operates on inherently sub-conscious levels. Such powerful aspects of social conditioning often operate below levels of deliberate signification and are thus usually transmitted without conscious intervention. I would assert that these are habits of cultural thought that guarantee the effectiveness of hierarchical binary distinctions, often utilised to *help* us ‘make sense’ of our *place* in the world, whilst they remain largely invisible and apparently immutable. As such, I wish to understand if aspects of these habits of cultural thought are incorporated in the ideologies of European electroacoustic music?

Ideologies of Western Art Music

In the West, we have experienced a preoccupation with objectivity as an intellectual precondition of knowledge formed through traditional epistemology. Lorraine Code, in her discussion of knowledge and subjectivity, notes that:

The objective/subjective dichotomy is but one of several dichotomies that have structured mainstream Anglo-American epistemology and have become a central focus of feminist analysis. (Code, 1991: 28)

I believe that these (and other) binary distinctions have shaped much of western thought. As Code states, feminist analysis has attempted to deconstruct epistemological dichotomies such as objective/subjective in order to question the hierarchical value system inherent in the use of exclusive dualisms. A problem that a feminist discourse may encounter when evaluating the work of traditional European electroacoustic groups, GRM and WDR, is that they operate and explore their theories within traditional epistemological boundaries³. The work of these male composers valued, amongst other aspects, objective, abstracted ideals and distinctly strove to reject any notions of a subjective relativity. These values exist in the binary oppositions, object/subject, and abstract/concrete, the deconstruction of which is important to feminist analysis. The importance is based upon the fact that the use of binary distinctions usually implies a gendered hierarchy. The distinction that western art music has placed high value in abstraction, objectivity and rationality, stereotypically masculine prerogatives, suggests that, (also by the invisibility of women from western art music) stereotypically feminine traits such as relativity, subjectivity, and emotion are less valued. The use in culture, of art, science/technology and music, contributes to the shaping of a society based on hierarchical value systems, often inherently at sub-conscious levels.

³I realise that by comparing the two schools of traditional European electroacoustics, I run the risk of establishing my own binary system.

Simon Emmerson's *The Relation of Language to Materials*, is an analysis of 'the possible approaches a composer may have to the organisation of material...' employed in the work of nine electroacoustic compositions, published in 1986 in the book *The Language of Electroacoustic Music* (Emmerson, 1986:20). Emmerson's approach to analysis is similar to the approach employed by Wishart in *On Sonic Art*, in that both analyses are based on a masculinist signifying economy. In this chapter, Emmerson immediately sets up a binary distinction between aural and mimetic discourse:

This 'abstract musical' substance I wish to redesignate 'aural discourse to differentiate it clearly from 'mimetic discourse'. The two, to varying degrees in any specific work, combine to make the totality of 'musical discourse'. (Emmerson, 1986:19)

Whilst the chapter pertains to contain no value judgement, I would argue that a value judgement has already taken place by the author's choice of exclusively analysing only male composers. Through his use of the binary distinctions abstract/abstracted and aural/mimetic, I believe that Emmerson plays into the conventions of western epistemology. Through the use of these binaries, Emmerson claims a supposed continuum between the dualisms that he constructs in which he believes that a 'unity of both the aural/mimetic and the abstract/abstracted dimensions of the language of electroacoustic music becomes possible' (Emmerson, 1986:39). But his assumption that these binary oppositions combine 'to make the totality of "musical discourse"' continues to keep the formation of language within the boundaries of an inherently gendered ideology. For Emmerson, these binary distinctions are the *totality*. Yet, I believe that this discourse can be read another way in which the inherent gender of the terms can be brought to the surface as McCartney states:

Perhaps syntax "abstracted from the materials" is less stereotypically masculine than an "abstract" syntax, thereby producing a social situation where women are more readily accepted, or where women feel less of a disjuncture between roles as women and composers... the differences between "abstract" and "concrete" approaches may also be thought of as the difference between symbolic control and practical, material necessity, depending on how privileged the subject (in this case the composer) is (McCartney, 1997:36).

McCartney focuses on the terms *abstracted* and *abstract* employed by Emerson, and how they relate to linguistics through epistemology. She analyses the terms through a critical feminist deconstruction of language. That *abstracted* can be read as less stereotypically masculine, is based upon the binary distinction of abstract/concrete that Emerson invokes by using it as the opposite of *abstract*. Whilst the analysis may not set out to place value in one term over the other, the use of binary opposites maintains the gendered division, it operates within an already value laden system. The analysis of *abstract* and *concrete* are instrumental in feminist theory for the deconstruction of socialized gender. The terms relate intimately to the object/subject dualism that many feminists have interpreted as the basis of stereotypical gender formation⁴. That McCartney finds room for women as composers in Emerson's analysis by identifying with the right of the binary distinctions is all that is left open to her in this system. She also highlights how the inherent structure of such value systems may be ordered through the social position of the subject/composer.

Whilst Emerson's analysis contents itself with exploring how musical, or electroacoustic language is extracted from the materials used, it does not extend itself to the question of how a social context can relate to the formation of musical language, or to the de-coding of the social significance of the syntax. In this way his analysis results in the continued masculine systemization of the syntax through the denial of any other viewpoint than one from a masculinist signifying economy.

Music is always dependent on the conferring of language, from which I believe social meaning can be constructed. As such, the study of the signification in music cannot be undertaken in isolation from the human contexts that create, transmit and respond to it. But so as not to lead to social determinism, I believe that music and other discourses do not simply reflect a social reality that depends/ exists on the outside; rather, social reality itself is constituted within such discursive practices. Media is that by which individuals are socialised; take on gendered identities, learn ranges of proper behaviours, structure

⁴ As my intention is for an inclusive understanding of the terms used by Emerson, I believe that contextual scrutiny of these terms cannot be avoided.

their perceptions and even their experiences. It is also within the arena of these discourses that alternative models of organising the social world are submitted and negotiated. This is where the ongoing work of social formation occurs. As a result, if binary distinctions are always utilised as the polar points of understanding, then hierarchical value systems can still be implemented through socialisation processes.

Irigaray & Westerkamp

If both technology and music composition are stereotypically male domains, how does a woman composer negotiate within these established discourses? What options are available to her and what do her choices signify? A strategy to confront the implementation of these social constructs has been put forward by the post-feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray. One of her views is the idea of the subversion of norms through 'unfaithful mimesis'. According to Irigaray, the very possibility of repeating a negative view unfaithfully, such as man/machine, woman/nature, suggests that women are something other than the view expressed. This leads me to question whether theories such as these could be utilised in sonic art practice and, if given that the participation of women in music throughout the history of world cultures has more often than not been to assist social rites of passage including birth, coming of age, marriage and death, can Irigaray's belief that women must reclaim and valorize the expression of their own sex and gender be implemented to encompass wider aspects of female subjectivity? I believe that women's role as respected keeper of these rites has traditionally been suppressed by a masculinist signifying economy in favor of art music composed by men, the original function of art music being to entertain and aggrandize the aristocracy in countries such as Austria, Italy and others. Perhaps through a conscious awareness and 'unfaithful mimesis', sonic artists can challenge these habits and beliefs.

An investigation of the most prominent women composers in the field of electroacoustic music draws my attention to Canada and America, and to the sub-genre of soundscape composition, where there appears to be a higher percentage of women working as composers than there are in Europe. I believe that this could be due to the possibility that feminism had a different impact on the western world outside of Europe⁵. This, combined

⁵ This is perhaps due to different issues about class, race, economic, cultural, regional, and historical variations amongst many other aspects which are far too wide to investigate for the purpose of this paper but are extremely relevant for further research.

with post-colonialism⁶ may have created a more open environment for women as composers. I believe that the reason why many of these women composers (who from now on I will refer to simply as composers) choose to work in the sub-genre of soundscape composition is because of the ability to socially contextualise their work. I also believe that this could be a reaction against the male dominated ideologies that I have explored.

The compositional work of Hildegard Westerkamp lends itself to feminist and post-feminist readings and is indispensable for such analyses. She states: ‘... [environmental sound] also has a social meaning ... That’s really what keeps me in this area. The connection between the musicality of a sound and the social meaning of a sound.’ (Westerkamp, quoted in Young, 1984:5). Westerkamp’s interest is in the musical signifiers of social meaning expressed through sound, for her, the connection between social meaning and musical meaning is important. I believe that this is one of the reasons why she works with recognizable environmental sounds that retain their original reference points.

Irigaray expresses the position of turning the idea of lack into an idea of excess and to challenge the binary opposition that is evident in the phallogocentric system of language. Her theory follows the thinking of poststructuralist theorists in asking questions about the relationship between language and bodies, specifically male and female bodies and masculine and feminine language and emphasizes the differences between male and female subjectivities:

...sexual liberation means to demand access to a status of individual and collective *subjectivity* that is valid for them as women. The emphasis is on the difference of rights between male and female subjects. (Irigaray, 1993:73).

Feminists such as Judith Butler and Haraway amongst others have accused Irigaray of being essentialist and Irigaray’s assumption of a *collective* subjectivity can be read in such a way. Yet I believe that aspects of her theories can be interpreted in the

⁶ Also a subject for further investigation

compositions of Westerkamp, who explores her own subjectivity to her environment as a recorder/composer in a way that investigates areas equated with being a woman, that delves into areas of supposed difference or similarity between male and female subjectivities to subvert epistemological binaries such as masculine and feminine, subject and object, mind and body, self and other. Westerkamp, I believe in part, does explore these areas equated with being a woman to valorize the expression of her own sex and gender as she trawls through centuries of socio-cultural values to be re-thought and transformed.

L'écriture Feminine Musicale

Yet if Westerkamp is exploring areas equated with being a woman, is she then making *women's* music, or perhaps an *écriture feminine musicale*? Rather than women's music, I would suggest that she is making *feminine* music: a musical form of feminine writing that is possible as an extension of the ideas of 'l'écriture feminine' (feminine writing) as developed through the theories of Irigaray and Helen Cixous amongst others⁷. This theory urges women to reject masculinist histories and instead 'write the truth of their bodies' through methods like autobiography and performance (Blyth, 2004:33). It is Cixous who coins the phrase 'écriture feminine', as a subversive and political writing with the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing structures through the inclusion of other experience. Through 'écriture feminine', Cixous posits 'woman' as a binary opposition to 'man' examining and deconstructing hierarchical binaries that reinforce and uphold that opposition, such as culture/nature; head/heart; colonizer/colonized and, speaking/writing. Cixous engages in a political and philosophical rejection of the dialectical relation of these terms, believing that they depend on power and exclusion for their existence.

I believe that Westerkamp's *Breathing Room*, composed in 1990, is an example of *écriture feminine musicale*. Through this composition, Westerkamp explores and deconstructs the binary oppositions of technology/nature and man/woman through the metaphors of breath, a mechanical heartbeat and sounds from the outside world which she uses to 'carry the reader [listener] further' in the three biographical pieces that make up this work (Cixous quoted in Sellers, 1994: xxxi). Westerkamp's overall style is characterized by an approach to soundscape composition that is particularly concerned with her subjectivity in relation to the sounding environment. I believe that this can be interpreted as a reclaiming and rewriting of female subjectivity as Irigaray says is a 'way out of the loss of sexed subjective identity' and thus can be used as a strategy for

⁷ Cixous proposes that feminine writing is a possibility for both sexes, but 'she believes that women are currently closer to a feminine economy than men' (Sellers, 1994:xxix)

overcoming the difficulties of speaking and of being heard as women who are normally excluded and denied in the patriarchal linguistic order (Irigaray, 1993:21). Likewise, Cixous claims that writing is that ‘somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition’ of the patriarchal system that offers an alternative discourse to the so-called ‘masculine’ economy of patriarchal discourse (Blyth, 2004: 23). This different economy is what Cixous believes is ‘feminine writing’.

Westerkamp’s non-linear and often personal approach to composition, as demonstrated in *Breathing Room*, does not consist of a stable language, nor does it offer any fixed meaning. As such, its form is similar to poetry in that it is language is set loose, the chains of signifiers flow more freely. The language Westerkamp develops plays in several directions and at several levels between language and the body, writing and the writer. She does not create masterful narratives, but journals of experience closer to the unconscious, and thus to a subjectivity that has been repressed.

Westerkamp explores her subjectivity through an insistence of her bodily presence through her work. As such she writes with her body to write her self, as Cixous contends: ‘woman must write her body’ (Blyth, 2004:33). In the liner notes for *Breathing Room*, Westerkamp says:

Music as breath-like nourishment. Breathing as nourishing musical space. The breath my breath is heard throughout the three minutes. All sorts of musical/acoustic things happen as I breathe in and out. Each breath makes its own, unique statement, creates a specific place in time. Meanwhile the heart beats on, propelling time from one breath to the next (Westerkamp 1990).

Here, Westerkamp describes a composition that consists of the use of her breath to create envelopes in which other sounds are placed, so that the effect is that she breaths these sounds from her body. Throughout the piece a mechanical heartbeat with differing levels of intensity can also be heard. But I believe it is the breath that is so important. According to Cixous, the breath is life: it is birth and can be interpreted as a metaphor for the ‘m/other’ (Sellers, 1994:49). Westerkamp’s desire to create a breathing environment within musical space is influenced by her contact with American experimental composer

Pauline Oliveros, who influenced her compositional practice, teaching her techniques and approaches to listening.

I believe that the use of breathing as a compositional structure not only reflects Westerkamp's respect for the acoustic environment as active and alive, and in dialogue with her as a composer, but can also be interpreted as a metaphor for self-birth, a topic that Cixous addresses in her text *Souffles* of 1975. In this text Cixous 'deals with loss in relation to the mother and the attendant (re)birth of a self that is both female and feminine' (Sellers, 1994:49). For Cixous, the feminine voice induces the labour of self-birth. I believe that in *Breathing Room*, the breath is the voice, and it is feminine not because Westerkamp is a woman, but because of its connection with the body, aligned with the feminine in hierarchical binary structures. For Cixous, the feminine voice, 'linked to the body and the pre-symbolic union between mother and child prior to the Law's intervention, incites the "I" to a new relation with herself, others and the symbolic order' (Sellers, 1994:49). The voice belongs to the 'time when the soul still speaks flesh' and has not 'been subjected to the injury of censorship' (Sellers, 1994:49). In the text *Souffle*, Cixous outlines how thinking has become dependent on a process of differentiation entailing opposition to and annihilation of whatever is thereby constituted as other. Westerkamp's breathing in and out in which 'all sorts of musical/acoustic things happen' replaces the *other* with the *I* reconstituting a new relationship with herself in a feminine economy.

Westerkamp expresses her sense of respect for the environment through refusing to think of sound as merely a compositional resource, or in Schaefferian language, as a sound *object*⁸. At the same time, she is not limiting herself to merely documenting nature. Her studio work is a dialogue between the original sound in context and her imaginary constructions. Above all, her approach reflects a responsibility to the natural world, and a desire to avoid completely effacing it with technology, allowing sounds to breathe within

⁸In Schaefferian theory the term sound object refers to every sound phenomenon and event perceived as a whole, as a coherent entity and heard by means of reduced listening which targets it for itself, independently of its origin or its meaning.

their own environments, while creating imaginary constructs that juxtapose different contexts.

Cixous, when discussing her writing as poetic ascribes great importance to music (Blyth, 2004:100). She says,

It's like the stream. I imagine that my writing is like all kinds of floating things, leaves, small barks, snails or fish that are carried on a huge stream with which they make a whole - not one, but a whole, an animated whole - and the current which orients, guides, takes a direction, is the musical movement of thinking. (Blyth, 2004:100).

Cixous believes that 'poetry *is* music. Poetry is the music of philosophy, it's the song of philosophy...it's essential...it's everywhere.' (Blyth, 2004:100). I would contend that Westerkamp's *Breathing Room* is a prime example of this 'song of philosophy' (Blyth, 2004: 100). *Breathing Room* is 'like the stream' that Cixous imagines (Blyth, 2004: 100). Her musical writing collects 'all kinds of floating things' to 'play with all the instruments of language' to create an expression that has its own meaning that is not apparent from the meanings of its individual parts thus creating 'an animated whole' (Blyth, 2004: 100). The 'animated whole' is the social context, it is animated, real, alive as a deconstruction of the binary animate/inanimate. The full significance of the individual details of the composition, and of feminine writing, can only be understood when placed in the context of the whole. While it is true to say that sounds, images and words signify when looked at in isolation, this effect is amplified, multiplied if they are considered in the context of all other sounds, images and words in the composition, or with Cixous, in the text.

I believe that in *Breathing Room*, Westerkamp implements the practice of 'feminine writing', through her use of non-linear, performative and autobiographical language to describe the truth of a new kind of body: that of the cyborg, a branch of post-feminism personified by Donna Haraway.

Haraway & Westerkamp

Haraway was particularly influenced by the French feminist writers Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray. I believe that their theories of 'l'écriture féminine', informed aspects of Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto. I believe that Westerkamp, in the spirit of 'l'écriture féminine', also draws upon Haraway's cyborg body theories. As McCartney states:

In *Breathing Room*, Westerkamp creates a cyborg body, with her own human breath taking in and singing the world around her, propelled by a mechanical heart. This is not a border skirmish between human and machine, or human and environment. (McCartney, 1997:8/6)

According to Haraway: 'The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment...We are responsible for boundaries, we are they' (Haraway, 1991: 180). McCartney's assertion that 'this is not a border skirmish between human and machine, or human and environment' expresses her reading of the work in which Westerkamp uses technology to create a body of work that makes audible to listeners the breathing connections between inner and outer worlds. Yet, at the same time, this cyborg body is still ironic, in that Westerkamp sets up a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning. The mechanical heart, for instance, while metaphorically a part of this body, is more rigid, and less organic, than the other sounds. So while it forms part of the cyborg body, its rhythms seem somewhat alien: mechanical heart and organic breath coexist in an uneasy tension. The juxtaposition of the mechanical heartbeat with Westerkamp's own breath subverts the man/machine and woman/nature binary to a combination of woman/machine/nature. In this sense, the piece can be read as engaging with a new form of subjectivity that comes into being out of the death of the modern, transcendental subject.

Yet, if I can say that Westerkamp *is* making *écriture féminine musicale*, with the intention to explore, challenge and valorize her own subjectivity in relation to her sounding environment, then does this strategy reinforce stereotypical masculinist notions of femininity? Does her exploration of her own subjectivity reinforce the epistemological binaries she subtly attempts to subvert?

Judith Butler and People Like Us

Contesting feminist theories assert that the setting up of “feminine” structures, such as *l’écriture féminine*, actually support the patriarchal structures that have denied access to women for so long by maintaining the binary distinction, masculine and feminine. The theorist Judith Butler believes that gender, being masculine or feminine, is not a naturally given status, and does not necessarily align with one’s anatomical sex. She believes that the formation of a gendered identity can be better understood as a series of repeated performative acts that establish modes of behavior that over time become understood as ‘natural’. These acts can only be performed with the discursive materials that are available, that is, with the semiotic codes that are circulating in a society. Thus, Butler believes that the only way to subvert masculinist discourse and produce truly ‘liberatory’ identities is through *subversive repetition*.

Butler argues that subverting gender norms—through parody, cultural unintelligibility, and many genders—is a tactic of an ‘agency that is not fully determined by [that] culture and discourse’ (Butler, 1999:182). She states:

The subject is not *determined* by the rule through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* ... In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency”, then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (Italics in original; Butler, 1999:185).

By this Butler means that notions of gender have been established through rigid practices of repeated signifying “codes of hierarchical binarisms” that restrict alternative possibilities for gender (Butler, 1999:185). She asserts that because ‘all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat’ then it is only *within* this practice of repetitive signification that a subversion of gender can become possible.

I believe that the work of the contemporary artist, Vicki Bennett, who passes under the moniker, *People Like Us*, can be interpreted through Butler's theory of subversive repetition. Bennett's performance name, *People Like Us* operates as a recognizable barrier that resists the ability to signify any *one* gender for the artist. Bennett describes herself as a media artist who uses "found" video footage and sound, which she recontextualises into entirely new audio/visual works⁹. Her art metamorphoses into a surreal world of bad connections and faulty communications, where presenters, interviewees, lost stars and found sounds become trapped in a misfiring loop of reference and repetition. All of Bennett's compositions employ parody through juxtaposition and many utilize cultural unintelligibility in the form of dada and surrealist psychobabble, as methods for recontextualisation.

Through the composition *Close To You*, I believe that Bennett deconstructs the cultural fabrication of gender identity to allow for the possibilities of new emerging narratives in the visual and aural world of mixed media appropriated art. She says:

My personality is very present in the work. The "underlying narrative" that is unspoken is my personality. Similar themes run through just about all of my work in one sense or another... I want to be a mirror and the best way for me to do that is throw layers of meaning - using collage. This way there are so many different ways in. The main aim is to be able to communicate AT ALL. (SAN interview, 01/12/04) [online].

Bennett claims that for her, collage 'seems like the most natural way of finding relationships between subjects and objects, and also to gain some perspective on one's thought processes and reactions.' (SAN interview, 01/12/04) [online]. Her appropriation through sampling can be interpreted through Butler's subversive repetition by which Bennett draws from various sources with the stipulation that she uses her samples 'in a way different from where I found them' (SAN interview, 01/12/04) [online]. In most of her work, Bennett takes icons of popular culture and through sampling, juxtaposition and collage, subverts their original contexts.

⁹ For the purpose of this dissertation, I will primarily focus on the audio content of Bennett's work.

I believe that her composition, *Close To You*, addresses and demystifies mainstream cultural conceptions of gender through subversive repetition. Bennett juxtaposes fragmented samples from Karen Carpenter's *Close To You*, Dolly Parton's¹⁰ *Jolene*, Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and Chicago's *If You Leave Me Now* into a parody and critique of mainstream cultural notions of idealized femininity. I believe that in this composition Bennett uses Karen Carpenter and Dolly Parton to represent the objectification of women in mainstream patriarchal society. Karen Carpenter represents a fatal struggle to attain an ideal of woman as object through her deterioration and death at the age of thirty-two from anorexia. Dolly Parton represents an objectified and deformed (through cosmetic surgery) version of womanhood, one that Carpenter dies from, through striving to achieve. Dolly Parton's highly exaggerated image of *femininity* can also symbolize the belief expressed by Butler, that gender, being masculine or feminine, is not a naturally given status, and in this case has been painstakingly and obviously developed.

I believe that Bennett juxtaposes the songs of these two women with Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*¹¹ for two reasons: Elton John's homosexuality is a very obvious aspect of his performance, in fact, he acts out his 'subversive' sexuality through his performances, incorporating subversive repetition himself. The second reason why I believe Bennett uses this particular song is that it was written in response to the exploitation that Bernie Taupin and Elton John encountered at the hands of people with more means and power than themselves before they achieved fame. This second aspect I believe is symbolic of the exploitation of Karen Carpenter and Dolly Parton by a society with more means and power, to conform to a fetishized idealization of femininity for success. Bennett achieves this subtle subversion of portrayed gendered identities by repeating and altering the order of the lyrics sung by both Karen Carpenter and Dolly Parton and by slicing and degrading the actual samples so that they become unintelligible in places. For example, Bennett splices the Karen Carpenter sample *I want to be close to*

¹⁰ It is perhaps interesting to note that Dolly Parton appears as a regularly deconstructed actor in Bennett's compositions.

¹¹ The yellow brick road from *The Wizard of Oz*, has been popularly interpreted in two ways: one interpretation is that it is symbolic of American capitalism; the gold standard being the monetary system used in the United States in the 19th and well into the 20th century. The second interpretation is that the yellow brick road is the path to self-actualization.

you to, *I want to be you*, and follows this with the Dolly Parton sample allowing for a cogent connection of aspiration from Carpenter to Parton. The sample of the word *Jolene* has been cut in half, only keeping the second syllable, which begins to sound like the word *pain*, yet still in Dolly Parton's unmistakable voice. The Karen Carpenter sample, *when I was young* is repeated towards the end of the composition where fragmented samples of Chicago's *If You Leave Me Now* can be heard before the composition ends in sounds of a digitalized self-destructive meltdown. The composition is inherently ironic, as is most of Bennett's work that, like Westerkamp's, highlights the contrast between apparent and intended meaning.

In Conclusion

The use of Hildegard Westerkamp and Vicki Bennett as examples of composers offers two very different approaches to the deconstruction of gender in sonic art composition¹². Yet I believe that they both engage to varying degrees, in a form of *écriture féminine musicale*, in that they both question and subvert phallogocentric discourses through their compositional practices. The common theme running through the work of these two composers is the subversion of epistemological binaries: masculine and feminine, subject and object, mind and body, self and other. Most significantly, what these composers demonstrate is that feminist discourses in sonic art can, and more importantly, do exist.

By taking Wishart's investigation in *On Sonic Art* published in 1985 as a starting point I have been able to analyse the signifiers of traditional western art music and understand how they have been constructed according to traditional epistemological systems. Whilst Wishart challenges the hierarchical traditions of music, he debates the values of meaning from the vantage point of the classical binary of speech and writing. His analysis is concerned with raising the importance of non-verbal sound and noise to the same level of importance that is accredited to writing within a patriarchal epistemological framework. Wishart's analysis aspires to assert a more significant meaning to noise, but his discourse still operates within a system of hierarchical binary distinctions. I believe that these discourses required deconstruction to understand the significance of the language in relation to gender constructions in sonic art practices.

The post-feminists Irigaray and Cixous both place a high value in writing. They believe that it is through writing that a framework for a new language, one not based upon a masculinist signifying economy, can be built. Cixous' theories of *écriture féminine* suggests that a feminine writing can create alternative forms of relation, perception and

¹² Again, I did not intend to set up my own binary system by comparing the approaches of two composers: my self-imposed limitation to two has more to do with keeping within the word limitations of this particular dissertation. Further research would allow the incorporation of many more examples.

expression that will exceed the binary logic that informs our present system and thus create the framework for a new language and culture. She claims that the importance of writing is as a means through which other voices, other selves can enter into and inhabit the spaces of writing to create a new framework to include the *other*. Cixous approaches the question of the *feminine as poetic*. What both Wishart and Cixous do is challenge the current state of their respective disciplines, one from the position of the masculine and the other from a position of the feminine. Yet, whilst Wishart's analysis operates within the binary of speech and writing, Cixous desires a deconstruction and rejection of the dialectical relation of these signifying terms to move beyond the boundaries of binary construction. What Butler then suggests is the deconstruction of these binary terms altogether to move beyond binary classifications due to her belief that gender, being masculine or feminine, is not a naturally given status.

The emphasis on discarding universals, 'grand narratives' identified by Butler, as all-embracing categories, results in her assertion that we need to think about "woman" as numerous and consisting of alternatives, not as a category with "ontological integrity", as being a sense of continual existence in space and time (Butler. 1999:33-39). Butler deconstructs the cultural fabrication of gender identity to allow for the possibilities of new emerging narratives.

Cixous, Butler and Haraway believe that gender is not a natural given, rather it is a social construct, and as such I believe that the examples of *Breathing Room* and *Close To You* by Westerkamp and Bennett respectively, demonstrate this understanding through their deconstruction of supposed gender specific traits. In *Breathing Room* Westerkamp subverts the binary woman/nature to woman/machine/nature, in the process, allowing me to identify this work with Haraway's cyborg theories. In *Close To You*, Bennett addresses and demystifies mainstream cultural conceptions of gender to deconstruct the idea of femininity. As such, I believe that both compositions aim to move beyond binary classifications through their deconstruction to create a stage for the performance of other voices and narratives.

I believe that a truly post-feminist discourse in sonic art would be one that traverses beyond the binary distinctions of speech and writing that Wishart takes as a starting point and it would dispense of the binaries that Emerson creates in his text *The Relation of Language to Materials*. The feminist theorists I have researched have each mapped new territories for women's expression outside of the masculinist signifying economy. Cixous and Irigaray create their own feminine signifying economies in the form of *écriture féminine*. Cixous stresses that through its transformations, feminine writing will initiate changes in the social and political sphere to challenge the very foundation of the patriarchal and capitalist state.

It has been necessary to address traditional binary structures in order to deconstruct them. Yet perhaps the most viable and current feminist discourse of sonic art could be one that incorporates an *écriture féminine musicale* with non-binary strategies. This research is only a beginning to the possibilities of applying feminist and post-feminist theories to sonic art. Rather than concluding here, I believe this essay presents a starting point for the exploration of the often contradictory and circular theories that can possibly be expressed in sonic art. As such, I believe that the work of Westerkamp and Bennett, whilst employing various strategies of feminist discourses, remains open, not resolving into a 'larger whole' but opening spaces for women's numerous voices to exist in the field of sonic art.

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