



MONASH University

Other Planes of Here: Sound, Multiplicity and the Social

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BA (Hons) and MVA

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at sound as a mode of knowledge transference. Sound here operates as a sensorial conduit for multiple senses of time and place and is seen as a carrier of past and future and as an amplifier of collective mythologies and complexities.

This research takes the methodology of the soundsystem culture organised around the speaker stack and looks in particular at the philosophical writings on the cultural importance of sound within non-western cultural contexts as put forth by Louis Chude-Sokei and Julian Henriques. The speaker stack is an adaptable object that functions both inside and outside the institution, and performs simultaneously as an amplifier and translator within each context.

My work *Other Planes of Here* consists of the placement and use of a custom built speaker stack within a cycle of unrelated and indeed culturally differentiated events around Melbourne. By conflating this existing understanding of sound culture within the context of the art world, the project activates a heterogeneous field of networks and disconnections.

This investigation engages with discourses around ethics and aesthetics within the field of participatory art and with the voice of ambivalence within the institution. It employs types of slippage as a tactic and as such it works within the theoretical and the philosophical realm, as well as the autobiographical, from the perspective of a migrant woman artist. Feminism is acknowledged within the framework of this project, as is the engagement with postcolonial theory via Gayatri Spivak and Denise Ferreira da Silva.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature



August 10, 2015

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INTRODUCTION

A stack of speakers was constructed and fashioned in the tradition of the Jamaican Soundsystem. I began informally discussing their progress with friends and acquaintances in late 2013.

In the six months between October 2014 and April 2015, *Other Planes of Here* as they have come to be known was invited to amplify the sound of five events. Most of those who requested the speakers had been following their progress and had expressed interest in using *Other Planes of Here* for planned events. These groups had been formed around commonalities i.e. cultural difference, collaboration, feminism, music/sound experimentation, or art. These events have had difference as a common factor. Difference was not a predetermining characteristic for selection, but rather, one of the factors that emerged as a commonality. This was not an intention, but it was not unwelcome or denied as a result, nor was it surprising. Simply these are the people within my social and professional networks. The question was how sound and amplification could become a heteronomous approach to art making. Further to this I wanted to know how my understanding of sound as a space of socio-cultural multiplicity could translate in different contexts.

The three layers of speakers have different provenances, each very important in terms of adding to the strata of meaning within the work. The speaker providing the high frequencies was donated by the owner of the Tote Hotel, a music venue that has fostered the alternative and punk rock scene in Melbourne since 1980. The speaker box that provides the mid frequencies was purchased from the *Heartical Hi Powa Soundsystem*, the largest soundsystem in Australia. This was procured as an empty box for me to build the speakers within. The speakers, which provide the indispensable low frequencies, were sourced by a founding member of the *Listen* feminist experimental music platform who took ownership when a music learning institution decided to discard them. Once all the speakers were in working order they were then painted in shades of green to unify them visually. It was fortuitous that as I was preparing to build my speaker boxes from scratch the speakers that now constitute *Other Planes of Here* were provided through the support of these people.

Before I continue I must explain that in this paper *Other Planes of Here* as a term is used to describe more than one thing. This includes the physical speaker stack also referred to in this paper as the soundsystem, it describes the research project, this exegesis and the final artwork. So in effect this name is given to all the aspects that encompass the project.

Other Planes of Here has emerged from a set of what I see as productive tensions. These tensions include the space between participation and artistic agency, as well as the unease between wanting to engage in different and nuanced ways of knowing in relation to culture outside of a Eurocentric context.

It became more and more clear as the research unfolded that my process had a direct correlation to my experience as a migrant¹ artist working within Australia. I believe that Australia still carries with it cultural baggage left from the white Australia Policy.² One the implication of this policy on culture has been that the dominant institutional language has remained that of its coloniser. Finding ways in which *Other Planes of Here* could directly embody tension within this still Eurocentric space became a focus.

To this end Chapter One establishes a political position within participatory art and strategic process for the project to follow. The chapter proceeds to address possible methodologies and artistic strategies such as heterogeneity that embody the unease of existing within the participatory and the institution. Chapter Two looks at the development of the project and arrives at discussions on the use of text and sound as aesthetic devices within the work while also looking at artists' works. Chapter Three discusses how *Other Planes of Here* understands sound, locating it within an academic context founded on sound as way of knowing. This chapter also looks at artists who work with sound as a medium. Chapter Four

¹ I arrived in Australia with my family at the age of 15 fleeing the civil war in El Salvador having lived in the U.S. for some time as a child for the same reason.

² The term *White Australia Policy* comprises various historical policies that intentionally favoured immigration to Australia from certain European countries, and especially from Britain. This was an attempt of Australians to help shape their own identity after federation. It came to fruition in 1901 soon after the Federation of Australia, and the policies were progressively dismantled between 1949 and 1973. Australia's official First World War historian Charles Bean defined the early intentions of the policy as "a vehement effort to maintain a high Western standard of economy, society and culture (necessitating at that stage, however it might be camouflaged, the rigid exclusion of Oriental peoples)."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Australia_policy

One of the most contentious aspects of the White Australia Policy was the 'Dictation Test' which 'applied to all non-European people entering Australia between 1901 and 1958. The applicant was required to write out 50 words in any European language (after 1905, any prescribed language) dictated by an immigration officer.'

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/a-z/immigration-restriction-act.aspx>

looks at each of the events one by one, describing organisational aspects and the role that *Other Planes of Here* performed within each different context. This chapter investigates how the theoretical, philosophical research functioned in practice. While I acknowledge the existence of philosophical texts on The Event by writers such as Badiou and Deleuze that *Other Planes of Here* could be discussed within as well as more in depth discussions into the development of Dub and Reggae music, it has been important for this paper to consider and develop research constraints.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL CLASHES

Other Planes of Here began from a position of looking specifically at the project's cultural and socio-political implications. Through this chapter I locate the project within the field of participatory art. I commence this investigation from a point of difference and examine how it exists within participatory works and dialogue within the field. My aim in this project has been to find ways to work within social practice that look beyond universalist notions. At the same time I position *Other Planes of Here* within discussions around agonism as an approach to understanding the social. Within this agonistic space I will look at collective myth making as a way to look beyond established binaries based on identity and identification. This chapter will also look at how *Other Planes of Here* may be able embody tensions and contradictions within its own methodology.

In terms of context, *Other Planes of Here* continues from a ready-made methodology that is borrowed from the socially based music/sound event, a culture that I have actively participated in outside of the artistic context for many years as a DJ/event organiser.³ The purposes of each of the events within the cycle of *Other Planes of Here* vary and are all mutually exclusive; they are not referential to the one before or the one after.

The process of setting up the speaker stack at each event requires not only the lifting and arrangement of the speaker boxes, but the 'stringing up' of the soundsystem, i.e. 'patching' the speakers with the multiple amplifiers and required processing devices. This is a complex process that at times has been challenging due to exacting technical requirements. The speakers are then left to amplify sound, which is either performed live, or pre-recorded.

The communal aspects of soundsystem culture fit comfortably within the framework of participatory art and social practice. However, the way in which I understand the communal, that is the haptic and reciprocal nature of human encounters and the subjective, emotional and 'interrelational' dimensions of art's potential impact on the beholder⁴ are entirely different. As a point of departure I will be looking at Claire Bishop's critique of ethical concerns aimed

³ My relationship to sound will become much clearer in the next chapters.

⁴ Helena Reckitt, "Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics," in *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions.*, ed. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013). 140

at participatory practices, as it is within this dialogue that difference is framed in a way that is of interest to *Other Planes of Here*.

It is not my intention to determine what constitutes good or bad participatory praxis within this exegesis but how tactically an artist can best deal with tensions and complexities that exist between participatory art and cultural power structures that are implicit in every context within contemporary society. Ethics are important to this project, however emphasising participatory aspects that are normally publically obscured from presentation is more important. I will look at the work of artists whose work highlights ethics and difference either as direct subject matter or at their margins. I will begin by looking at the work of two of participatory art's most discussed artists, Santiago Sierra and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Santiago Sierra's work mimics the neoliberal process of 'outsourcing' and presents it within the gallery through the hiring of marginal or troubled communities. These are orchestrated performance works that employ the tactic of creating discomfort in the audience, for instance his 2002 work *Hiring and Rearrangement of 30 Workers in Relation to Their Skin Colour*. These works aim for a political awakening within the viewer. At the same time the museum becomes implicated as a participant within this gesture. Marcel Broodthaers describes this relationship between art and the institution:

This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. If we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification, then Art is a particular representation of the phenomenon - a form of tautology⁵

In a binary of discomfort versus comfort, Rirkrit Tiravanija is on the side of comfort via conviviality. Tiravanija's '*Untitled (Pad Thai)*' where participants enjoy a meal together in the gallery is a well-known relational work. Tiravanija's work is a good example of how the more problematic aspects of participatory works are often suppressed for public discussion in order for a focus to be placed on the positive aspects of human to human exchange, as Kathleen Ritter states:

It strikes me as extremely odd that the negative impact of the work is never discussed, given that Tiravanija left the remnants of the meals to rot in the gallery over the duration of the exhibition to eventually be cleaned up by the gallery staff.⁶

⁵ Marcel Broodthaers and Paul Schmidt, "To Be Bien Pensant... Or Not to Be. To Be Blind.," *October* 42, (1987).

⁶ Kathleen Ritter, "At the Doors to the Gallery" (University of Western Ontario, 2005): quoted in Reckitt. 140

Closer to home I will discuss the work of artist Royce Ng, Somali Peace Band project. This was an exhibition with an accompanying series of community events including the sharing of food, tea and poetry, cooked, served, and recited by the Somali community from the public housing estate adjacent to Gertrude Contemporary where the exhibition was held as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2013. I will not speak directly to the ethics in staging of these activities here because these aspects engage with discussions around multiculturalism that surface later in this chapter. However, I would like to highlight Ng's acknowledgment of the compromises that surface when art, human rights and difference commune within the institution. He speaks directly to this when in discussion with curator Vivian Gerrand:

Vivian Gerrand: ...How does art speak to human rights? How can it work as a vehicle I suppose in the promotion but also where are its limitations? It seems like you've come up against them very strongly and the fact that the Melbourne Festival probably receives a lot of funding from the federal government...

Royce Ng: Yeah, I mean that was part of my idea: to take public money and give it to refugees to bring them to here as opposed to the inverse of that which is the policy of the Australian government to spend millions keeping them in detention and out of the country I guess what it's brought up for me a lot is the idea of the relationship between art and politics and artistic autonomy.⁷

Claire Bishop in her much cited book *Artificial Hells* argues against the surfacing of ethics as critical judgement in what she terms the 'ethical turn'⁸ in participatory art practices. She does so by referencing Jacques Rancière's⁹ writing on aesthetics. For Bishop to approach a participatory work via ethical judgement devalues the aesthetic realm, because the usually separate entities of art and the political are only able to effectively meet within the aesthetic. For Bishop to replace the aesthetic with the ethical is to dissolve the possibility of art and the political ever coming together.¹⁰

I would argue however that in order to work within a given place or group of people an artist needs to understand ethics and boundaries in order to maintain or push them to full effect.

⁷ Vivian Gerrand, "The Somali Peace Band," (2013). [http://royce-ng.com/files/Conversation with Royce Ng and Vivian Gerrand about the Somali Peace Band %28Revised3%29.pdf](http://royce-ng.com/files/Conversation%20with%20Royce%20Ng%20and%20Vivian%20Gerrand%20about%20the%20Somali%20Peace%20Band%20Revised3%29.pdf) (accessed 5, March 2014).

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012). 11-40

⁹ J. Ranciere and G. Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006). Quoted in Bishop. 11-40

¹⁰ Bishop.

Indeed one must remember that good intentions were the substance of naïve colonial frontier practices such as Christian missionary work, including for example, the removal of children from their cultural, familiar and linguistic contexts to be ‘civilised’ in missions.

The results of works that neglect this crucial research act to replicate the existence of structural power imbalances within the social, but they arrive at this by accident and thus become complicit in the very thing they are often trying to critique. This is different to Sierra’s work, which does so with intent. Whether a result of too much focus on the end product or because of certain compromises with the institution, this naïve complicity is problematic. In this research it is the aspects sacrificed for the carrying out of the project that appear the most interesting and worthy of attention because they are repressed.¹¹ What I see as a false binary of aesthetics/ethics only serves to facilitate the concealment of what I consider to be the interesting aspects of what it is to create work considering the social.

THE -----¹²

My interest in the above discussion is not based in an ethics versus aesthetics debate, a need for consensus or compassion, a disdain for discomfort, or an overdeveloped sense of empathy due to my own ‘-----’ ‘identity’. This investigation is simply a means to closely understand how *Other Planes of Here* can exist within the social while at the same time taking difference into strong consideration.

Grant Kester, an active voice within the ethics debate in social practice, states:

That the Other, is a material to be exposed laid bare, and made available to the artists shaping influence. In his naïve and untutored spontaneity, the Other can never achieve full or complete consciousness without the requisite discipline imposed by aesthetic experience (or the leadership of a vanguard intelligentsia).¹³

¹¹ It is from experience as an artist that my criticality of such practices stems. I have collaborated in groups with artists and creative communities in Indonesia and with fellow creative members of migrant communities, such as diverse African and Latin American migrants in Melbourne. The focus of these works has always been on collaboration through some kind of discussion to the end of creating a participatory event involving music or sound. Often a main collective body has achieved the initial stages of the organisation of the work. I found it particularly interesting that complex and tricky issues were overlooked, particularly when gender, social privilege, and race were involved, in order to present a final outcome.

¹² The symbol ----- is used here to replace the words *multiculturalism*, and *multicultural*. I have chosen to do so in order to acknowledge within this paper -----’s flat-lining effect of culture. This is a position I feel strongly about.

¹³ Grant Kester, 2012. "The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent," <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-sound-of-breaking-glass-part-ii-agonism-and-the-taming-of-dissent/> (accessed May 2014).

Claire Bishop's¹⁴ position echoes Nicolas Bourriaud's that postmodernism via ----- acts as a type of 'aesthetic courtesy', although he concedes it is based on "well meaning sentiments..."¹⁵

I agree with Bishop et al but only partially. The fear is real. Political correctness can be a pesky, relentless and destructive policing force on the boundary-pushing nature of art. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose contributions to the development of the field of postcolonial studies have been significant, critiques postcolonialism's dysfunctional mutations. Spivak points to how, within a writing context, postcolonial theory has placed the marginal within 'the conservatism of the establishment and the multicultural masquerade'¹⁶ acting as another theoretical tool that continues to insist that only the scientifically verified is correct—a system of verification built on the foundations of white privilege.¹⁷

But a binary of ----- and aesthetics is deeply conservative, not the least because it assumes that the artists working within participatory art are mostly white and privileged, with the choice of either rescuing and protecting the marginal, or employing 'them' in order to create discomfort and 'social truths' within the comfort of the institution. This completely denies the marginalised their agency, as neither artist nor participant is required to go beyond being pawns within an academic and reactionary feedback loop conducted from positions of institutional privilege.

Is the marginal individual or collective within the aesthetic participatory realm able to become the artist or participant, who shocks, or antagonises at her own leisure? Is antagonism a tactic for the privileged? Is this too close to the way the marginal/migrant/'illegal' is already perceived outside of the gallery? I agree with Stewart Martin when he proposes that antagonism as an approach only reproduces the problem.¹⁸

¹⁴ Making reference to philosophers such as "Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek who, in different ways, remain sceptical of the jargon of human rights and identitarian politics." Bishop. 25

¹⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Relational Aesthetic* (Lukas & Sternberg, 2009). 25-27

¹⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason : Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999). 175-176

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text* 21, no. 4 (2007): 377.

In this binary the artist either sides with the politically correct postmodern camp or that of the modern avant-garde's aesthetic, which along with ethnocentric universalism developed during the time of the European Enlightenment.¹⁹

These critiques continue along a superficial line that leaves the "marginal" both at the centre of a critique and yet also fenced within the margins of the discussion, at the mercy of the binary of the universal/impotent cacophony.²⁰

Arriving at this point of the research necessitated delving further into the argument, despite it using up what would otherwise have been words dedicated to investigations into artistic production relevant to my conceptual, and interestingly enough, my aesthetic interests. I had to finally pin the universal down. In constant oscillation in regards to me as an artist, the universal has at times curated/categorised me as its 'other', and at other times complimented me on my ability to assimilate to it despite the 'odds'. As Walter Mignolo explains it, this assimilation has simply meant that one accepts one's inferiority and resigns oneself to playing a game that is not one's but rather an imposed game.²¹ At other times the universalists have resented me for having the audacity to assert cultural nuance against its clichéd predications guided by good intentions. Who would dare bite the hand that feeds her?

SETTLING SCORES

Within this section I take time to investigate the universal within the postcolonial, and decoloniality and difference within cultural production. Denise Ferreira Da Silva argues that:

It is precisely the failure to conceive the cultural and the racial as productive (scientific) signifiers that limits the understanding of how they govern the contemporary global configuration, instituting modern privileged and subaltern subjects.²²

¹⁹ "The aesthetic regime of art, ushered in with the Enlightenment, continues today. It permits everything to be a potential subject or material for art, everyone to be a potential viewer of this art, and denotes the aesthetic as an autonomous form of life." Ibid. Bishop. 29

²⁰ Borriaud.

²¹ Walter Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience," *Confero Essays on Education Philosophy and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2013). 2

²² D.F. Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (University of Minnesota Press). 6-7

It is from this point that I will begin to expand on the limitations of the universal and argue for the importance of voicing difference as a productive strategy. As Anthony Gardner points out Spivak's call to maintain an ethics of alterity remains as crucial now as it was in decades past.²³ The question I aim to answer in the following paragraphs is how I would approach it through *Other Planes of Here*.

As an artist I have a very common cultural trajectory—that of the migrant and a woman—and it is important to me to engage with the ways of knowing that are normative to my own experience. I do not see the point of translating these ways of knowing within what Da Silva describes as modernity's constitutive oppositions.²⁴ The reader must not mistake my need to engage with a migrant's 'ways of knowing' with theories of hybridity as discussed in 1990s Cultural Studies. Hybridity became the neat formula offered to the migrant cultural producer as an illustrative crossover of motifs in order to demonstrate one's existence in the limbo between two worlds—the exotic one left behind and the new adopted world. Ali Nobil Ahmad criticises what he describes as 'champagne hybridity' as:

“The naivety of intellectuals and artists who are celebrating their racial otherness, degrading themselves with multicultural exoticism and feeding their bodies and cultures to the gluttonous mainstream beast.”²⁵

Ahmad, however, does not offer what the alternative to this naivety might be. Surely he is not suggesting self-protectionist tactics that drive alternate knowledge underground and privilege Eurocentric proficiency? Artists should exercise choices but taking speaking from different knowledges of the 'palette' would also be naïve. Working with these concerns in mind there are artists, organisations and collectives who have specifically chosen to work outside of the 'system' in order to thrive while avoiding being 'co-opted':

For instance, Gugulective (a South African art collective) has shown it is possible to do things without funding as well as an arts organisation in Ghana that consciously does not want to be part of international projects. They don't want to be visible. They want to do their work. They have many projects on the go, but that doesn't mean that they are discursively available. It comes back to economics. What is money used for?

²³ Anthony Gardner, "Whither the Postcolonial?," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. H. Belting and J.T.S. Binter (Distributed Art Pub Incorporated, 2011). 155

²⁴ Da Silva.

²⁵ Ali Nobil Ahmad, "Who's Underground?," *Third Text*, no. Spring (2001). 74

Is it to do the work at hand or is it to project “representation value”, which can be fed into the international arts circuit.²⁶

My apprehension is not so much with inclusion/exclusion into the mainstream but an investigation into how the cultural knowledge of the marginal can be uttered considering the dominance of the Eurocentric. The Tropicalistas, a collective of artists working in late 1960's Brazil, referred to their act of taking elements from the Western Modernist Art cannon as ‘cultural cannibalism’²⁷. Notably many of the Tropicalista artists were imprisoned or exiled by the right wing dictatorship ruling Brazil at the time. The adaptation of cultural aspects of Modernism within this context became a dangerous and risky cultural activity. In this way the need for a revived monolith, such as a different way of looking at modernity, as proposed by Bourriaud's Altermodern²⁸ and Okwui Enwezor's petite Modernities,²⁹ are not so new after all. Those working culturally outside of the scope of the modern centres have aggregated modernism in the way in which strong cultures naturally adapt. While at the same time others have managed to continue despite modernist ideas of culture, rather than because of them, for example Australian Indigenous art practices.

As a move away from replicating binaries, I investigated ways to ground *Other Planes of Here* within difference rather than in opposition to universality by looking at feminism and decoloniality. Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva assert that at the core of white feminism is a claim to universalism which relegates thoughts and experiences of Black and Third World feminists as invisible, “over and over again”.³⁰ On the other hand postcolonial feminist intersectionality proposes an acknowledgment of how ‘race’, class and sexuality construct difference/disadvantage as well as moments of overlap. Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix see intersectionality as a move beyond the feminist universal that fits with the

²⁶ This is a conversation amongst the members of the South African collective, *Dead Revolutionaries Club*. Dead Revolutionaries Club, "Interrogating the South," in *Mapping South*, ed. Anthony Gardner (Melbourne: The South Project, 2013). 301

²⁷ Leslie Bary, "Oswald De Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto", " *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991).

²⁸ Nicolas Borriaud presents the concept of Altermodern as a new way of understanding contemporary art from around the word beyond the ‘impotent cacophony’. More to the point however it seems that the *Altermodern* is more a new way through which to judge art paradoxically around an agreed aesthetic based upon permutations around a universal. Borriaud.

²⁹ Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Post-Colonial Ambivalence," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (2010). 595-620

³⁰ Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva, 2013. "White Feminist Fatigue Syndrome," *Critical Legal Thinking* <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/10/21/white-feminist-fatigue-syndrome/> (accessed 14 February, 2015).

disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas.³¹

Decolonial theory presents the option of ‘delinking’ from Western ethnocentricity, and as Walter D. Mignolo describes it, this is not a new Third World-based universal, but a move away from:

“...territorial and imperial epistemologies that are grounded on Renaissance and Enlightenment ways of knowledge.”³²

Decoloniality and, most relevant to me, its development of ‘border epistemology’ is a move towards knowledges excluded by the modern universal and the colonial.

It is in this way in which the research arrived at finding a way towards multiplicity beyond simplistic discussions around the universal. These are theoretical discoveries that aim to change the conversation and not only its content³³ and they have allowed me to proceed confidently with my own voice.

EMBODYING UNEASE AND OTHER EXCURSIVE WAYS

Returning now to the task of discussing art making and strategy. In 1980 Lucy Lippard identified what she saw as:

Feminist (and socialist) value systems that insist upon cultural workers supporting and responding to their constituencies. The three models of such interaction are:

1. Group and/or public ritual;
2. Public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances; and
3. Cooperative/collaborative/collective or anonymous art making.³⁴

³¹ Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5, no. 3. 82.

³² Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience." 2

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Lucy R. Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970's," *Art Journal*, no. Fall/Winter (1980). 364

These ‘value systems’ when separated from their original time, and quite specific and earnest political context, present a good starting point through which to consider artistic methodology around collectivity through a decolonial perspective today. I am drawn to Lippard’s list, as aspects of *Other Planes of Here* could be understood within these three different contexts. However I have adopted methodologies, which I will now discuss, that engage with slippage and heteronomy when addressing issues around cultural complexity as well as when addressing the social aspects of the work. In this way the strategy is one that problematises being read solely within the universal colonialist judgement, at least when first encountered. I decided to make my position, following what Spivak has described, as one of “productive unease”³⁵

The first artist I will discuss within this context is Luke Willis-Thompson whose work *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, (2012) used a house located in suburban Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand as a destination for the art viewer. The viewer was taken to this house from the gallery via an organised taxi. This trip from the gallery to the unknown suburban location was a moment of disorientation for those on the way to look at the art. This confusion was not broken when the taxi arrived at the home. The viewer entered a house full of a person’s belongings although there was no one home. All the doors were locked except for one leading to a lounge room. The objects in the room belonged to Willis-Thompson’s late father. The viewer was presented with an intimate site of loss for the artist. The room was crammed with objects, some seemingly half packed into boxes, and there were many clues as to the Sāmoan provenance of the person who inhabited the space. The viewer was immersed, aware of someone else’s surroundings and was placed within this private space as an outsider: lurking, putting clues together. After a while the viewer was taken back to the gallery. This gesture of departing from and arriving at a gallery is crucial as it not only positions the work as an artistic gesture but also provides clues as to the artist’s relationship with the gallery space and its limits as a site of re/presentation of experience. This is a work full of complexity and, as there is no photography of the actual room itself, the only way to understand it is by reading about others’ experiences and perceptions of the work. The only exhibition images available are photographs of the outside of the house (see fig.1)³⁶. The

³⁵ Spivak.

³⁶ Luke Willis-Thompson, *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012, accessed 12 May, 2015 <http://www.hopkinsonmossman.com/artist/?artist=Luke+Willis+Thompson&work=inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam&id=511#btm>.

house articulated the nuanced voice of a particular person and their condition, via their possessions but it is the viewer's displacement that activates the work. While the work is participatory in nature the artist has full agency and control over the way the viewer interacts. This heterogeneity and participation is very similar to the way I am approaching this research project.



Figure 1. Luke Willis-Thompson, *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012.

The need for slippage, complexity is not specific to the migrant. Gerry Bibby's practice is expansive and while it has persistent aesthetic motifs such as the brick wall, it engages in a range of mediums such as text-based works in the form of long fiction writing as well as poetry, collage, sculpture, participatory intervention, performance and installation. Bibby's practice is driven by a criticality of the capitalist power structures taken for granted within the most minimal of engagements with the social, the material, the institutional and the everyday administrative. This criticality is applied from a position of difference, that of sexuality.

The work I would like to discuss is the collaboration with artist Sean McNanney titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009 (see fig. 2)³⁷. In this work, staged at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Bibby and McNanney furnished an ornate oval shaped space allocated for their presentation with furniture essential for a couple's living space. Here, behind doors closed to visitors they ate, slept, made art, and existed for the duration of the exhibition. Through their time inhabiting the 'oval office' the artists created a space that was both practical and aesthetic. Within this space the couple existed intimately and creatively and beyond examining eyes, undisturbed by expectations. The Oval Office title referenced the United States government with subsequent hints at surveillance culture. This gesture was to be further reiterated as other performance elements of the work took place. Bibby's *They Come At Night* comprised of the artist dancing alone from the time of one o'clock in the morning when the gallery was closed to the public. The evidence of this performance could be seen on the floor of the gallery for the remainder of the exhibition as a dancing Bibby wore and peeled off different costumes as the night went on. The only witness to this performance was his collaborator and partner McNanney (see figs. 3 and 4)³⁸. Visitors were invited on two scheduled occasions to walk through the 'Oval Office' accompanied by a guide. The work's most important gesture was one of real agency at a time of surveillance and the co-option of privacies. This agency took place while at the same time literally existing within the institutional space. Information intimated to the viewer was chosen with careful consideration. For example, the performances and convivialities did not belong to the viewer or the gallery in this instance. The act itself was experienced and belonged only to the two artists. The viewer is not excluded but is welcome upon invitation. The end performance culminated with the artists using sheets applied as draping elements to create sculptural forms (see fig. 5)³⁹ over furniture belonging to the art museum space.

³⁷ Figure 2. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

³⁸ Figures 3 and 4. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

³⁹ Figure 5. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009.



Figure 3. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009.



Figure 4. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009.



Figure 5. Gerry Bibby and Sean McNanney, titled *Their Time In the Oval Office (Remains)*, 2009.

LANGUAGE AND COLLECTIVE MYTHOLOGY

“There are artists, who make things concrete and artists, who make things liquid!”⁴⁰

The cycle of events that make-up *Other Planes of Here* are organised around each collective’s own interests. In this sense the speakers amplify nuanced languages specific to each event and in turn the events together form part of the larger work. This aspect of the work operates within the ‘minor’ language as described by Deleuze and Guattari⁴¹.

One of the effects of the atomising of the work via multiple events is that of deterritorialising the ‘major’ dominant language of the art institution that the work is researched from and that concludes with as the final event.

The methodology employed in this research acknowledges the importance of the artistic institution, with the gallery being the ideal cultural space in which to frame nuance and multiplicity. At the same time it identifies the problem of presenting/representing difference within this space. As speakers *Other Planes of Here* exists as a way to both metaphorically and in practice amplify difference and create new architectures within pre-existing physical spaces which house them at any one time. The documentation of the event that occurs elsewhere is never exhibited in the gallery as photographic evidence. This is because the event belongs to those whose bodies have been present at the live performances, DJ’d music and other sound events, which I will discuss in coming chapters. Because of this, the role of the translator is given to the speakers.

The event does not look to the gallery walls for validation in the form of documentation. In this way it refuses both the exploitation of the participants and the will to aestheticise the experiential aspects of the work. In this way the gallery exhibition functions as its own event. The heteronomous event lives through a network of informal photographs perhaps on social media. Thus, the myth around what took place is created through memory; commentary and visual snippets circulated around post-event. Much in the same way that Brian O’Doherty speaks about the relationship between documentation and mythology:

⁴⁰ Christian Egger, "Gelatin Pavilion –Some Like It Hot! ," (2011).
http://www.gelatin.net/uploaded/PDF/Interview_Gelatin_en.pdf (accessed 21 June 2014).

⁴¹ Kaftka Toward a Minor Literature, *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari*, trans., Dana Polan (Minnesota University of Minnesota Press, 1986). 16-27

The historical process is both hampered and facilitated by removing the original, which becomes increasingly fictitious as its afterlives become more concrete. What is preserved and what is allowed to lapse edit the idea of history—the form of communal memory favoured at any particular time.⁴²

For reasons that have already been established I am determined to steer clear of evidence that serves to look back to the event within a pseudo ethnographic modality. On the other hand this is not an attempt to oversimplify identity through cultural anonymity or erasure. Considering that there is a well-entrenched mythology of the ‘other’ in culture, to create a mythology outside of these existing fictions is to me a radical gesture. This forms a methodology that is productive and circumvents colonial languages. Here I can draw a connection between the deterritorialisation of a major language and ideas around culture and stereotypes when considering the concept of myth. The work produced for the gallery within this project seeks to create a new type of myth through a focus on complexity. In the words of Sun Ra:

“If you are not a myth, who’s reality are you? If you are not a reality, whose myth are you?”⁴³

Chantal Mouffe proposes that rather than a binary choice between the combative or the utopian, the most productive approach comes from a space in which conflict and difference is acknowledged and recognised with the aim to address the need for the “de-universalisation of political subjects.”⁴⁴ Mouffe offers an alternative to traditional models of democracy, such as deliberative democracy based on consensus and majority rule when she states that an:

Awareness of the fact that difference allows us to constitute unity and totality while simultaneously providing essential limits is an agonistic approach that contributes in the subversion of the ever present temptation that exists in democratic societies to naturalise their frontiers and essentialise their identities. Such an approach would, model to the multiplicity of voices that a pluralist society encompasses, and to the complexity of the power structure that this network of differences implies.⁴⁵

²³ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube, the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986). 70

⁴³ Anthony Elms John Corbett, Terri Kapsalis., *Pathways to Unknown Worlds: Sun-Ra, El Saturn and Chicago's Afro-Futurist Underground 1954-78* (Chicago: White Walls, 2006). 20

⁴⁴ Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?," *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999). 754 -757

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

Although as Denise Ferreira da Silva points out, Mouffe's agonism is missing specificity when it comes to the 'subaltern' in its portrayal of the social.⁴⁶

The cycle of events in *Other Planes of Here* takes the function of Mouffe's 'network of differences'. Sound and the cultures around it provide this project with a way in which to fill a space with possibilities and tensions. It has the ability to put forth other ways of knowing via sensation, it is multilayered and in this way it is able to articulate nuance. *Other Planes of Here* goes further than just acknowledging that this difference exists by amplifying voice and articulating the specific variations within each collective's distinct way of knowing or wanting to know. In this chapter I have been able to locate aspects of *Other Planes of Here* that work within the social and I have established a way of working with agency. In the next chapters I will expand on how this has been put into practice.

⁴⁶

Da Silva. 4

CHAPTER TWO: TEXT AS IMAGE, SOUND AS TEXT

TACTICS

Having considered theory, philosophy and developed a grounding for a strategy in the previous chapter, the next few paragraphs will be dedicated to discussing the way *Other Planes of Here* developed during the research process as well as artists whose work has been important to developing aesthetic visual and experiential approaches.

The project began as a type of sharing, interacting around a common guided activity in a similar way to participatory art practices, but with an antagonistic approach. The aim was to reach a point in which various types of clashing music pertaining to various subcultures would be played to the same audience in order to subvert expectation. This in turn would present dissonance through the exposure with the unfamiliar. This iteration was to take the form of a series of events organised by me as the artist. This evolution developed into a more antagonistic need to exclude, obscure and even protect the “uncool” collective approach to sound pertaining to the subcultures in which I move as a woman and a migrant. This work was to be an installation coming from a reactive perspective. The reaction was precipitated by what I saw as an over simplistic view of culture demanded by the default ----- lens that my work has often been viewed through when it came to creating culture from a position of difference.

The work was to be a critique of the inclusiveness and would literally exclude the viewer from being able to experience the work itself. The sound would be experienced only through a barrier comprised of an aluminium shed reverberating⁴⁷ physically and activated by the bass

⁴⁷ This reverberation immediately spoke to me both metaphorically but also quite viscerally as my identification with bass began to come to the fore. As a child in El Salvador I heard two very memorable sounds as I lay in bed every night. One was the sound of the reception centre located behind my house. This sound was the sound of large Latin celebrations through the distant bass and nothing else. The other sound was also the bass heavy sound of bombs dropped in far away places. These sounds by the time they got to me as a girl in bed created quite a complex and layered rhythm for me to exist within. In fact my first forays in the club scene as a teenager were comprised of me falling asleep as soon as I got there. Bass had come to be lulling and comforting much to my friends’ amusement.

heavy soundsystem within it.⁴⁸ This work aimed to obstruct the experience. When I ran this idea by peers the exclusionary aspect was almost unanimously seen as a type of turning of the tables. That is to say that I, as a non-white artist, was actively intending to barricade the viewer as the main gesture within the work. While this was part of the intention, I felt that this was too simplistic and did not speak to the nuances that attracted me to sound.

I started at this point to make enquiries in the male dominated custom-built soundsystem scene in order to test the waters and see if this is something I could do myself (see figs 6 and 7)⁴⁹. I researched the language of the technical aspects of the culture and made many enquiries with novice questions. I have spent a substantial amount of time during my research project researching the physics of sound, learning how speaker drivers work, and understanding amplification and impedance. There are two almost opposing aspects to the soundsystem culture that I became familiar with while researching the building of the speaker stacks and these are mentorship and competition. While I have experienced a small amount of competition from serious players in the scene, it was very clear to me that as a beginner, an artist and perhaps as the only woman with her own soundsystem in Australia that I posed very little threat.⁵⁰ In keeping with the premise of the culture I have received a lot of mentorship even procuring some of my speaker boxes from the proprietor of the largest soundsystem in Australia.

⁴⁸ This idea was arrived at through a testing out of the soundsystem in its early (and rougher looking) incarnation where I invited a few friends over to my studio, originally built as a back shed. The shed itself became a percussive instrument as the bass frequencies in the music played caused the shed to vibrate and create sound.

⁴⁹ Figures 6, and 7. Developmental images of the *Other Planes of Here* soundsystem. Courtesy of the artist.

⁵⁰ At least, for the moment.



Figure 6, 7. Developmental images of the *Other Planes of Here* soundsystem.

But then the project began to take shape into what would be its final outcome. This is when the soundsystem began to take over the work. As word began to go around different friends and subcultures that I am involved with, the soundsystem began to draw attention. *Other Planes of Here*, was going to preside over events, still organised by me as the artist and was never going to be exhibited or shown in the art gallery.

Mirroring my original call for cultural complexity the work has moved beyond my initial antagonistic provocation. It has become more about understanding temporality through what Salomé Voegelin describes as listening not as an activity of hearing sound but rather as a way to engage with sonic sensorial material. Therefore playing with the agonistic fragments of a work and innovating its complex temporality⁵¹ in what Voegelin calls the ‘space of perception’. It became important at this moment for the events to be organised by each interested group and the aim of *Other Planes of Here* became to activate a communal space of perception within it by reflecting their amplified sounds back to them.

IMAGE TEXT

Other Planes of Here seeks to bring to the foreground the layered quality of sound and its function in creating collective mythology out of an understanding of multiplicity through resonance and nuanced levels of register outside of the image. At the same time, the name of this project became a slogan alongside other poetry quoted from Sun Ra’s repertoire. I decided early in the project that I would need to make banners for this work as I have for all events I have organised in the past (see fig. 8)⁵².

⁵¹ Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence. Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London: 2010). p.150.

⁵² Figure 8. Lucreccia Gomez Quintanilla *Other Planes of Here*, 2014, Gouache, oil, sequin on linen, 2mx3m. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8. Lucrecia Gomez Quintanilla *Other Planes of Here*, 2014, Gouache, oil, sequin on linen, 2mx3m.



Figure 9. *Other Planes of There* Sun Ra album cover 1968.

I researched Su Ra and his Arkestra's record covers and came across the cover to the album *Other Planes of There* (see fig. 9)⁵³, which became the basis for a new painting. Text is painted onto a large banner-sized unframed piece of linen. The large format of the banner work occupies a significant space within the installation whether it is indoors or outdoors. The slogan within this format becomes a type of provocation and also an "in" into the work. It is also very important to mention here that these banners are there for events organised by me. This is because the other events through which the speakers circulate already have established visual identities. To this end of investigating the banner and text I researched the work of Vernon Ah Kee, Paul Thek and Mike Kelley.

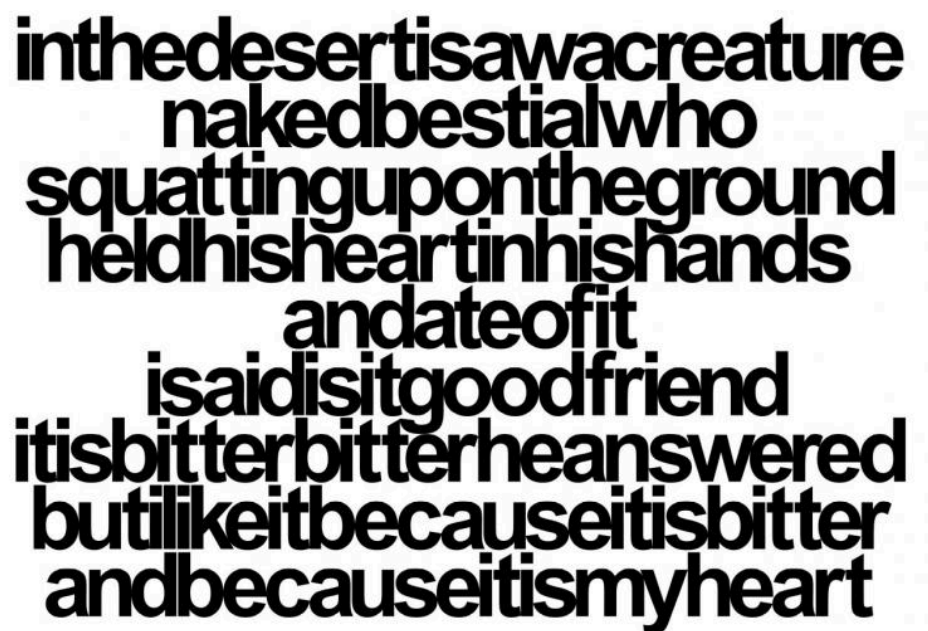


Figure 10.. Vernon Ah Kee *becauseitsbitter*, 2009.

The text works of Vernon Ah Kee *becauseitsbitter* 2009 (see fig. 10) are large bold text paintings in black and white⁵⁴. The text initially reads as abstract shapes. There is no punctuation and the compressed formatting of the text seems to challenge interpretation. The words make reference to issues around race, colonisation and the survival of Australia's first peoples, quoting the poetry of war writer Stephen Crane. Ah Kee uses text within these poignant works in order to state a poetic yet political position as an indigenous man within

⁵³ Figure 9. *Other Planes of There* Sun Ra album cover 1968, accessed 15 January, 2014 http://cps-static.rovicorp.com/3/JPG_400/MI0002/466/MI0002466997.jpg?partner=allrovi.com

⁵⁴ Figure 10, 11. Vernon Ah Kee *becauseitsbitter*, 2009, accessed 12 June, 2015 <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/163.2011/>

the context of a colonised Australia. Making it hard to read the text ensures that the viewer has to work hard to engage and understand the meaning contained within the text.

This visual oscillation between legibility and illegibility led me to the reverse text paintings of Paul Thek that are an example of the way text can exist aesthetically as image and as words to be deciphered (see fig. 11)⁵⁵. In these works Thek uses text as abstraction within the surface of the painting. They are energetically and urgently articulated. The letters convey a message in their depiction as much as in their symbolic ordering as words.

In *Other Planes of Here* the paintings work to occupy the space between the functional object, the banner, and the more evocative and gestural painting.



Figure 11. Paul Thek, *Untitled (Latin America)* 1984 acrylic on coloured cardboard 64.1 x 94.6cm.

This space between the functional and the dysfunctional combination of text and image attracted me to the banner works of Mike Kelley and the way in which they create and impose spatial boundaries, as well as behaving as large replicas of found didactic posters.

⁵⁵ Figure 11. Paul Thek, *Untitled (Latin America)* 1984 acrylic on coloured cardboard 64.1 x 94.6cm, accessed 21 July, 2014. <http://roveprojects.com/paul-thek.html>

Behaving as a type of sculpture as well as two-dimensional works, the banners recreate texts in colourful fabric, graphically communicating a message and at the same time acting as physical dividers of space. These are different in approach to my own text paintings as they are not really paintings but textile crafted renditions of various announcements and slogans. Kelley's placement of his banners next to each other creates a rather absurd collective pronouncement of a disjointed vernacular within the gallery space (see figure 12)⁵⁶. For the purpose of this context I have used these banner works of Kelley's but his works that involve live music or reference music culture would also be as relevant to this project.



Figure 12. Mike Kelley, Installation view of banner works, 1987.

SOUNDING IS A VERB

I would like to look at collective sounding in the context of the work of Melbourne artist Geoff Robinson's *15 locations / 15 minutes / 15 days*, 2014 (see figs. 13 and 14)⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ Figure 12. Mike Kelley, Installation view of banner works, 1987. accessed 4 July, 2015. http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_metropicturesgallery_com/MK_I_1988_g0.jpg

⁵⁷ Figures 13 and 14. Geoff Robinson *15 locations / 15 minutes / 15 days* 2014, accessed 18 May, 2015. <http://www.melbourneprize.org/mp2014/>

Robinson's work was executed as the title suggests over fifteen locations marked by coloured poles located around the Federation Square precinct of the Melbourne CBD. Following a roster of volunteers from differing communities around Melbourne, each pole indicated the position that each volunteer would occupy over the period of fifteen minutes while he or she would ring a bell over this duration. The work lasted for fifteen days. As a volunteer I was required to collect my bell and walk over to my allocated post. Significantly, the bells were created to celebrate the centenary of Australia's federation. The bells are heavy and have to be swung widely and energetically in order for them to sound, adding a performance aspect for the participant to enact. The rhythmical sound of the bells bounced off the walls making new territories within existing architectural spaces. Tourists and locals going about their way were suddenly immersed within this new space as they made their way around this civic setting.



Figure 13, 14. Geoff Robinson *15 locations / 15 minutes / 15 days* 2014.

As a participant I became aware of the way sound's immersive qualities changed the space but most importantly it was the distinct sound that the bells made that had its own social connotations. Not so much religious, but civic, social, like a type of call to convene, or the announcing of a proclamation that has yet to be articulated. As a participant I was energized by the sound. As I swung my bell I could also hear the slightly differently toned bell of the volunteer across from me and like cicadas the bells conversed as we swung them back and forth. To me the pronouncement that the bells announced was made apparent when thinking of the way in which the artist had organised the overall project. That its structure and organisation were perceptible and articulated community and a type of collaboration is an aspect of the work that resonated with my own project. That over the period of time that the work took place different members of the community donated their time to participate in the act of 'sounding' and activating the space in a different way was a significant gesture. The question of whom the work belonged to was also interesting in terms of how *Other Planes of Here* was developing at the time at which I participated in the work. For example did the work belong to the artist, the passers by, the loiterers or the commuters who happened to find themselves witnessing the ringing of the bells? Perhaps the work belonged to those who had volunteered their time in order to ring the bells. Robinson has since made small replicas of the striped wooden markers to give to each person who volunteered for the job. To me these tensions of who benefited from and whether the work should even benefit anyone at all are why the work is successful.

In the next chapter I will discuss the importance of sound and its multipronged and culturally nuanced input within the work. I will discuss how the tactics, which I arrived at in the planning and building process of *Other Planes of Here* have been put to use.

CHAPTER THREE: SOUND SYSTEMS

This chapter is concerned with the physical, theoretical and philosophical aspects of the speaker stack at the centre of *Other Planes of Here* as a research project. There are some key aspects to the soundsystem and sound itself as a medium that have been crucial to my interest and adoption of this mode of working within an artistic context. Please note that *Other Planes of Here* is not engaging with theories of pop music but much rather of *sound*, the event and affect as they relate specifically to a particular way of understanding *through* sound. Theories of sound and time perception are also of interest within the context of the project. Through my initial interest and subsequent involvement with soundsystem culture, I have been drawn to texts that investigate sound and metaphor within dub, reggae and bass heavy music.

I will discuss ideas around the socio-political propositions that producing artwork around the soundsystem makes, through a brief look at the structure of the culture around it. I will look at the specifics of sound within the modality of listening and sounding within the context of the soundsystem. While I am aware that there is a strong field of Western experimental sound that the project could be guided by, there are two reasons why I am not engaging within that field. One is that I am not a trained sound composer or musician. I stumbled if you like, into an interest in sound through my practice as a DJ. The other reason being an urgency to approach sound within a decolonial methodology, and as such I am concerned with researching sound through the rich field of emerging academic research on soundsystem culture.

Reflecting soundsystem culture, *Other Planes of Here* as a project is many things. It is a cultural experience that echoes aspects of its previously described original context, including its politics. It is a sensorial experience of sound, and significantly it is also a physical object that alters the space around itself.

AN IMPOSING STRUCTURE

As a speaker stack *Other Planes of Here* is relatively small by the culture's standards, even though it remains an imposing stack of 2.5 metres in height. Australia's largest speaker stack at the moment is the *Heartical Hi Powa Soundsystem*, which at its largest can be up to three metres in height by seven metres in length! My *Other Planes of Here* speaker stack is made up of three components which operate in isolation from each other in order to best present each frequency: low, mid and high. Two fifteen inch J bin scoops represent the low frequency, the *J* and *scoop* referring to the design of the boxes in which the speakers are housed. This design is there to enhance the low frequencies. On top of the bass bins, is one speaker box in charge of producing the mid-range frequencies, with a smaller speaker, often called a 'tweeter', on top of that as the crown. This speaker is in charge of delivering the high frequencies. The system works in a mono setup. Powering and operating the soundsystem comprises using a complicated set of amplifiers, cables and a 'crossover' (a set of filters through which the signal of the powerful amplifiers is distributed). This setup is preferred in soundsystem culture because of its ease in isolating the bass frequencies that are crucial to the reggae, dancehall and dub that are typically played through the speakers. As such, the speaker stack in *Other Planes of Here* is a technology used to facilitate the clear dissemination of sound.

SELF-ORGANISATION AND THE SOUNDSYSTEM

Around this simple construction of the physical soundsystem, a culture developed in Jamaica in the 1950s. A 'crew' of DJs, selectors (music – selectors), MCs and their followers came together. They represented, performed and created mythology around a community. As the different soundsystems formed they would battle or clash. A soundsystem battle consists of two or more soundsystem crews made up of a speaker stack, DJs, a music selector and their supporters. Usually the speaker stack crews take turns playing a track with an MC jousting and making quips at the expense of the other crews in order to work up the crowd. After each crew takes a series of turns, the winner is decided through crowd response. This format for the soundsystem battle event has been taken up all over the Caribbean, South and Central

America⁵⁸, North America, Japan, Africa, Europe, New Zealand and Australia and it has a particularly strong history in the UK where, from the late 1960s onwards, the Jamaican diaspora has embraced and adapted this culture to its new surroundings.

Louis Chude-Sokei looks at reggae music and its use of effects such as echo, reverb and delay as a conduit for manifesting the past within the present as a way to:

...hear our metaphors of self and national belonging. This music has helped us ground ourselves in communally created myths that sustain us in the protracted experience of dispersal. After all diaspora means distance and the echo is also the product and signifier of space.⁵⁹

SOUND AND MYTHOLOGY

Chude-Sokei refers specifically to the African diaspora within Jamaica but this way of looking at sound also resonates with me as a migrant. Echo, delay and reverb through their invocation and manipulation of time act as conduits for the teasing out of meaning and metaphor within the diaspora. To me sound is able to articulate this condition better than the image by activating a multiplicity of layers, a play with time as well as an ability to create a collective mythology. This aspect of sound is what has drawn me to work with it as a subject matter and as a medium.

Chude-Sokei could be criticised for his sentimentality and unempirical claims peripheral to a modernist backdrop. In her analysis of the contemporary theory of sound, Voegelin addresses this concern:

And we are, even within post-modernism, working according to modernist principles and attitudes, producing modernist work which refrains from and even despises any emotional interaction with the material and prefers a formalist, analytical reading

⁵⁸ As explained before I have a Central American background –Salvadoran rather than a Jamaican background. These two countries have a different contemporary cultural experience outside of postcolonial and the resulting developing world social and economic circumstances. Both initially colonised by the Spaniards (for Jamaica later England). Although El Salvador officially does not recognise the impact of African slaves on its culture as so many other Latin American countries do. Jamaica was a port of call on the way to the delivery of slaves to from Africa to Central America, which at the time was one united national entity. Even with an ocean in the way the travel distance from each other by plane is only two hours. The approach here on my behalf is also one of intersectionality.

⁵⁹ Louis Chude-Sokei, "Dr. Satan's Echo Chamber": Reggae, Technology and the Diaspora Process," *Emergences* 9, no. 1 (1999). 47

instead. Sentimentality and nostalgia are frowned upon and marginalised into the realm of indigenous or feminist practices. Within the art field sentimentality is formalised via the notion of Kitsch, managed within the aesthetic rationality of this identification, and as such drained of any real emotional production.⁶⁰

Voegelin points out the disdain of modernism towards the use of emotional/political triggers.⁶¹ It is here that ideas around cultural memory become relevant to my research project. Within this ‘uncool’ concept, the emotional pitch in sound has been used to assert agency over modern urban spaces through cultures like those that formed around the soundsystem. Within this emotional intonation, a story is carried and dynamically added to from one generation to the other.

At this point, it is worth recalling the sheer presence and physical size of the average soundsystem. They are designed to be large not only for maximum volume but for maximum immersion and bodily response to the bass produced by the speakers. It is this experience where the human body itself literally reverberates with sound and becomes the conductor for memory within the music if only for the duration of the event. Through this process the body becomes part of the metaphor. To look at it from Julian Henriques’ perspective on sound within soundsystem culture, *Other Planes of Here* aligns itself within:

⁶⁰ Salome Voegelin, "Sonic Memory Material as 'Pathetic Trigger'," *Organised Sound* 11, no. 01 (2006).

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⁶¹ I originally chose not to include personal anecdotes within this chapter, as I have been conscious of dangerously painting myself into an easily reducible Latin cliché which I would not be able to shake off for the rest of this exegesis and this would act counter to the project. I have to this end chosen instead to concentrate largely on new research. However, it is through my own experiences that this research has come about and it is how I have been able to understand sound in a very specific way. I have chosen one of many instances in order to locate my research within a specific point of focus; as migrants settle they create their own spaces in their new homes, be it via private gatherings or public places in the way of businesses. It is in one of these places that I was able to get a glimpse at a very young age of how important music/sound experience is to the migrant. My family used to frequent a Salvadoran restaurant in Queens when we lived there for a couple of years during my childhood. It was a dark shop front selling Salvadoran traditional food. On one very poignant occasion as we ate, I noticed that most of the patrons were men sitting alone. In hindsight this was the case because many Central American men travel illegally into the USA, leaving their families behind as they do today (and in larger numbers) and send a weekly or monthly remittance to those left behind. In this restaurant there was a jukebox with cumbias, rancheras and salsa as well as some contemporary US music like Michael Jackson. I observed as a man walked to the corner, inserted some coins and, after making the selection, sat back down at his table. As his song began – I cannot recall what the song was – I could see his body language change as the familiar sounds filled him as he picked up his drink. Slowly slumping he began to cry as he watched the world cup broadcast on the large tube TV mounted on the wall. I cannot pretend to know what he was thinking about or what memories were flooding to him through the sounds that he was hearing, and it is of course obvious that music is emotive and that memory and sound are tied together. My point is not only that music is emotional, rather that it has a cultural function that speaks to a particular type of complexity, that which belongs to the settler. Places and experiences such as these are only marginally sites of nostalgia. They are more sites of transition where a confluence of both emotion and self-identification occurs. This is a site where the creation of new collective mythologies take place that contribute in a type of feed back loop where the migrant is able to evolve, connect, develop and contribute to this new context.

“...lineage rather than abstract types or essentialism; it is concerned with communication as an embodied, situated and particular process in the way feminist epistemologies have pioneered.”⁶²

I would like at this point to briefly draw a link between Voegelin’s writings on emotion and the manipulation of spaces through sound with William Sites’ writings on sound and the urban environment. The activation of urban spaces, either outdoor or indoor, through sound emitted by the speaker stack is crucial to soundsystem culture. William Sites speaks to the relationship between music and the urban:

Musical performances become the location for new creative ways of understanding, knowing and being...The emotional spaces that music creates are seen, from this vantage point, to engender new communal types of being and belonging.⁶³

This is an important point to make, as what the sound does in the instance of the soundsystem is create an ever adaptable and creative cultural link between the past and present. Sites refers to music’s

“anticipatory character – its ability to capture the still-fermenting quality of human existence, that which has not yet emerged in objective, definable form.”⁶⁴

REVERB AND ECHO

I will now look at artists whose work engages with sound, mythology and the socio-cultural potential of the audible realm. Indonesian performance duo Senyawa has been influential to my understanding of how sound operates within different cultural contexts. Senyawa works in the space between heavy metal music and a strong tradition of Javanese transcendental musical ritual. Senyawa’s sound is epic, emotional and intricate. Senyawa (see fig. 15)⁶⁵ interacts with the continuity of Javanese culture while at the same time adding to this knowledge via experimentation through sound and movement as well as through inventing new instruments. Through Senyawa’s performances the audience becomes immersed within

⁶² Henriques p. xxi

⁶³ William Sites, “We Travel the Spaceways”: Urban Utopianism and the Imagined Spaces of Black Experimental Music,” *Urban Geography* 33, no. 4 (2012). 571

⁶⁴ E.B.T.A.A. Nassar, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford University Press, 2000): quoted in William Sites 567

⁶⁵ Figure 15. Senyawa, live performance still, accessed 1 August, 2015. <http://www.the-wknd.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/senyawafb.jpg>

cultural fluidity through sound and movement. This is relevant to the way in which I perceive sound as functioning within *Other Planes of Here*. The cultural fluidity transmitted through the speakers can only be understood through experience, through the transformation of space, and the creation of a social and individually immersive context.



Figure 15. Senyawa, live performance still.



Figure 16. Sun Ra, *Space Is The Place*, film still, 1974.

William Sites' paper on sound and urban spaces provided a rich source invaluable to the direction of *Other Planes of Here*. But it was also no surprise that he too came to investigate the work of artist and writer Sun Ra whilst looking at sound within this context. Ra himself articulates the way he sees music within his own project:

“The beauty of music is that it can reach across the border of reality into the myth. Impressions never known before can be conveyed immediately.”⁶⁶

Sun Ra is known mostly for his experimental jazz music and his 1974 cult film *Space Is The Place* (see fig. 16), as well as his contribution to the creation of the genre of Afrofuturism alongside George Clinton and acclaimed science fiction writers Samuel R. Delaney and Octavia E. Butler⁶⁷. But Ra's wider body of work, including complex cosmic philosophy, poetry and prose, is often overlooked as it was based on a particularly complex vernacular knowledge gathered from a specific experience - that of an African American man born in the 1940s. Sun Ra worked with information that was readily accessible to him to channel his creative vision, as easily quoting the bible or discussing the possibilities of space travel, at the forefront of popular culture at the time. His musical projects, such as the Sun Ra Arkestra, have been more accepted in an avant-garde context. However, despite his collaborations, including a record with the experimental musician John Cage, his prolific creative output is often dismissed as entertaining but too 'out there' to sustain any serious position within the academic canon. This could be because he insisted on calling himself a 'being' other than human coming from Saturn to present a new vision to Earth. Ra turned to African imagery and mythology, Egyptology and space travel as sources for both his visual and sonic output. His merit lies in his attempt to construct a new sense of self-perception for his community through myth making and imagination, via the creation of an eccentric, futuristic and extravagant body of music, film and poetry. To Sun Ra music is a type of device through which the past and the present could be manipulated into a different sense of temporality, a kind of subjunctive conjugation in order to imagine a future, a brand new way to exist within the African diaspora in the USA. Sun Ra sought to find a space outside of the dichotomy between slavery and the assimilationist notion of freedom that was tied to the civil rights movement at the time. The search for this 'out there' space is still relevant as I write this. It is

⁶⁶ S. Ra, H. Geerken, and J.L. Wolf, *The Immeasurable Equation: The Collected Poetry and Prose* (Waitawhile, 2005). 453

⁶⁷ Figure 16. Sun Ra, *Space Is The Place*, film still, 1974, accessed 10 July, 2015. <http://music-selections.ilmagoweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/sunra4.jpg>

this space of mythmaking and the liminal space between dichotomies that my research project is placing itself within.

My research into Sun Ra's practice has led me to look at his work in very much the same way that artist Camille Norbert describes Sun Ra as being:

"Information experimentation made flesh, finding slippages in truths, myths in realities, or even multiple time dimensions in the present."⁶⁸

Other Planes of Here is particularly indebted to Sun Ra's multidisciplinary approach of creating a visual language in conjunction with a sound language. In his film *Space is the Place*, he is able to combine music, myth, sound, costume design, poetry as well as his stage presence. His visual aesthetic, especially his costuming, which borrows heavily from the appearance of ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, was brought to life through the use of readily available metallic and sequin fabrics referencing the precious head dresses and heavily adorned costumes of Egyptian royalty.⁶⁹

This space of discursive possibilities is akin to what Denise Ferreira da Silva does when she privileges looking at the "/" between the words which produce a binary. Da Silva finds a space for possibilities within the 'slash' found between two opposing ideas or identities.⁷⁰

This is also what Julian Henriques describes as happening when 'sound' is given the qualities of a verb. In describing this as a type of 'thinking through sound'⁷¹, Henriques writes:

⁶⁸ Anthony Elms John Corbett, Terry Kapsalis., *Pathways to Unknown Worlds: Sun-Ra, El Saturn and Chicago's Afro-Futurist Underground 1954-78* (Chicago: White Walls, 2006).24

⁶⁹ This DIY opulent aesthetic really appeals to me and I have used sequins, gold and silver paint within my banners. I have done so in order to make a direct reference to Sun Ra's aesthetic but also my familiar association between music, sequins and myth was formed at a very young age. As a kid I spent a lot of time with my maternal grandmother and aunt who lived in a small town in El Salvador. I watched my aunt get ready every Saturday eve before her performance as the lead singer in a cumbia and salsa band. Her *combo* played a different small town's festivity every weekend and her preparations would take up hours. Hair in rollers and facial mask, control underwear, stockings and finally the dress and make up and gravity defying hair. My job would be passing different accoutrements from the sacred piece of furniture by the window, the "chiffonier". This mirrored wardrobe with what was to me the most exotic name would be otherwise locked during the week. My aunt as so many women do had irrational issues with body parts. Tropical weather was put to one side in order to wear the most fantastic gowns, which managed to be quite sexy while covering her neck to toe. A great deal of effort was made in order to deflect the ridiculous nature of the band of fabric around the neck. This usually involved glamorous rhinestones in all sorts of colours, sequins and clusters of glued on glitter sourced from the local market. This was the height of opulence. The slit on the side of the long dress to show some leg was the final element of sophistication, the icing on the cake. To me my aunt was the ultimate diva as she practiced her singing during this whole event. I knew when the men's cologne (she preferred the scent) was sprayed from head to toe that my Saturday evening's entertainment was over as she would very soon board the back of the pick up truck and head to her glamorous job.

⁷⁰ Denise Ferreira Da Silva, "Introduction: The Global Matrix and the Predicament of "Postmodernisms": An Introduction to the Critique of Kulturkampf " *Seton Hall Law Review* 35, no. 4 (2005). 1281

⁷¹ Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2011). xv

Sounding is a dynamic patterning propagated through a medium. Though it cannot be expressed outside its embodiment in such a medium, it is in itself entirely immaterial and insubstantial. Sounding is a transitory event in time rather than an often more permanent mark in a visual surface. Such events are entirely distinctive, unique and unrepeatable. Sounding has direct sensorial effects and affects, as with smells, tastes and gestures, in addition to how it is purposed as a medium for encoding meaning, as with phonetics... This idea of sound serves to draw attention to a rather different object of enquiry than the conventional ones of text and image. In practice it is not object at all, but a process of events, not a coded representation but medium, not a thought but a feeling – often independent of conscious reflection.⁷²

When approached in this way, sound overrides the concern with visual representation by engaging instead with a different set of complex experiences. Salomé Voegelin highlights the interrelationship between time and space in sound and how it challenges a dialectical reading that presents them as stable, autonomous and static concepts. Voegelin describes the notion of ‘time’ in sound as neither time opposed to space nor time plus space.⁷³

“Sound prompts a re-think of temporality and spatiality vis-a-vis each other and invites the experience of ephemeral stability and fixed fluidity.”⁷⁴



Figure 17. Camille Norment, *Rhythm Wars - Crazy Army*, 2012.

⁷² ibid. xvii

⁷³ Voeglin. p.124

⁷⁴ ibid.

Camille Norment's *Rhythm Wars - Crazy Army* (see fig.17) is a sound installation from 2012 commissioned and exhibited by the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo⁷⁵. This work is particularly relevant to my project as Norment uses empty oil drums and fills them with bass frequencies so they perform as amplifiers and reverberating containers. Their metal hollowness controls the sound, at times resembling the sound of marching feet and other times the sound of rhythmic percussion. *Rhythm Wars – Crazy Army* is a visual and aural experience that brings to mind the ubiquitous use of the oil drum as a repurposed rhythm instrument, and simultaneously its origin in the transport and storage of oil in the global resource economy. The drums line the marbled walls of an institution introducing a disruptive passageway in what are traditionally quiet places of contemplation. Camille Norment's work exists within the slippery space between sound and imagery in order to create moments of both disruption and deep immersion. This aspect of Norment's work has been of great interest to the gallery installation aspects of my research.

Through *Other Planes of Here*'s speaker stack, this research project has become a practical, contextual exercise that is aware of and engaged with its own socio-political lineage. The soundsystem culture surfaced in Jamaica as an outdoor event self-organised by the working class to rival the exclusive and lavish events organised by the dominant economic class. From its initial manifestation this culture has been about creating an alternate platform. Emerging from this radical history is the possibility to think about sound in a particularly idiosyncratic way, what Henriques refers to as a type of 'philosophy through sound'. Note the emphasis here on the term 'sound' rather than 'music'. Even though the music played through the soundsystem often has lyrics, it is the sound that is of primary value. Chude-Sokei explains this emphasis by pointing out that, for example, in soundsystem culture:

“... ‘word-sound’ has ‘power’, more power than the actual language, the actual lyric or the local intention.”⁷⁶

I have been very conscious of ensuring that the project cannot be dismissed as solely being about the unquantifiable ‘vibe’ surrounding a vernacular space or merely essentialising the soundsystem culture and its apparatus as some type of exotic spiritualism. The project is concerned with mythology and sound although not the imagined fiction dominated by the world music fan, but rather coming from my own engagement with the ways of knowing and

⁷⁵ Figure 17. Camille Norment, *Rhythm Wars - Crazy Army*, 2012, accessed 10 May, 2015

<http://www.norment.net/work/objects-installations-ind/rhythm-wars-crazy-army/>

⁷⁶ Chude-Sokei, "Dr. Satan's Echo Chamber": Reggae, Technology and the Diaspora Process." 47

cultural genealogy contained within sound as immersive sensorial pedagogy. Linda Tuhiwai Smith states:

Research 'through imperial eyes' describes an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings.⁷⁷

Other Planes of Here as a research project has aimed to engage outside of the dominant empirical realm. Julian Henriques identifies the soundsystem cultural practices as being radical and contextualises them within the philosophical via what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe termed a 'delicate empiricism' within a cultural phenomena,⁷⁸ an act of research via total sensorial immersion. In this way sound becomes a text for the researcher/the immersed. This way of perceiving sound is compatible with Henri Bergson's ideas around duration:

Pure duration is the form, which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point along side another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.⁷⁹

When understanding sound in this way, one can see how the commonly deployed binaries such as the public/private, and rational/irrational⁸⁰ ricochet between one another until they disappear and are replaced by nuance and multiplicity.

⁷⁷ L.T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books, 1999). 58

⁷⁸ Henriques is particularly conscious of how Goethe's language "may appear a little quaint to contemporary ears, the quality of methodological relationship he describes is entirely in tune with the aspirations of the present research. For Goethe, this attentive listening is central to his particular scientific methodology which he describes as a *delicate empiricism*..." Henriques. 105

⁷⁹ Henri Bergson and Frank Lubecki Pogson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Essai Sur Les Données Immédiates De La Conscience. English (London : New York: George Allen ; Macmillan, 1912). 101

⁸⁰ Da Silva, "Introduction: The Global Matrix and the Predicament of "Postmodernisms": An Introduction to the Critique of Kulturkampf ". 1287

CHAPTER FOUR: ORBITING ⁸¹

This research has been an investigation into how sound can exist as a way of knowing and as a conduit for multiplicity and cultural complexity. This way of looking at sound is evident in my approach to socio-cultural and philosophical research. This approach is transferred into the physical and technological nuance of amplifying the audible via the soundsystem. These views of complexity and multiplicity are also present in the overall methodology of *Other Planes of Here*.

The intention behind the following cycle of events was to investigate how my understanding of sound as a space of perception could function within different contexts. Furthermore these events tested how the soundsystem could behave as an adaptable object within each location. I wanted to test how myth making worked within the events. Sun Ra states:

“The beauty of music is that it can reach across the border of reality into the myth. Impressions never known before can be conveyed immediately.”⁸²

In this final chapter I will describe the cycle of five events that occurred around the soundsystem. Previously my work has involved an orchestrated exchange, between me as collaborator organising events around music with a focus on a type of ‘cultural exchange’ as such. I will discuss how the strategic approach mentioned in the first chapter was employed and how it actually developed within each different context. What is interesting about each of the events is what they brought to the overall project despite there not being a crossover between them. There were rules set before the events were to be conceived. These rules were as follows:

1. I will talk about the speakers to as many people as possible and speak about their possibilities.
2. The soundsystem/speaker stack will be in use only when invited.
3. The events will be organised by an existing group.
4. Each group will advertise the events.

⁸¹ Artist and MADA faculty lecturer Spiros Panigirakis likened the travelling of the speakers from one place to the other to the orbiting of comets travelling through space visiting one atmosphere after the other and moving on. This to me is a neat metaphor for the way in which the speakers work and it spoke to Sun Ra’s racial mythologies around outer space.

⁸² Ra et al. 453

5. Those present at the event will be those who have found out about it through the above channels.
6. I will set up the speakers.
7. I will try to learn how to set these speakers up myself.
8. The events will be mutually exclusive from each other.

I am going to address each event individually in two ways: one in the way in which they were organised, for example the purpose of the event and who was involved. Secondly, I will describe what transpired in terms of what actually took place within each context.

The different events are not small artificial utopias. They are spaces where irresolute mythology is able to expand and contract through sound. The empty space that sound occupies within *Other Planes of Here* is a space of contextual iteration rather than a dialogical or static pedagogical space. It's a space of transferring ways of knowing through sensation, and voicing through amplification. In this research project the events are not a means to an end as research based artistic practices can be.

There is one main commonality at all the events. I arrive a couple of hours before it is to take place. With help I deliver the relatively heavy speakers, amplifiers and a case full of individually coiled cables. After the speakers are plugged into amplifiers, they are then plugged into a mixing desk to which instruments, iPods or turntables are connected, after which the speakers are tuned to the specific space. The event as far as this project is concerned begins as soon as the speakers start to make sound.

EVENT #1

Reggae/dancehall '*Block party*' Fundraiser for WISA⁸³ (Women's International Solidarity Australia)

North Fitzroy, apartment building car park

25 October 2014

This was an outdoor project (see fig. 18) organised by and featuring all women dancehall DJ's as a fundraiser for a project to benefit women in India and organised by the Women's International Solidarity Australia collective⁸⁴. *Other Planes of Here* was invited after the organiser, a DJ, found out through word of mouth that there was a new soundsystem built and operated by a woman. The speakers were set up and plugged into two-turntables early in the morning after being transported and 'sized up' by one of the scene's soundsystem proprietors. The music played was that traditionally heard within a Jamaican soundsystem. The DJ's on the day are part of a tight group of women DJ's within the male dominated reggae and dancehall scene in Melbourne. As the only female -built and owned soundsystem, the speaker stack within this context marked and celebrated the potential for self-reliance for dancehall events run by women involved in this culture in Melbourne.

Within this first event *Other Planes of Here* was understood within the context of what Louis Chude-Sokei defines as 'sound' as a *cultural apparatus* that requires deejays, selectors, engineers, producers, people who build up the sound and disseminate it through speakers.⁸⁵ Anecdotally there are more women DJs within this scene than in any other city globally. These are dedicated and focused women. This is a politically contradictory culture within which these women operate. This culture is based on respect attained through involvement within an organism which itself exists as an adaptation of the original Jamaican dance culture, now practiced more widely in the diaspora than within Jamaica itself. The lyrics of some of the Jamaican songs that are DJ'd at regular 'dances' often have widely questioned

⁸³ WISA's mission statement: makes supportive connections, across the globe, with women who are striving for the human rights and empowerment of women in their own communities. WISA's work involves providing assistance for the projects and initiatives of women, offering financial, organisational, political and personal support. It is well understood that the most effective catalyst for positive community change is via the empowerment of women. With education, skill development and access to paid work, women flourish and their communities prosper. WISA works from this perspective.

⁸⁴ Figure 18. Event #1, Reggae/dancehall '*Block party*' Fundraiser for WISA, North Fitzroy, 2014.

Courtesy of photographer Jason Heller.

⁸⁵ Chude-Sokei 49.

homophobic tones that reflect the local mainstream culture within Jamaican dancehall and reggae. While wanting to keep up with the latest releases within the genre, many DJs, both men and women, choose to play music that excludes this offensive lyrical content as was the case within this event. However, there is no unified criticality of offensive lyrics within the local male –dominated scene. This is problematic. The DJs at the event were from various cultural backgrounds and have found voice, unity, and collectivity through this soundsystem culture. They played while the core group of older women who were not involved within the reggae scene but who belong to the feminist Women’s International Solidarity Australia collective conducting sales of second hand goods.

The heavy bass of the music reverberated within the outdoor environment bouncing from the walls. Those in attendance at this inter-generational feminist event danced, sat in groups, and browsed some of the second hand wares offered over the duration of five hours on a Saturday afternoon.



Figure 18. Event #1, Reggae/dancehall '*Block party*' Fundraiser for WISA, North Fitzroy, 2014

EVENT #2

The Instrument Builders Project⁸⁶

National Gallery of Victoria Studio, The Ian Potter Centre, Federation Square Melbourne
1-23 November 2014

This project was organised around collaborations between Indonesian and Australian sound artists and instrument builders. This was the first time this project had been brought to Australia. I was apprehensive when first invited as I was still formulating the physical relationship of the speaker stack to the gallery context. Having developed a relationship with Indonesian artists through previous projects, I became interested when I was asked to amplify the work of performance and sound artist Wukir Suryadi, who is one of the two members of Senyawa. The fact that this studio space was to function as a closed workshop for the building of instruments as well as experimentation and collaboration through ‘jamming’ for most of the duration of the project worked well within the constantly negotiating boundaries of *Other Planes of Here* as it was to be used only within the last four public days when the *Instrument Builders Project* culminated in an event where Suryadi and other artists performed their instruments to an audience, and visitors were invited into the workshop to interact with the work (see figs. 19 and 20)⁸⁷.

For the Instrument Builder’s Project, Suryadi constructed two instruments. The two instruments were plugged into a mixer and took turns being amplified as they shared the speaker stack. One of the instruments was an automated hurdy gurdy constructed out of wood which could also be manually manipulated creating an ethereal drone using the mid and high range available through the speakers. Significantly for reasons that will soon become apparent this instrument was built into one of the tables belonging to the NGV. The second was a percussive instrument utilising the NGV itself. This was a response to working within the rigidity of the National Gallery of Victoria, with its bureaucracy and stringent safety

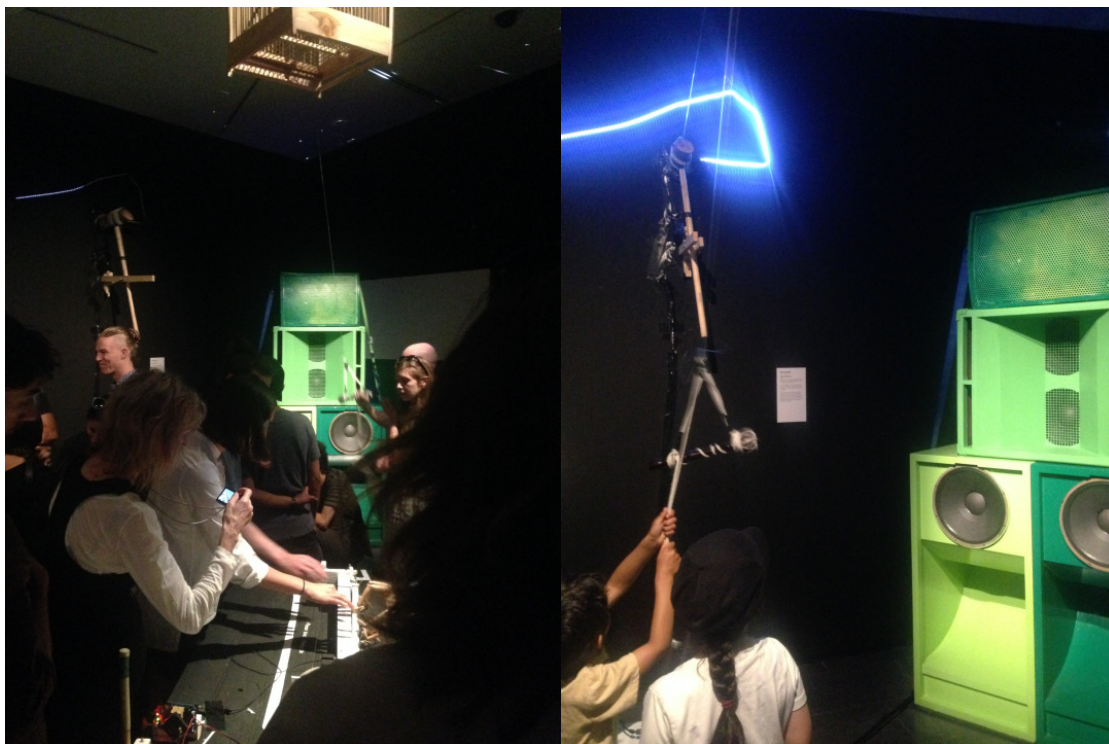
⁸⁶ This was the first Australian iteration of *The Instrument Builders Project (IBP)*, an experimental collaborative project between Australian and Indonesian artists and musicians curated by Kristi Monfries and Joel Stern. The first two iterations of the *IBP* were held in Yogyakarta in June 2013 and March 2014. The *IBP* sets up a shared workshop space, with elements of studio and gallery, in which artists conceptualise, build, perform and exhibit new works together over a period of 3 weeks, with scheduled public programs (concerts, exhibitions, workshops and talks) punctuating periods of experimental ‘free time’.

<http://theinstrumentbuildersproject.com/about/>

⁸⁷ Figures 19 and 20. Event #2, *Instrument Builders Workshop*, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014. Courtesy of photographer Jason Heller.

protocols in contrast to the freedom of the artist studio. The deep low frequencies reverberated through the space as a large hammer-like implement covered in soft cloth and operated by the pulling of a rope, hitting against a contact microphone attached to the wall.

In this instance the sounding was experienced through the experimentation process, through the performance of the work as well as part of a community day where visitors to the gallery were invited to play the instruments themselves. The speakers physically grounded the work within an indoor space and filled the room with the harmonic resonance of the hurdy gurdy and the hammer, which banged bass heavy onto the walls of the institution in a heavy, echoing protest to its limitations.



Figures 19 -20. Event #2, *Instrument Builders Workshop*, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014

EVENT #3

Other Planes of Here event to commemorate the legacy of Sun-Ra

Monash Art and Design Postgraduate Colloquium

16 December 2014

This third event was organised especially for the Monash University Higher Degree Colloquium. These are yearly opportunities through which to present work to peers and obtain valuable feedback. This event, because of its context, was to be of a different nature than the others within the cycle, beginning with the fact that I organised it as an individual artist rather than being invited by a group. In this way, *Other Planes of Here* represented itself rather than behaving like the not so silent partner. It took the shape of a type of presentation with the aim to honour the legacy of Sun-Ra whose philosophy has been quite influential to this project. Coincidentally this event occurred in the year of what would have been Sun-Ra's 100th birthday were he still alive.

The speakers were placed outside within a walkway area of the MADA faculty where I was able to set them up amongst papery bamboo trees. The sound broadcast this time was not music but a looped five minute sound recording of the mapping of the surface of a comet found by the NASA-launched Rosetta space probe in October 2014 which I put through a delay and echo filter. At the same time otherworldly and technologically mediated, the sound of the comet made reference to Ra's interest in space travel as a way to create a new mythology. Furthermore, this was an event to honour a new way for African Americans to perceive themselves outside of the binary of slavery and the assimilation that the civil rights movement advocated. The sound that the oscillations of a magnetic field created gradually filled the outdoor space, (see fig. 21) bouncing off the adjacent buildings, and 'activating' the dried leaves from the bamboo that surrounded the soundsystem.⁸⁸

The attendees, while being there voluntarily, were a crowd assembled around an institutional context. Roughly ten people, made up of faculty members and interested visitors, were made aware via wall text that they were taking part in an event. In this event *Other Planes of Here* worked within a conventional artistic language and in a self-reflexive context. Rather than

⁸⁸ Figure 21. Event #3, *Other Planes of Here* event to commemorate the legacy of Sun-Ra, Monash Art and Design Postgraduate Colloquium, 2014. Courtesy of photographer Jason Heller.

performing as a conduit for a community's sound, the sound system activated the space around it and created a poetic space in which the spectators could physically and intellectually immerse themselves in a *sounding* that meditated on the legacy of Sun Ra. Their viewing position located between the speaker stack and a tall building ensured that each frequency was felt by the body as the sound bounced back and forth from speaker to wall. The possibility that the speaker stack may be able to intonate the “/” which Denise Ferreira da Silva refers to brings to mind Elizabeth Grosz's writings on sensation, music and art when she states that sensation impacts the body not through representation, signs, images or fantasies but through energy, rhythm and resonance.⁸⁹

I would also add to Grosz's statement that sound is able to incorporate the philosophical experience. It does so by creating imaginary mythological spaces where it is able to invoke the thinking through sound, which Julian Henriques has described. Sound is able to construct spaces within the urban environment that are conducive to invoking cultural memory and future mythologies through a type of secular ceremony which inhabits collective and individual complexities, multiplicities and possibilities. While collective listening and its immersion into sound is a crucial aspect of this work, it exists not as the sole outcome to the work. The speaker stack in *Other Planes of Here* is there to create environments. Through these environments the dissonance and chaos, as well as the echo and reverberation of human movement and culture—in their many temporal conjugations—are summoned through sound. This particular event and the discussion around it as required within the context of the colloquium made this aspect of *Other Planes of Here* come to the fore.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). 73.



Figure 21. Event #3, *Other Planes of Here* event to commemorate the legacy of Sun-Ra, Monash Art and Design Postgraduate Colloquium, 2014.

EVENT #4

Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival - Community Day⁹⁰

Footscray Community Arts Centre, Melbourne

11 April 2015

The *Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival* is a yearly event, which presents the work of contemporary artists from Pacific diaspora communities in Australia. This year the theme of the festival was *Oceania Now* and looked at spiritual, physical, cultural and political dimensions of contemporary Pacific cultures. This event was organised after a casual conversation with artist and then board member of the *Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival*, Torika Bolatagici. We initially met because the year before I was struck by her reading room, a project consisting of a rather extensive collection of literature on art, difference, artists of colour and identity, cultural studies and the diaspora. I was hoping that Bolatagici would be able to help me find some relevant literature for this exegesis, which she did.

After explaining what *Other Planes of Here* was all about, Bolatagici suggested that the speakers would be great for her *Pacific Photobook Project* booth which would be located outdoors at the Footscray Community Arts Centre for the CPAF Community Day. This was the culmination of a series of photography workshops with young photographers from the Pacific diaspora in Sydney and Melbourne, which were conducted over several months the previous summer. The end product presented at the Community Day consisted of a series of photobooks produced within the workshops (see figure 23)⁹¹.

The soundsystem in this case amplified playlists of music as compiled by different participants within the workshops; each song was of significance to whomsoever had chosen it. Within the *Pacific Photobook Project*, the soundsystem amplified the sound to those who walked by and walked into the shipping container booth. It accompanied images and careful looking as well as casual discussion.

⁹⁰ The Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival's multi artform program consists of exhibitions, workshops, and performances alongside the CPAF Symposium, Community Day and publication.

⁹¹ Figure 22. Event #4, Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival - Community Day, Footscray, 2015. Courtesy of photographer Torika Bolatagici.

The Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival is a festival organised for a strong engagement and understanding of what culture means to the Pacific diaspora in Australia. It is there for the community itself to discuss, understand and develop its own cultural conditions.

Being hosted within this cultural context meant that I was able to learn from Pacific cultures in terms of their understandings of participation, decolonial cultural production and intersectionality. In the symposium, a presentation by performance artist Grace Vanilau included a description of the Sāmoan concept of the *vā*. The *vā*, states Sāmoan writer Albert Wendt:

...is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things.⁹²

The *vā* is the liminal space where genealogy, material and spiritual relationships, and multiple senses of time and place are located within Sāmoan culture. Further to this and relevant to agonism within this exegesis, the *vā* is as Leanne Clayton would describe, a space of “woven connections” of constant negotiation, it is where relationships define and redefine the space between two cultures.⁹³ Learning that the *vā*, which in Sāmoan culture resides within motifs in tattoo demonstrated to me that my own understanding of how sound works within *Other Planes of Here* is a concept that is fundamental in many cultures.



Figure 22. Event #4, Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival - Community Day, Footscray, 2015.

⁹² Albert Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," *New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre* (2002). <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp> (accessed 12/7/2014).

⁹³ Leanne Clayton, "Patterns and Motifs in the Va: A Samoan Concept of a Space between" (Auckland University of Technology, 2007). 2

EVENT #5

Listening Party #5 for Listen⁹⁴

The Bank, Melbourne

18 April 2015

The *Listen* collective have been crucial to the execution of *Other Planes of Here* as it is through the encouragement of founding member, musician Evelyn Morris, that I was able to procure the important bass speakers for the soundsystem. *Listen* formed in response to a need for discussions around women and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex people in the Australian music scene. Its main discussion platform is on Facebook where various discussions take place on general and specific issues around feminism and music, particularly experimental, independent, rock and electronic. The *Listen* website commissions more formal essays and personal stories by women and LGBTQI musicians.

A very important part of the *Listen* platform is its 'listening parties'. These are events organised around different genres and with a specific focus on performances by women and LGBTQI musicians. The discussions within *Listen* have been much needed within the music culture for some time including discussions around rape and harassment.

A listening party was organised around the soundsystem. After all the speakers were assembled, a photograph was linked to the Facebook page and enthusiastic discussion towards organising an event began from there.

Listening #5 was held at a now disused bank building at the beginning of the outer suburbs of Melbourne. The historic old building with its old carpet and its cubicles has now become art studios and a performance space. This was the first time that the speakers were to be used for live music and for that matter the first time they were set up inside. I negotiated at length with the professional mixer who was apprehensive about the power and loudness of the speakers. The focus of the night was live electronic and experimental music. This was an exciting line up which included a noise act featuring a woman screaming loudly and primally into the microphone. The resulting sound coming through the speakers was enveloping, full and

⁹⁴ *Listen* exists to spark and cultivate a conversation around women's experiences in Australian music.

electrifying. Following this act played pop electronic dance artist KT Spit as well as electronic dance act Biscotti whose lyrics were autobiographical and concerned with gender and cultural identity. After this, played industrial live dance act and independent Girls Who Smoke Poke record label owner Simona Kapitolina. This event was a loud, sexy enunciation of pride in queer and gender difference. This was an affirming event asserting the incredible talent within the community. DIY at its best including the fact that the front door could not be opened for fear of further aggravating neighbours who have persistently complained about noise levels. Because of this, to smoke cigarettes outside, those in attendance had to climb over a stack of crates in order to jump out of a high window (see fig. 23)⁹⁵. There was a door charge and the funds raised went to support *Listen* events such as an upcoming conference (see fig. 24)⁹⁶.



Figure 23. Event #5, Listening Party for *Listen*, Melbourne 2015.

⁹⁵ Figure 23. Event #5, Listening Party for *Listen*, Melbourne 2015. Courtesy of Photographer Jason Heller.

⁹⁶ Figure 24. Ashley Goodall Event #5, Listening Party for *Listen*, poster, 2015, accessed 13 June, 2015 <https://www.facebook.com/australianmusiclisten/photos/gm.827512160674683/1563835420534977/?type=1&theater>



Figure 24. Ashley Goodall Event #5, Listening Party for *Listen*, poster, 2015.

EVENT #6

Other Planes of Here gallery exhibition

Forthcoming at Monash Art and Design

September 2015

This is an exhibition within the gallery space in which I will present a series of large painted banners, the speakers within a sculptural structure as a well as a sound piece. This event speaks within the context of the gallery as a place of reflexivity through sound and focusing on sensation through sound, this will be an event all onto itself. The sculptural piece encasing the speakers is made of large alternating 'leaves' tessellating the surface. Sometimes they are

reflective mirror-like material, sometimes black, and sometimes transparent in order to disrupt, obscure and facilitate the viewer's perception of the object. This event is yet to happen so at this moment it will remain propositional.

DISSEMINATION, AMPLIFICATION AND CONTEXT

When considering aspects such as technology as well as heteronomy within *Other Planes of Here*, Mobil TV, 1995 by Pierre Huyghe has been an interesting work to look at. This was a work where the artist filmed television segments with some members of the local community in and around Lyon as well as making his own videos based on works by artists such as John Cage. These programs could be viewed via a pirated channel on local television. These television programs were broadcast from a transmitter located within the Aperto 95 exhibition at Le Nouveau Musée in Lyon. Its focus on visual dissemination and broadcasting are not dissimilar to my interest in amplification as a way to disseminate information.

In this research project, the events are not a means to an end as research-based artistic practices can be. Each of the events is both research and a distinct crucial component of the overall work. To simplify the work via reduction seemed counterintuitive to my need for *Other Planes of Here* to embody the dynamic space of agonism. The importance of this approach became evident in the function of the speakers within each context.

CONCLUSION

The event of time's colonisation (capitalism). This reactive event is the event of our time. It can be combated by the true event of our dreams and of our imaginations (the constitution of other worlds, other temporalities). The event of time, in which the eternal within time is deployed against it. These events constitute the new battleground.⁹⁷

Other Planes of Here understands the socio-political functions and implications embedded within sound's sensorial capabilities. To this end, this exegesis has looked at writers of philosophy and theory as well as artists who have worked from a point of view of difference. I dedicated some space within the footnotes to tell personal stories, which while not necessary to the reading of the work, are there because they are of importance to the research and needed to be on par with other references within this academic context. Difference and acknowledgement of tensions inherent in relationships with the artistic institutional space became an important aspect to the project. The productive unease resulting from these tensions became the space that I decided to work within.

By working outside of the gallery and working in as many different contexts as possible, *Other Planes of Here* becomes a type of moving target working against a need for a simple artistic uttering. By not photographing the events for gallery exhibition *Other Planes of Here* simultaneously highlights the limitations of the institutional space as well as the possibilities available within the gallery and the institutional context for work that engages with the social. This exclusion of evidence is not intended as an antagonistic gesture; rather it comes from identifying a need for *Other Planes of Here* to embody a productive unease.

Other Planes of Here adopted heterogeneity as an approach not only by working outside of the gallery space but also by recognising that there were other ways through which to understand sound outside of dominant European ethnocentricity. Granting value to the way in which I understand sound and researching ways through which to articulate this has allowed the project to gain the freedom to develop fluidly.

In order to manifest complexity, I researched ways in which I could problematise simplistic notions of culture within the social. *Other Planes of Here*, the speakers in their act of

⁹⁷ Simon O'Sullivan, "What Is an Event?," (2004). <http://www.simonosullivan.net/art-writings/what-is-an-event.pdf> (accessed 12 April, 2012).

amplification, acknowledged and voiced difference within its own. When viewing *Other Planes of Here* on a macro level one can see that through fragmentation the cycle of events speaks directly to agonism, where the events are a network of multiplicities.

I have demonstrated that there are ways to work within the social that work outside of binary-based positions, and further to this, that there are ways to consider ethics within the social in an artistic context outside of these binaries. By activating the 'inbetween' spaces the multiplicity of languages outside of the universal can be voiced without compromising the aesthetic realm.

Sound within *Other Planes of Here* has functioned within multiplicity, because nuance transpires within the localised space in which it naturally thrives. This nuance was amplified to its full frequency via the soundsystem. To move away from the image when it comes to representations of difference allows for complexity to be articulated in its more unfamiliar voicings. Through sound's engagement with duration one can experience this in real time, which was clearly evident in the performed sound events. As a consequence, the superficial lifting of stereotyped visual tropes becomes redundant.

Multiplicity is present in all the different groups concerns and also in the way sound is perceived. I wanted to see whether the way in which I understood sound could be overlaid into contexts other than my own. By 'orbiting' to different spaces and cultural contexts the soundsystem became the adaptable structure that I expected it would become. It translated sounds not originally intended for it. These sounds were fed into and then back out to those who were there to be immersed. This translation was experienced via the idiosyncratic tonalities of the soundsystem as a device, including the reverberating bass, physically resonant through the human body.

The multi-temporal spaces contained within this project work outside of the accepted Western linear conventions held within the binary of avant-garde rupture and/or ethnography. They do so because the amplified sound voiced difference, as it understands itself within a discursive cultural space of perception. *Other Planes of Here* has become an intentionally slippery project that understands sound as a way of knowing and an effective way to escape

clichéd notions of what culture may constitute. It is an ongoing project for which there is much more scope for the generation of work both inside and outside the gallery.

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