

Nina Dragičević

THE SHALLOW THROAT AND THE GRAND COMPOSITION

(Published in Slovene in the author's book *Famous Unknowns: Women sound artists in construction of society* (original title: *Slavne neznane: Zvočne umetnice v konstrukciji družbe*, 2016); Translated by Marko Karlovčec, 2018)

I am thirty-two years old. To this day I have survived for two reasons: because I turned myself off and because afterwards I did not.

In the world of chaos nothing is clear. We live in a world of chaos, nothing is clear and it does not seem to be getting clearer anytime soon. And how could it get clear when it is maintained in its very form by the existing discourses. The speech is unclear, inaccurate, trimmed and exhibits a tendency towards simplifying both meaning and interpretation, followed by a classification of the already simplified, which is fragmented at the same time also. We often do not perceive the destructiveness of everyday-life discourses. Or actually we do – we are aware of it, but only in the form of a frustration, inevitable and unstoppable, for we are attempting to solve it inside the said (our own, old, ideologically laden) discourse. How can I explain it again to her who *did not understand me*?

The error gets bigger with the mediation of the message and an increase in the abstractness of the interpreted. This makes sense, as it is allowed to be so by the tendency towards simplification. The error grows together with the increasing crumbling of a notion or event into sub-notions or sub-events. For if a notion is wrongly defined or determined, interpreted and then explained in the same discourse, the same speech, then the error is also incorporated in the sub-notions. Even more – new attributes are added, differentiating the sub-notions and sub-events from other sub-notions and sub-events inside a specific notion and event - let alone if the message is not verbal but “only” aural / auditory.

At the time when I do not yet have thirty-two years, but a lot less than that, at a time when I am not even going to school yet, my brother does and he also goes to music school and plays the accordion and performs music school concerts. One day, at five years old, I go there and there is someone who plays the violin. From then on I play violin or do something else. It is often too loud.

So I develop something completely opposite – a distancing from sounds, an alternative reality, a disconnect. A typical childhood (or adulthood) is sonically (or otherwise) violent. Familial (or otherwise personal) modes of expression are based on asserting and sustaining authority, manifesting itself in loudness, frustrations manifesting through the intensity of sound and what is unresolved (unresolvable?) manifesting itself through variations on this theme. The killing of an individual¹ is accomplished long before a published obituary. *Repetita iuvant*.

Disconnecting from sounds is a self-preservation strategy, meaning - creating a space that is not *this* space. The auditory disconnect has one unfortunate consequence: inside communication there is a shortage of reaction, which is the consequence of the disconnect, which is the consequence of the unbearableness of the situation, most often conducive to punishment by the very act leading to said reaction shortage, namely disconnection.

The auditory disconnect has another consequence: the demand to renounce the whole spectrum of reality, of space in a broad sense, to renounce one's time in this space where the body *must* be – if it wants to be for a relatively long time. Each disconnection brings about holes of perception (though filled with other perceptions) that are themselves individual compositions and therefore temporal. They form themselves into a larger opus – into perceptual abysses. Not being sounds documented on reproductive mediums, they cannot be repeated.

The auditory disconnect has one more consequence: disconnecting from the frontal sounds enables the perception of sounds that are more difficult to sense – the constant, the taken-for-granted, the ones I do not question, but that are nonetheless always here. Attempts at equilibrium between the two extremes – the illusion of presence and the illusion of absence – widen the horizon of perception; without resorting to escapism they allow for creating a (different) space and for the coexistence of radically differing realities. This is also an utopia about a lover's discourse trying to evade becoming-*Medea*.

I (also or especially as a composer) am not interested in sound. Not interested in *what* I hear², when this *what* stands for a sound with a material source. What I am interested in is the context inside which it comes into being, the context inside which I decide whether to listen or not - and

1 In the original, a female form of the noun “individual”, “posameznica” in Slovene (the male form is “posameznik”), is used throughout the text.

2 a “Hearing” should denote the mechanical process or the experience of perceiving change in sound pressure.

inside which I interpret it. And my desire will determine whether I will get used to both the sound and the context. How does context come into being? “In my sound installations, the presence and movement and/or the absence and stillness of the audience in areas of the room determine the combinations of tones of the sound-space. The audience finds - at the same time - that those sounds function to reveal changing three-dimensional forms which vary in depth and time.”³

The conceptual starting point of American artist Elizabeth Phillips is a space, completely structured by human (inter)actions. In this space, people act as individual systems contained inside a greater system. That they operate inside said system is crucial. They are not merely part of the system, they are active co-creators of space. The way a particular installation is conceived makes for a direct modification of the synthesizer-generated electronic sounds by the activity of the people inside the space. And not only their activity, but also variations in the people covering the surface of the space and all they do are components of said space. Their doings are not something to be documented later, in a text about the event, but rather a real-time happening communicating sounds set in motion by the people inhabiting the space to people inhabiting the space.

In the case of *Sunspots I & II* (1982), Liz Phillips' installation is attuned to the place it is situated in. A visitor moving across the space, getting closer and farther from a copper electrical coil and a brass wall, is what determines the combination of sounds. In another work, *Garden* (1996), there are three objects present in the exhibition space: a cactus, a piece of copper and an anchor. From the author's perspective, the anchor is identified as an old, man-made tool. The cactus was allegedly a gift from Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) to John Cage (1912-1992).⁴ The cactus is alive, it continues, each new leaf is embedded with the pattern of the previous one; in such a way, the author patterns and keeps memory of events in the form of sonic images. A still garden of objects, chosen for their esthetic and kinesthetic characteristics, is being activated by the entrance of a visitor. Thus, sonic fantasies are created - only not by themselves, but by the visitors.

The works of Liz Phillips speak to an attention and an awareness of the presence of each individual in the context of a wider social structure. They smash the *little* man complex and show the individual in an active, potent form, rather than in the role of a victim of the system. Sounds *create* space. Individuals *create* sound. Space does not *exist*, it *happens*.

3 Elizabeth (Liz) Phillips, *Sound Articulates Space*, Synapse, 1977, vol. 1, n. 5.

4 From the programme of the composition.

Perceptual anxiety stands for too much happening at the same time. The world is saturated. While at the same time constant looking at the already seen leads to melancholy and attempts to get out of it through utopias – and none of these things is movement. In the diary to the *Blindfold Window* performance, during which its author Linda Montano (1942-) wears a blindfold, is written: “*I didn't see the night but knew it was there [...]*”.⁵ On the 22nd of March, 1975, Linda Montano is in Los Angeles. She is there to make the performance *Three day blindfold*. On that same day Pauline Oliveros is also in Los Angeles and she goes to check out what Linda Montano is doing – seeing as she is not looking. She finds her sitting in the gallery, arguing with somebody. She, Linda, does not even notice that someone else is in the room, as she is very heatedly arguing with someone. That someone leaves and Pauline Oliveros does not leave. After some time she is heard by Linda Montano, who starts talking to her. As far as words are concerned, it is a one-way conversation because Pauline Oliveros keeps silent. *If you cannot look*, she thinks to herself, *I, then, shall be unable to speak*. Later Pauline Oliveros has a lecture in the same gallery – and she is still silent. Linda Montano cannot take it anymore and takes off the blindfold. Afterwards, they are together for many years.⁶

What Linda Montano cannot take, is listening without inclusion, without sight. In sight there is certainty. It is better to see the spider than not to see the spider. A diminishing of visibility also causes a splitting of sensation and meaning, while also situating doubt into perception itself. But the fact is we do not see everything. And a *persona* can, etymologically speaking, actually be *per-sona*. The borderline of sight is not darkness, but rather invisibility. There is still sound there; it is inside the space, whether you want it or not, it is here, spatial and persistent. “In every city, especially in the big ones, an incredible number of electromagnetic waves is hidden; they’re everywhere, we can’t hear them but they’re here!”⁷

The sounds we do not notice can be long or not, but they are mostly not unexpected. They are *expected*. Almost inaudible – or maybe we just got used to them. They are constant. That is how long-lasting sounds often are. Not fast, not slow, they are long. So long that they situate themselves inside the space, spill over it and do not evaporate in any way. They are wet.

5 Linda Montano, *Blindfold Window Piece* on her blog.

6 Mockus, 2008.

7 Christina Kubisch interview for Digimag, 2009, p. 29

“Moisture has a sample of more.”⁸ Their persistence is not intruding, does not have to be intruding, for it is sensual. It is an audible gratification of the senses, which it does not agitate, but rather takes them over without questioning, settles itself inside them and us – hollow frameworks, consciously left to unexpectedness, momentariness of pleasure we cannot manage. At least not as long as sonority can. The only thing that can fill us – hollow frameworks – up in the same way as the sensuality of a long sound can, is despair. But these long sounds we overlook, while the despair we do not.

Do we overlook them, that is, *overhear* them⁹, because we do not know where could they even be? The *proximal theory* would, for example, situate the sound inside the object of the receiver. While not denying the existence of the sound itself, it will nonetheless equate the content of the sound with its qualitative perception (or the inability to do so). The perceiver adding attributes to said sound (squeaky, high, soft, distant...) and thus changing it from an event in front of her into a subjective perception of the sensed. On the other hand, sound taken as *waving* can be located somewhere between its source object and recipient in the form of sound waves – a series of mechanical vibrations translating through an elastic medium (air, water). And then, *distal theory* will locate sound where the object of perception perceives it: in herself.¹⁰ This hitherto written overview of different possibilities regarding the localization of sound is much reduced and should only serve to help the reader comprehend the multiplicity of perspectives.

What about this option: Sound is located halfway between its source object and other objects, without being present in the object inside which it sets in motion a reaction - or on its surface. The receiving object perceives the sound and because of that, sound is not sound anymore, but rather an interpretation of the sound, which is everything but the actual sound arriving at it. It should also be taken into consideration whether the source object and receiving object actually occupy the positions we have assigned them here. The reality of situating positions shows itself to be an illusion. When these positions are in place, sound is, in fact, everywhere within the sphere of possible perception, safe for the recipient herself. For at the moment of sensation there begins in her a perception - a perception where sound undergoes a metamorphosis into something it was

8 Stein, 1993, p. 87

9 Translator’s note: The word *overhear* of course means the exact opposite of *overlook*, it actually means to hear something and not *not-hear* it.

10 An interesting collection of essays dealing with sounds from an ontological perspective, finding out what constitutes them, where are they located (inside things, waves, events?) and questioning what it is that we hear, when we hear, is *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays*, editors Matthew Nudds and Casey O’Callaghan, 2009.

not necessarily at its inception, at the source object. The theories about sound open a lot of questions¹¹. There is no (final) answer.

Sounds and sounding are not the subjects of theory, they are an *experience* creating space out of the being-present-in-space – where the experience is (temporarily) bearable, for the sounds are bearable. Avoiding any sound I am able to hear amounts to a parallax of reality, the mistaken notion of me partaking in society. It is also an irreversible rejection of reality.

What is happening while everything else that is frontal and the object of my perception – because my entrenchment in ideology gives it such relevance – is happening?

“I simply put a microphone in my window and recorded the sound environment until the tape ran off the reel. When I replayed the tape, I realized that although I had been listening carefully while I recorded, I had not heard all the sounds that were on the tape. I discovered for the first time how selectively I listened, and that the microphone discriminated much differently than I did. From that moment, I determined that I must expand my awareness of the entire sound field. I gave myself the seemingly impossible task of listening to everything all the time. Through this exercise I began to hear the sound environment as a grand composition.”¹²

Only she who encounters the grand composition will enter into art. She bounces back from social reality trying to extinguish and commodify art, thus weaving it into the realm of surveillance, while transforming the artist into an obedient artisan that will embody this linguistically hollowed-out, relationally limiting ideology in her work. She bounces back and with the intent to articulate spiritual and sensitive subjectivity in the only place she can: in art. But her art is sonic. Her composition “strips bodies of their inertia, of the materiality of their presence: it disembodies bodies.”¹³

Her composition, a composition bringing forth the inaudible into the audible and creating a space

11 For example, if the sound is inside the recipient, in which way does it enter her? Secondly and under the same assumption, what is its location, between source and perception, inside the space? Thirdly, how is sound supposed to be the thing we perceive, without hitting the wall of subjectivity? To put it in another way: can sound be the same thing, before and after entering the receiver? And last but not least: if sound is located between its source and its receiver, where, if not inside the source, is it while it is being made?

12 Pauline Oliveros in Mockus, 2008, p. 38.

13 Deleuze, 2003, p. 54.

that is other space, is a consecration of sensibility. Her art is a humanistic revolution, time and time and time again, it is an *anti-anti-sensible* political creed. Her presence drives society crazy. Society does not want an artist (a sound artist), because she represents the ultimate alliance of the ungovernable: to society she is the other that has known the other, known what is other to life. This presence of a dreadful knowledge they must not erase. They must not murder her (the artist and the music). For if she (the artist and the music) can survive without them (the society and the word), the same cannot be said in reverse. There is no word without music. "Life screams *at* death,"¹⁴ the word screams at music with her and through her, there is no word without music. The word is subordinate to the music. They try hard to have more words, so many as to overpower and destroy her by screaming at her with her. They would like to ward off death and, in the same manner, would like to ward off art. But the musician (sound artist) is headed directly into the art of sounding, because this is her bouncing off of the devastating phantasm purportedly wishing to be life. She does not escape, she transcends. Events she exchanges for durations. Standstill she exchanges for waving. Movement she exchanges for waving. The anti-sensibility of bare survival she exchanges for the impetuous, passionate, unrelenting convulsive duration that is art. Now she is declaring it, taking it with her, looking downwards, but her look is not one into emptiness, it is neither desperation nor moving the gaze away from the moment – it is a partaking in duration. Her gaze, which is listening, is not passive, apathetic, resigned, depressed – it is a mobilizing one. Listening to both the grand composition and the composition being formed through listening allows her to bounce back from socially constituted reality; it allows her an entrance into a space where she can, only just then, subjectify herself. This she cannot manage without a relational other, an *other* that would contemplate just such art, not create it. That is why the musician and her composition always invite our coming to them, they provoke a becoming something other than materialized reality, they provoke a separating from the acidic soil. Listening and art remain quite lonely places of contemplation.

"Music is something else altogether, you can either feel it or not. You need others for music also, but a lot of times you are alone with it. Feeling is what is important, everything else is unimportant, unnecessary."¹⁵ Feeling is not technical, technocratic and servile, it is spiritual. It is not strewn together by cables and software but with contemplation, resulting in sensible articulation. It is a rebound of an illusion regarding facts and events into a wealth of interpretative

14 Ibid., p. 62.

15 Margita Stefanović in Velikonja, 2010, p. 177

possibilities and into duration. All of this is also art. But this they either forgot or they will not know.

What is needed is an elimination of *opinions, desires and speculations*,¹⁶ a liberation from concept systems and ideologies by which we generate space. It is exactly because of this, the fact of creating sound being equal to creating space, that society has in its beginnings removed women's voices from the public audible space. Music remained, noise was pushed to the margins. As a result of sociopolitical turbulence in the sixties and seventies (of the 20th century), a new social and cultural discourse, termed *new sensibility* by Susan Sontag, is established. This will also soon precipitate into the cultural industry that oppresses rather than transcends or sublimates.¹⁷ But first, feminist and political artistic practices bring into being a new space. Feminist and lesbian protests, the founding of feminist publishing houses and record labels, the so-called *female* music festivals, awareness-raising groups and other activities all form a different space.

“Women speak in whispers / so that no one would hear them / sometimes it is hard to believe they talk at all / with their mouths as near as possible, because / they like to see the auricle get wet by confession. / Women speak in whispers / they take pleasure / in the all-round spreading / of a white mosquito net of intimacy weaved every day anew: / from the bed above the shelves to the kitchen from the bathroom to the window. / They do not want for someone to tear it apart. / [...]”¹⁸

The sound characteristics of the world are changing. The grand composition – the wholesome sound structure of society – is not just polyphonic anymore, it is also polyintonational. Let me simplify: if the voices from the throats of biological women are higher than the male ones, the new space is then higher in regards to intonation. Generally speaking, it moves from the baritone upwards¹⁹. New voices and the interactions between them create a space that resonates differently.

“Women speak in whispers, then they laugh out loud – “²⁰

16 Oliveros, 1984, p. 138-157

17 Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, p. 111

18 Izabela Morska (1961-), *Govori mi šepetaje*; in Mozetič. 2015, p. 58

19 This simplification is only meant for illustrative purposes. The voice is far from being reduced to its pitch.

20 Last verse from the poem *Govori mi šepetaje*.

In the sixties, Pauline Oliveros, in accordance with the new sensibility, occupies herself with Buddhism and long tones. She finds out she can better listen to those, if she incorporates them into her consciousness. She starts to develop *sonic meditations*. Meditation is uninterrupted attention and uninterrupted awareness, cyclical or constant in time.²¹ The meditations are sonic because sound is at the core of space, society, the world; because sounds are the *focus of attention and the stimulus of awareness*. It is necessary to synchronize both, for them to be in equilibrium. As they hardly change or do not change at all, as changes are minimal, barely or even not at all perceptible, long tones become themselves objects of interest. And they become such when I know the constant sounds, sirens, engine hum, waterfalls, ventilation, *background music*, pedestrian signals are space, impossible to be escaped from. Constant sound, forced and discursively normalized sound, the taken-for-granted-ness of my space, an urge I am able not to hear and not take into consideration, entertainment that became boredom, for its expectation amounts to a minimal effort, violence that never was anything else than *affect*, because it is normalized and expects zero reflection, because it is invisible and fleeting – all of that is the space, impossible to be escaped from. There is nothing grand in this forced composition. An imitation of monumentality, mysticism, unquestioned repression, unquestionable discourse and an associative trace that is just like that. I can continue to overlook it, that is – *not-hear* it, I can parallax reality, metamorph the unexperienced from inside fantasy. What has not been experienced dwells inside fantasy. Fantasy vanishes by wholesome and attentive listening, while sound dies. Its originator soon discards it, casts it into oblivion to free herself from it and be able to at least get some rest – and sound dies. As language of the past it is a clairvoyant, the ones inside the created space are its coffin, no, not its coffin, they are its mummifiers, credulous formations of loneliness welcoming it with open arms. Inside my imagination, where I commune with myself and mold my desire through articulate thought, *paint it*. Fantasy is desire, articulated to its minute particulars. I can hear myself and that part of social reality not (yet) available, known or *close* enough to me, in it. If not otherwise, informational technology brings *that* closer to me. Robotics and all these sharp sounds, early industrial machinery, phonograms and the awareness of “near” being one click away. But you cannot thrive on SMS and smileys.

When talking about auditory sensations, describing and evaluating them, a multitude of words, interpreting the observed in a superficial, abstract and dichotomous manner, are used. Music is

beautiful or not-beautiful, quiet or loud, disturbing or pleasant, good or bad or sometimes okay. A multitude of opposing qualities bearing no meaning; a binary index of notions. How much is society cultivated into sound as a communications set, a constitute of space, a medium - for speech about it to proceed on such a valueless level?

They talk about disruptive noise. In November, 2015, *Death and the Maiden*, a play by Elfriede Jelinek (1946-) is running in a polish theatre. Before the event begins, a crowd of right-wing protesters gathers at the entrance and demands a cancellation of the performance on the ground of it allegedly being filled with pornography intent on destroying what little morals there are still left in polish society. She is disruptive. Elfriede Jelinek is a disturbance in the system; a disturbance for that same group which also accomplished the burning of a puppet, representing a Jew, on the square.

Talk about *noise* as an antipode to *music* is an expression of class, political, cultural, economic and also gender and sexual positioning. The hearing of sounds understood as noise and creating with them are both reflections of that same position.

On May 31st, 2001, Liz Phillips and visual artist Anne Bonney set up the intermedia installation *Shaded Bandwidth* under the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. In this work, the beams of the bridge become the architectural component of the work, the beam takes on the human role:

“I now live in Queens. / So I drive over bridges every day / And traveling with my 13 year old daughter means the radio is always in and tuned to a station I would rather not hear. / When we’re crossing a bridge with heavy metal work the radio station drops out and in / The interruptions contain different bits of colored noise. / And that’s what I tune into. / Metal structure of the bridges acts as a filter and the radio waves are too big to get through that filter as transmissions / The bridge is ghosting – acting as shadow / Here on the bridge all bands are not received / For a moment I feel protected, saved from the commercial broadcast / Relieved / Through the window I can hear the doppler shift of the cars passing and the sound of my own car on the pylons. / So the signals go in and out / The waves actually reveal a lot about the structure of the bridges / I am moving slowly / seeing and hearing structure as waves of radio sound.”²²

22 This text was recited by Liz Phillips in the accompanying video to the installation *Shaded Bandwidth* (Bonney and Phillis, 2012).

The above citation encapsulates everything that determines Liz Phillips. The author lives in Queens, at the time still one of New York's cheapest quarters, populated by an ethnically heterogeneous demographic of generally low income. She is a woman and has at least one child. (From reading her biography and interviews, I also find out she is married.) She drives across the bridge every day, drives her daughter somewhere, to school, maybe, she also has her own *errands* and *projects*, every day she goes here and there and every day that radio is on, the speakers roar *hits* and *charts* of something *top*. This is her frontal reality. She cannot escape it. This is her space. It is also the space she does not want. If I say as they say: this is her *noise*.

The beams of the bridge disturb the radio sounds inside the space that is the car. They interrupt wireless communication, a public communication stemming from a dislocated position, while the receiver is everyone present in said space. Beams disturb communication, demolish the syntax of the radio, destroy order. These self-evident structures connecting quarters and structures greater than themselves, also demarcate them at the same time. They do it wirelessly, without touch. The grid structure of the fence and long steel rods are an interworld, an alternative reality uncompromisingly cutting into the flow of the everyday. It literally interrupts the majority discourse – the one rejected by the author.

She tunes into this parallel, alternative reality. She listens to the difference. Inside difference the structure is different; soundwaves reveal her the structure of a different reality; the structure of beams. Suddenly, she hears the *doppler effect*; the sounds of cars approaching and leaving, signals coming and going. They travel and she travels *slowly*, not as fast as time flows in *that* reality. Concentrated listening allows her to hear obvious, self-evident sounds of traffic in their wholesomeness. She listens sharply and carefully, she is aware of them. They flow. She widens the perceptive horizon, which in turn brings her closer to the body without *organs*.²³ She rejects concepts and conventions immanent to both her as a woman in the 21st century, as well as society as a whole; she enters into *deep listening*, according to Pauline Oliveros, she lets herself go to the fluency of naked (radio) waves. She feels safe in the parallel space. She can finally relax and rest a little from the sounds of the *external* world constituting her space without her consent. She *has to* go elsewhere – and she does, without driving anywhere at all.

I do not want to drive away, do not want to leave. Noisy sonorities are the ones I am not used to. They are not yet normalized. *Repetita iuvant*. After the initial unbearableness it will be easier, the noise will merge with the speech I consent to. Just as the specifics of a new lover are unusual and an everytime disturbance – and then they are not anymore. A desire that is interest will take me through repetition. Friedrich Nietzsche says:

“This is what happens to us in music: first one has to learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life; then it requires some exertion and good will to tolerate it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kind-hearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are used to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing ... that is how we have learned to love all things that we now love.”²⁴

No one told us desire means *painful* repetition.

Verbal communication, the most frequently used way of communicating inside civilizations, has its roots in voices – and these are nothing but sounds created with the help of tonsils. Thus the foundation of verbalizing is sound, for which, it often seems in this society, there are not that many words – derivations from sound itself. A quite worrying paradox of an impossibility to describe oneself with oneself. A bit of semantics – now that I have the words *music*, *noise* and *silence* in front of me. The SSKJ (Slovene Written Language Dictionary) tells me *music is an art in which expressive device is sound*. Taking into consideration the above listed ruminations on the situatedness of sounds, this definition could be said to mean the following: it is not only sound that reaches the object of perception – at that very same time it is also reached by art. If music is art expressed through sound and if I remind myself of how often I say “I listen to music”, am I then listening to art? For sure I am not listening to *noise*, am I? According to the SSKJ, *noise* stands for *loud, intermingled, discordant voices, usually of different origin*. Commonsense imposes upon me the conviction of some undetermined sequence of sounds being different from some other indeterminate sequence of sounds. The common sense of definitions does not claim *music* is about indeterminate series of sound, rather the opposite, it situates them within the field of art, but does not provide an explanation as to how this series should be, what its characteristics are

24 This citation comes from an essay by Barbara Engh entitled *Loving it: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes*, published in *Musicology and Difference; Gender and sexuality in music scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, p. 75.

and how do I separate it from other series – from *noise*, for example. Of course it does not do that, for this would amount to the opening of a finite, but growing number of marked combinations of sounds, resulting into something the source calls *music* and something it does not. When it talks about *noise*, it talks about the *loud, intermingled, discordant*. Somewhere in the background, it seems to be talking about the magnitude, amplitude and frequency of certain sounds and combinations of sounds. But it does not tell what do *loud, intermingled* and *discordant* (with what?) mean.

Every definition endowing sound with attributes (so it becomes at least *music* or *noise*) but not with context, deprives sound of what it is: an elementary constitute of space. Music and noise are not only two imprecise, but also completely wrong notions. Does this also concern *silence*? Yes and no, there might be no answer – if there is also no question about silence. Silence in Slovene language stands for absence of sound or audible sound. This means either (somewhere) there is no sound or rather there is, the object of perception can perceive it, but not in such a way as to hear it. Or want to listen to it.

Noise (just like silence) is a relational and subjective notion. It is determined in negation, by what it is *not*; it is not communicative, it means nothing, is not pleasant, but most of all – it is not music. It exists only *in relation to what it is not*. Because it is none of the things it should be to safeguard social acceptance (as something constructive), it is pushed to the margins, is always a disturbance it is necessary to suffocate. Literally. There, at the margins, it is embraced by the ones called *avant-gardists*, already because it is contrary to everything that *is* what it should be. Repressive apparatuses also take it as their own, but even in this case it is *noise* only for those who recognize the oppressiveness of the apparatus. In short, it always exists in relation to what it is not and it is always context – of the source and the space it creates with its presence – that sets it apart from what it is *not*.

But it cannot be said that sound simply *is*. It is possible to say sound *becomes*; comes into being, happens. (That is why space also *happens*.) It is created by smaller structures, down to the smallest, i.e. the individual, inside a wider social structure. At the same time, we say the world is loud, it is loud in the cities and villages are connecting with the cities, so then they also become noisy and more or less everyone is driving out in to nature – where it is noisy all over again, for everyone is there. That noise is pushed to the margins is not exactly true, for we still say the world

is *noisy*; in the center, away from the margins, we find small systems (individuals) creating sounds that are noise. When these small and a little bigger systems try to suffocate noise, they *de facto* suffocate themselves.

To listen implies my perceiving with sound receptors – and we understand ears to be such a thing. And these are negligent and dictatorially selective. Or indifferently inattentive. The reader might know the case of percussionist and composer Evelyn Glennie. In her work *Hearing essay* the author, who is heavily deaf, explains how she perceives sounds. She performs barefoot because she perceives certain sounds with her feet. The non-deaf also perceives sounds with her feet. She does not hear the sound, which is neither *music* nor *noise*, she perceives it and interprets it immediately. I think to myself: I do not listen to music and do not listen to noise, I perceive and interpret sounds, create space. It is mandatory to decompose what is said, before it is said. For it shows that, one, a wide-eyed approach and a description using terms derived of fundamental notions are more precise than crumbling notions into sub-notions with the aim of providing a clearer picture of the said, two, they do not ascribe unreal meanings to the described notion and three, they rid the space of the superfluous (and false).

When talking about herself, composer Bojana Šaljić (1978-) says she *dives* into sound. At this point composer Maryanne Amacher asks: *what does thunder sound like underwater?* On the 9th of September, 2014, Bojana Šaljić performs the work *Hiperprostorska srečanja (2010)*, “hyperspace encounters”, at Kino Šiška in Ljubljana:

“Pondering about the universe encourages me to constantly reestablish my attitude towards life, which is so small and transient, but nonetheless grand, anew. In my thoughts, I travel across the edges of the Milky Way, where new dimensions and new spaces open, always a bit different, for with improvisation based on electronics it is possible to break boundaries or retreat into the safe embrace of the known, each time anew. The piece was inspired by *Bubble*, an art video by Robertina Šebjanič.”

The video work *Bubble* by Robertina Šebjanič shows membranes pulsating in the dark. It is not clear what this bubble is, nor is it important. In this work, the artist questions the emotional connectedness (of man) to nonhuman lifeforms. The observer asks herself: what is this being moved by, what does it pulsate on? How can it be so near, a touch away, yet at the same time

completely elsewhere? In her electroacoustic composition, Bojana Šaljić crosses both spaces. The life of a small structure, the individual, is at the same time part of a greater structure. But it is wholesome and grand even on its own. The sounds it creates the inhabited space with are grand, mighty. Despite their smallness, they are interacting with other small grand systems that are themselves in interaction generating space, generating the composition, which is, provided I listen to it whole (at the same time), of a great size. It pulsates, even when it does not talk much.

There is no need to say anything. Talking is a simplified format of presence. Being-in-space already communicates. To be close. To be close to a lover. Or to be far from. Will she still be a lover then? “In love and in boxing / everything is a question of distance. / If you come too close, I get upset / I get scared / I get confused, talk nonsense / I tremble. / But if you are away / I am sad / I stay up all night / and write poems.”²⁵ Closeness and distance create reality and question the will to survive whether it is still there. I shall observe, but observing is never passive and without consequences. Actions, interactions, reactions and inter-reactions will continue just like that cactus, they will trace in indelible patterns and modifications of patterns. The question will not be *what* but rather *what kind of*. In her work *Electronic Banquet (1969)*, Liz Phillips amplifies an everyday human activity – eating. The dining table is equipped with electronic elements (theremin, frequency change receptors...) reactive to change (in movement, speed, temperature...) and registering the presence of the individual behind the table inside the space. Simple autopilot movements are suddenly not so natural anymore. Not even as an obvious, audible consequence of dining. Suddenly, every movement is important and, more specifically, it is important in a situation necessary for (physical) survival (eating), in most cultures also understood as a socializing event and a pleasure. What the individual does, not even talking but sitting calmly, creates the space. Responsibility for the awareness about every gesture is headed straight to plate of the hungry. The raising and lowering of a glass no longer signifies a toast or rehydration. The structure-inside-a-greater-structure can be observed in whole, for the individual inside the collective is amplified in her entirety. Because she is also observed – she sits at the table with the others – she can be observed wholesomely. In a completely benign situation, a panopticon, or rather a *pansonicum*, is established – one that strips the individual of the lightweight and carelessness in the causing of sounds.²⁶ Can the subsequent (self-)control, the fear of exposure and correction forever delete

25 Orig.: “En el amor y en el boxeo / todo es cuestión de distancia. / Si te acercas demasiado me excito / me asusto / me obnubilo, digo tonterías / me echo a temblar. Pero si estás lejos / sufro entristezco / me desvelo / y escribo poemas.” In: Peri Rossi, 2005, p. 45

26 Classic feminist theory will perhaps have a different interpretation. It will emphasize the motif of nutrition and show it to be a stereotypically feminine activity (care for the other) incorporated into the space of art through

noise? I hope so, for otherwise the grand composition may easily lose its grandness.

On the 1st of October, Bojana Šaljić has a concert of her compositions in Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana. This work or performance, named *Iz časa v čas*, “from time into time”, should perhaps bear the title “from space into space”, for here is what Maia Juvanc has written in her review of the event in the magazine *Odzven*: “Bojana’s concert had an unusual “side effect” upon me: from my exiting Cankarjev Dom on, the obtained sharpened attention has transformed my comprehension of the environment. Everything I understood musically, it seemed. I heard like never before – every step of mine resounding and resonating in my ears, every little stone coming off the shoe revealing different shades of sound”²⁷

Shades of sound, this expression makes sense. *Music* would not mean anything. *Noise* would not mean anything, for it would just denote the unpleasantness of the environment I create, or at least co-create. Will this speech ever end? And before that: will this apology of one’s own destructivity ever end? Will it ever stop being carried on into art? Will it then be possible to consume art until the end of its fleeting duration and not run away being unaware that by the act of running away I am running straight into the source of what I think I am running from?

Applying a dichotomous organization and treatment of sound sculptures, the distinguishing between music and noise, is yet another superficial attempt of the superego to establish itself as an ethically credible instance, feeling better than the other for not being what *that* other is – or even thinking oneself to *be* better. Talking about noise signifies an attempt to establish some critical distance from the oppressor; from capitalism understood as a brutal system in the narrow sense. Rejecting the spectrum of sounds that are noise is at the same time an attempt to distance oneself from a system in which one voluntarily or under constraint (what kind of constraint?), participates – noise is *disturbing / it is non-music / not anything at all / I do not like it / it has nothing to do with me, an articulate subject / noise is a degenerate offshoot of the capitalist machinery / the tool of capitalistic structuring of the production process exploiting me / it imposes upon me / it is unpleasant / it is disturbing / it is non-life*.

female authors and acting as a corrective to male space. In the text *The Innocence of Food: Female Artists in the Digital Age* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), Angela Krewani further elaborates the thought of Liz Phillips – who develops an entire series of installations named *TV Dinners* (1979-1999) from the work *Electronic Banquet* – blurring the borders between the personal (dinner) and public (television and dinner as media spectacle). More than that, she furthers a return to gender and integrates it in a wider – media technologies and communication – context.

27 From the review *Iz oči v oči*, published in the online magazine *Odzven*.

When noise takes the form of an artistic genre, being placed there by the artists themselves, it often does so without reflection, without in-depth critical listening. Without contextualization, they construct faceless sound sculptures lasting, as a rule, longer than the ones which are music. They think it is simply necessary to stand it. Stand what? They think the glorification of sounds disturbing to most is in itself already a subversion. It is not. The same goes for loudness. I still wait for a so-called *noise* event where what they call noise will be broadcasted quietly. For the disruptiveness of sounds lies in their context. Disruptiveness is not loud, visible, it is not a punch. It is exactly the opposite - disruptiveness is a complex generating of threads and is situated inside nuances I do not see.

Producers of sound and authors of sound compositions labeling their work as *noise* do themselves and their work a disservice; they consciously lower its value, by placing it into the realm of conventions. If their intention is to step aside from conventions by rejecting the term *music*, they still deceive the sources of perception by trying to separate their work from other works through separating their series of sounds from others, all the while staying in the same discourse. This is a reducing of certain sounds and sound combinations (structures) to ones of value and the ones without – or to the ones that happen to exist and whose context of creation is neither to be questioned nor corrected. These become something “more” – in a conventional sense – only when the author of the sound composition effectively does something (we do not know what) with them. But this does not count if one does not do anything with them, but society and/or she then still claims to have created *music*.

This kind of speech must come to an end. Therefore I call out for: first, a complete dismissal /opustitev/ of the terms *music* and *noise* and then, for a complete distance from the act of describing sounds and combinations of sounds in a dichotomous manner or any manner at all.

In 2013, when I present the composition *Preslišani fragmenti zvoka (Overheard fragments of sound)*, a composition made of *concrete* sounds – sounds recorded in their environment and processed but little –, for the first time, I am asked if I have been creating *noise* for a long time already. I am mute. If they are truly so *unpleasant* and *unbearable*, why do they keep arising insistently? The listener will leave and will say she had been to a *noise* concert. She will spread false information, but the receivers of the message will, despite the relativization and

simplification, understand her – and so on, *ad infinitum*. *Overheard fragments of sound* are the sounds of city traffic, bar chatter, eating etc. – in short, sounds of everyday situations. Their unbearableness is evident after the broadcasting of the composition, for in it they are trapped inside the space they create and the time creating them. The structure of the sounds is made even more intense by the act of performing the composition in the dark; the author steps behind the blackness and the light goes out; I know she is there, but her image is absent. She does not exist as an object, she exists as a ghost – which she is. Her likeness is irrelevant, for she is present inside the space through the sound by which this space *becomes*. Attention redirected towards sound, towards a space inside the invisibility of space, co-created by a restless, darkness-bound audience. At that point the audience wants to leave. But, where to? Back on the street, where there are buses and chatter and restaurants and eating?

But then again: no one would want to leave, were it not unbearable.