

*Feminism and Sound**Ella Finer*

2018

This is a significant time to think about the way feminism sounds, or more critically how feminisms sound. The year of Vote 100 has hosted huge celebration for the centenary of equality in voting rights. Yet, even in the wake of both silent and loud protest at inequality in cultural industries *and* while calls to critique ‘the identitarian work of intersectionality’ are amplified, the most critical questions of privilege, power and difference in Women’s Rights (and how these make the project of feminism ever more complex) have been relatively quieter than the broad and general successes of women’s suffrage.¹ While an extraordinary achievement, the story of the Suffragettes is not ‘a single story’ as women’s suffrage scholar Sarah Jackson vitally reminds in her writing on working-class women’s roles in the movement.² Not all women got the vote in 1918: those over the age of 30, with property and education could vote after following Emmeline Pankhurst’s well-known call to ‘make more noise than anybody else’. And yet, the many working-class women who supported the suffrage campaigns (who made noise quite literally as public speakers and lobbyists as well as symbolically) remain as ‘women quite unknown’.³ ‘Having a voice’ – the familiar sonic metaphor for having agency to act and represent oneself – was reserved for only some, not all, women. As such, I offer 2018 as context for thinking about ‘feminism and sound’ *now* – through literature, experimental music and sound art installation – towards the future in which you are reading, as an unfixed and ever-evolving partnership, where the terms and categories of *feminism* and *women* are always shifting. Significantly so in relation to issues of representation: 2018 also marks the year in which an explorative consultation for the reform of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) has taken place: a government consultation seeking to transform the intrusive and bureaucratic process – of trans people legally registering an acquired gender – into one of ‘dignity and respect’.⁴ I think of Sara

Ahmed's question in *Living a Feminist Life*: 'How to dismantle the world that is built to accommodate only some bodies?': I think of this in relation to the consultation, but also specifically as Ahmed positions her question, in the wake of critical feminist voices rendering 'trans women into "not women," or "not born women," or into men.'⁶ This is a brief reminder of feminisms' multiple and distinct agendas through at least three historical waves and the ongoing ideological debates around biological and social/cultural experiences of living as a woman. Such debates are reignited as transgender rights are amplified and studies of gender and the voice draw critical attention to the 'many unchecked assumptions ... woven into the accepted wisdom about how and why women's and men's voices differ.'⁷ Crucially, studies of transgender voices foreground that the *sound* of the body, through the voice, complicates such assumptions and any notion of a singular or coherent identity, especially as they focus 'on a site in which the body and cultural processes of socialization and identity construction come into contact with one another.'⁸

One of the key arguments for reform of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) is that transgender people be legally permitted to self-identify, to self-declare their gender rather than present a case before a panel or as a medical diagnosis. And so, I underscore what follows with recognition for the ethics of representation, for the complex relation between the heard and the under-heard: who speaks on behalf of whom and with what permissions, with what assumptions?⁹

Echo

Attending to feminism *with* sound is to practice trans-historical listening, with ears simultaneously to the past and to the future. Many sounds characterised as female overlap and repeat again through time: for example, the keening women in Celtic Irish folklore resounding again in the bodies of the Greenham Common women, who walked and wailed in protest through Parliament Square in 1984. Their conscious reclaiming of sonic tradition in the form of mythologized 'feminized' sound for feminist action is useful to consider in relation to the complexity of constructing feminist identity as formed through/by history. This complexity would seem to be especially emphasised when – as Anna Feigenbaum writes of Greenham Common's adoption of the Celtic Goddess Bridget as 'song, spirit, icon' – 'a feminist project of historical recovery takes place.'¹⁰ This 'historical recovery' is both particular to the activist agenda of the Greenham women and also speaks more broadly of a methodology for

becoming audible as social agents. Feigenbaum cites Joan Scott's compelling work on the Fantasy Echo, the characterisation of 'retrospective identification', an identification with historical women and their agendas, to draw this out further:

Groups with suppressed histories, in this case women, often direct themselves toward the creation of historical lineages or genealogies that pick up on moments and figures across time and place in order to write their group into history. These patchworked narratives, Scott says, 'have the quality of echoes, resonating incompletely and sporadically, though discernibly, in the appeal to women to identify as feminists.'¹¹

The imperfect, delayed return of the sonic echo, methodologically underpinning and focusing this chapter, physically takes place in the space between surfaces: an echo happens when a sound is reflected back towards its source after hitting a hard surface. What we hear is the originating sound altered in acoustic character – largely dependent on the environmental characteristics it sounds within, for example what the sound is reflecting off and how far away it is. The physical echo will always return a sound distinct from the original, bearing the traces of its travel through time and space. Mark M. Smith, describing the echo as 'a faded facsimile of an original sound, a reflection of time passed', emphasises listening for echo's differences from 'origin' as critical historical method, as does Scott: echo 'invites a habit of listening that not only allows us to locate origin (temporally and spatially), but more important, test authenticity: how illustrative the sound was of the historical moment in which it was produced.'¹²

The echo, giving back only ever 'incomplete reproductions' of sound material is crucial in my consideration of feminism and sound within this one take on the intersection, most particularly as Scott emphasises: the effect of echo 'undermines the notion of enduring sameness that often attaches to identity.'¹³

Because the echo deals in difference, in the richness and complexity of sonic difference that might well be unintelligible, it provides a sonic method for *how* to listen to the complex subjects of Feminist study:

women refers to so many subjects, different and the same, that the word becomes a series of fragmented sounds, rendered intelligible only by the listener, who (in specifying her object) is predisposed to listen in a certain way.¹⁴

Making intelligible, though, is not without its own ethics of interpretation and attribution on the part of the listener. Scott continues that '*Women* acquires intelligibility when the historian or the activist looking for inspiration from the past attributes significance to (identifies with) what she

has been able to hear.¹⁵ Through feminism's kaleidoscopic lens – through subjects and what they hold dear, strive to change and transform – sonic culture produces its own kind of politics and history, which like a feedback loop folds back into how we attend to feminisms by ear. We are guided by those who 'pick up' something vital, or apparently so, in the air – those who compose history. But to echo again the very first lines of this chapter, we have to look critically at who is composing, who is attributing significance to what they hear and why. More diverse compositions of feminist history are called for: to listen for and to amplify the key historical notes of the under-heard, or more chillingly the 'never to be heard' in Zora Neale Hurston's words, as cited in Daphne Brook's essay on Hurston, in which she so powerfully situates Hurston's singing as 'embodied cultural documentation'.¹⁶ Brooks writes that Hurston, as with Civil Rights era activist and musician Odetta, 'pounded out the beat of overlooked histories through their bodies'.¹⁷ These women made history *and* theory in the practice of sounding, *though their bodies*, and their beat is amplified in Brook's listening and writing of it, as she effectively puts a hearing tube through the fabric of time, to playback louder than traditional expectations/assumptions of black women making sound.

Of course, historical expectations of Western women play a significant role in the intersection of feminism and sound. Feminism, in all its complexity, is already inbuilt into the way we hear (or think we hear) each other. Consider 'the haunting garrulity of the nymph Echo', who as Ann Carson reminds in *The Gender of Sound* is 'described by Sophokles as "the girl with no door on her mouth."¹⁸ Carson's subsequent reminder that 'putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day' casts the girl with doors flung wide as continual vocal disturbance to the dominant social acoustics of history: social acoustics which have so often sought to restrain and dominate women who speak out, who are deemed to talk excessively, too much, too loudly or out of turn.¹⁹ Mary Beard demonstrates the silencing of female speech as historical 'practice' in *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, showing through ancient history to present day 'just how deeply embedded in Western culture are the mechanisms that silence women, that refuse to take them seriously and that sever them ... from the centres of power.'²⁰

I have written on voices that resist such mechanisms elsewhere and most recently (with Emma Bennett) about Glenda Jackson's subversive speech acts in Parliament, especially at the Margaret Thatcher Tribute Debate in April 2013 during which (mostly male) voices can be heard

shouting 'shame on you!' and 'sit down!' as she speaks forcefully against the legacy of Thatcher's record in Government. In the recording of the debate, underneath Jackson's voice the clamour of disapproval is audible; if heckling cannot silence Jackson by stopping her speech, the voices will at least attempt to drown out her voice in the din.²¹ There are echoes of this silencing, even more forcefully so, in US Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren's reading of Coretta Scott King's 1986 letter criticising attorney general nominee Jeff Sessions' record on civil rights in February 2017. Warren's reading was cut short and the rationale for her silencing – 'she was warned . . . nevertheless, she persisted' – was immediately adopted by feminist movements in the US. Refusing to stop – *persisting* – is as I outlined above a method of the sonic echo which will continue to sound, as long as there are surfaces from which to bounce, as a 'reflection of time passed'.²²

Considering the legacy of Echo as disturbance to the acoustic norm: a subversive, rather than subjugated, sonic character can offer ways of 1) listening to and 2) making sound that effects some change, however subtle, in the way women take up – command and occupy – space *and* time.

Echo cast as an ancient sound artist, formed and reformed both in the physical world and in literature, provides some of the most integral methods I have recently observed in sonic practices with feminised sound now: methods of motion and return – to confuse repetition, to refuse fixity, to take up space and time, to overlay, overlap, feedback. And it is most often the voice used as material to practice with – evidenced in such recent work as Ain Bailey's *The Pitch Sisters*, an installation of speakers from which a chorus of voices all sing the pitch hypothetically found to be the 'preferred' pitch of ciswomen, or Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, in which a collective of women from Morocco and London physicalize a wall of sound so intense as to baffle all senses, or Deborah Pearson and Anna Snaith's *The Filibuster*: a performance spanning twelve hours with as many women taking up space and time by speaking successively, continuously, wherever the time takes them.²³

In what follows I briefly make the case for echoic sound as feminist method alongside considering Echo, the Greek mythological character whose reappearances through literature confer upon her a cumulative agency, evidenced in her sonic invention/intervention. From my reading of Echo as complicating any idea of a coherent female identity, I then consider echo's legacy through two recent examples of sonic art works: Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* and Sonya Boyce's *Devotional Series*, both of which insistently demand to take up space through sounding out

multiple times, and multiple women in and through history. Rather than constructing identities of the artist and/or audience, these works form collectives in and of those who witness. They are organised, following Jennifer Nash in her writing on black feminist love politics, ‘around the vibrancy and complexity of difference.’²⁴

Echoes after Echo

The mythical character Echo is punished in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book III, by the goddess Hera for distracting her with conversation. Hera silences Echo, depriving her of all speech but for the ability to repeat the last lines of others’ words. As with the myths of Philomela, her tongue cut out for fear she would speak the truth of her rape, and Cassandra, cursed to foresee and tell of prophecies that no one would believe, Echo’s is a punishment transforming vocal agency into an enduring vocal captivity. This action, visited upon Echo as her eternal punishment, personifies the echo and the way it performs. That the acoustic echo bears the name of the classical female character is important to expand upon here in a discussion of feminism and sound because 1) Echo’s disembodied voice cannot help but haunt the airwaves in any discussion of acoustical echo; 2) because Echo is a female character who practices with sound and animates a specific vocal practice in which she is both speaker and listener; and 3) because literary interpretations of the Echoes after Echo provide her character with new methods of vocal and sonic invention, methods which as I have suggested above, and go on to illustrate, are implicit in women’s work with sound today.

‘Echoes after Echo’ suggests that there is an original character from which to depart, but as John Hollander comprehensively illustrates in his study on *The Figure of Echo*, before her appearance in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the nymph Echo, ‘we first hear echoes in Homer as reverberations and amplifications of battle noise or falling trees.’²⁵ Echo could not have come into being without identifying characteristics of the acoustic world, and now the acoustic world cannot forget her. The repercussion of this origin story born out of the mutual relation of sound-effect and character ensures the reappearance of the mythic persona of Echo through association, as in Hollander’s example of Lucretius hearing the ‘effect of a six or seven-fold echo’ in his first century BC *De Rerum Natura*, when he perceives that ‘echoes such as these cause imagined nymphs and satyrs to come into being.’²⁶ Through listening to the sonic effects of repeatedly overlaid sound – through hearing physical echoes in action – mythical

Echo's narrative is perceived and remembered among the bodily forms of nymphs and satyrs taking shape in the sonic landscape. Lucretius *hears* narrative in the sounding of space, and not just any space as his descriptions not only 'seem to evoke a quite favourable condition for hearing echoes: in a lonely, mountainous region at nighttime', but also in the space of the 'in-between', as Mieke Koenen considers in her writing on the 'echo-passage in Lucretius' "DRN" [De Rerum Natura].²⁷ Lucretius presents the echo as an "'in-between phenomenon" ... precisely between a voice directly heard and a voice that completely fades away.²⁸ And in this in-between space Echo's character is only ever fleetingly forged, before another's interpretation sounds out the story again, differently.²⁹

Let me give a short review of the interpretations of Echo in literature to chart subtle adjustments in her character, adjustments that I then use to offer methods for interpreting Echo and echo in some recent examples of artists working with sound.

Can Echo disturb gendered power relations if she is doomed to repeat the trailing remnants of others' words? Echo as mythic character is, as P.A. Skantze rightly describes, 'a female voice who through perpetual motion sacrifices invention of ideas for elegiac repetition.'³⁰ Echo eulogises her own disappearance until she is a voice alone, but her disappearance is never complete. As a character, too, Echo endures, and through her literary afterlife as a character returned to and translated, she begins to find her own methods of invention and intervention as a 'disembodied and uncontrollable voice.'³¹

In Gina Bloom's analysis of 'seventeenth century poet, traveller and mythographer' George Sandys's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, she details the 'eerie possibility' that Echo's might be a 'volitional voice.'³² Even though Sandys's translation ultimately casts Echo's power of self-expression as 'immoral,' Bloom identifies 'how compelling Echo's legacy can be for contemporary feminist theories of agency.'³³ A significant part of that legacy is evident in Echo's vocal practice, as Bloom writes:

Whereas Ovid's Latin poem merely *suggests* that echoic sound can constitute voice, Sandys's translation more clearly represents aural reverberation as Echo's self-expression. Perhaps most tellingly, Echo's first word in Sandys's translation is the pronoun 'I'.³⁴

In a literal act of translation, Echo is granted her own subjectivity to speak her own words. In a new author's hands, she is reinvented, and however slight the interventional 'I' might appear, Echo's character begins to claim agency in speaking for herself. As a character whose destiny (and trait) is

to return only the last words or syllables of another's speech, significantly she begins to construct the emphatic *beginnings* of her own. Douglas Kahn clarifies how the acoustics of a physical echo can return the beginnings as well as ends of speech depending on the 'duration of speech and where a speaker is standing.'³⁵

The differently positioned speaker, who causes an echo to reflect the beginning of her speech, can be compared to the differently positioned author, who causes Echo to claim her own assertive first word. Speaking from different locations in space and in time composes the character of voice anew using the materials of the past: whether the materials are the altered sounds of an echo in different landscapes, or those literary materials altered in a new generation's approach and application, through an author's or translator's conscious attention to syntax and word order.

More early modern moves in Echo's evolution can be seen through Bloom's analysis of the Duchess's echo in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and her reminder that Echo's character in Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, 'speaks about forty independent lines' as a monologue.³⁶ Although not the character of mythical Echo per se, these Echoes after Echo cannot help but become attached to her legacy, cannot help but resemble and haunt her in character. The successive representations of Echo as literary character after Echo as myth will always make her a complex character, returning variously in different texts, different stagings, different bodies. And what appears in these instances is a type of citational echo, a spectre of past Echoes. In analysing a dramatic character as a form of phenomenal return, Rebecca Schneider makes evident the multiple returns implicit in a staging that reverberates. Drawing attention to how the staged spectre (the actor playing the disembodied persona of Hamlet's father) might make shifting temporalities appear from the sight of one body, she identifies a community of correlating 'characters' attending to the live actor who is already 'behind the spectre's visor':

For if behind the spectre's visor may be a live actor, certainly behind (or to the side) of the actor may be a spectre – of other actors, other spectres, other faux fathers, other scripts.³⁷

Carson's image of 'the girl with no door on her mouth' is all the more provocative when considering the many versions of Echo in literature and how they differ from Echo's first incarnation as a doomed repeater. Her new-found agency to speak differently, to compose differently communicates more forcefully because of her (non) narrative past. Rather than repeating history, the Echoes after Echo make new interventions

using language to identify their own subjectivity in subtle, but significant ways. In Bloom's configuration of how Echo, 'constitutes her personhood through the words which are available to her', Bloom describes the practice of the auditor-composer, an idea I have developed elsewhere in an article on Ophelia as an expert listener, who like Echo recomposes what she hears and as a practiced listener is 'ready to await the sounds.'³⁸ Gradually though, through time, Echo appears as a character who not only listens to other's voices, but more importantly composes the sounds of her own. Giving Echo the autonomy to speak her own lines decentres the symbolic trait of her character, because she finds her own vocabulary and/or she artfully discerns what words to repeat. The autonomy granted Echo's character in *The Duchess of Malfi* is significant, because her responses are formed as knowing answers. On hearing the Echo near the Duchess's tomb in Act V, Scene III, Delio encourages Antonio to make of it what character he will, but ultimately the Echo determines her own character:

DELIO: I told you t'was a pretty one. You
 may make it
 A huntsman, or a falconer a musician,
 Or a thing of sorrow.
 ECHO: *A thing of Sorrow.*³⁹

Bloom observes how 'the echo throws sounds back to their producer, creating what appears to be an independent vocal act' and I would suggest this is as much a mark of the physical character of Echo as it is of the dramatic character. Echo is both listening subject and speaking subject:

The echo's capacity to 'speak' is precipitated by its capacity to 'hear,' as hearing and speaking become two sides of the same disembodied vocal process, virtually indistinguishable from each another.⁴⁰

Kahn identifies the acoustic phenomena of the echo as 'the only pre-phonographic method to hear one's own voice,⁴¹ but in relying on a reproduction of one's voice, bounced back from a reflective surface, the sound will always return altered. This important practice of speaking in order to listen again differently to that speaking is part of Echo's compelling legacy *and* how she can participate in a feminist project such as Elin Diamond's 'feminist mimesis,' which 'would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not producing the same.'⁴²

Echo and echo offer a way of *unmaking mimesis*, to use Diamond's title, but not only through practicing with recomposing the physical properties of sounds heard. While Echo can and has been used simply as

the vessel and carrier of other people's words, the Echoes after Echo demonstrate that re-writing, re-staging, re-interpreting characters through time recomposes the character in each 'new' appearance. Furthermore, the further away the legacy of the distant and impossible 'original' Echo (or any legendary or popular character), the more of her versions attend the character we witness now. Echo's 'compelling legacy' for feminism is present in her vocalicity 'geared to change', charted through literature where she is variously composer, editor and sound experimentalist, and as I will now propose is also evident in the reverberations of women working with/in sound today.

Compelling Legacies

What are sonic legacies? Who creates them, or feels entitled to participate in their making? The absence of women in the history books of the new/ancient discipline of Sound Studies, has been significant, with renowned author Douglas Kahn even offering an introductory apology for the representational imbalance in his 'history of voice, sound and aurality in the Arts' owing to 'lack of time and resources' while other historical surveys unapologetically reaffirm the white, male canon of experimental sound practices.⁴³ These again shed the starkest light on who exactly is composing history, who is attributing significance to what they hear and why. A recent and curious case of the treatment of women in relation to sonic histories takes place in composer and writer Eldritch Priest's book on experimental music in which he spins a seemingly scholarly yarn so great that he fabricates a whole generation of avant-garde sound experimentalists, *but* even dreaming up a fictional line up excludes women from the story. This may be because the fictional composers whose work he discusses are versions of himself, but, whatever the reason, this storytelling only serves to bolster the boundary lines between those who can play or are invited to play with sound most audibly/visibly and those who are not. This exposes another boundary line: between those who can 'play' in Priest's own words those 'whose agency is always (already) secure... those who have always already succeeded as social agents' and those whose agency is more precarious.⁴⁴ Something Priest does as one of those 'who have always already succeeded' (by his own admission) is allow himself to play with who get to be the main players in one historical line-up of sound makers. Priest's whole book is constructed around the conceit of game-playing, but he exposes in play what has been all too common in authoring histories of sound – the exclusion of women's sonic practices.

As another way in to thinking about how women's experimental practices with sound now take place and/or make places, the context of experimental music is useful for three reasons: 1) because in recent years experimental music has gained increased critical attention as a feminist subject (by writers such as Marie Thompson, Annie Goh and Frances Morgan and through important projects such as *Pink Noise* by Tara Rodgers and *Her Noise* initiated by Lina Džuverović and Anne Hilde Neset in 2001), 2) because some of the most widely recognised and celebrated female innovators/inventors of sound art practices worked in this field: Elaine Radigue (1932), Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016), Daphne Oram (1925-2003), Delia Derbyshire (1937-2001), Bebe Barron (1925-2008) and 3) because these women and others worked with sound making equipment and materials which needed space – a 'workshop' – a working place – a room, a shed, a studio, a corridor . . .

There is a wonderful description of sound taking up space, or the promise of sound taking up space most materially in the recollections of Delia Derbyshire, probably best known for her work in the BBC Radiophonic Workshop realising the theme tune of *Doctor Who* in 1963.⁴⁵ As is well known, making such sounds with feedback and tape was initially a very physical, hand-made process. Until the synthesiser largely took over this practice, the work of making sound necessitated *making space*. In Derbyshire's recollection, she not only describes the spatiality of a sound making scene, but also seems to give the sound material (in this case tape) intent and direction through naming the places it passes – as if it (the tape) had taken a walk: 'it went out through the double doors and then through the next pair, just opposite the ladies toilet and reception' . . . 'the longest corridor in London with the longest tape loop!⁴⁶ Derbyshire's tape stretching through the building is a striking image of a sound material not only taking up space but demarcating place, mapping a corridor and its landmarks.

Derbyshire, who had studied Maths and Music, was a sonic inventor whose oft-cited anecdotes – such as her cutting up her own taped voice to make the sound of camel hooves crossing a desert – figure her relationship with sound as one of imaginative pragmatism, especially considering her role in, as she names it 'a service department'. As Jo Hutton emphasises in her writing on *Radiophonic Ladies*, Derbyshire, as with Daphne Oram and Maddalena Fagadini 'worked under enormous pressure to meet deadlines, in an environment where the only rule was to satisfy the drama producer.'⁴⁷ And as Derbyshire recounts herself in an interview with Hutton from 2000, the 'workshop was purely a service department for drama. The BBC made it quite clear that they didn't employ composers and we weren't supposed to be doing music.'

JH: What were you doing?

DD: It was music, it was abstract electronic sound, organised.⁴⁸

The ‘abstract [...] organised’ is composition even if not allowed to be named so. Even while Derbyshire was doing her job, *a* job, for those more senior, there is a particular kind of agency attached to these early scenes of experimental sound making led by women in the Radiophonic Workshop: the transgressive tape loop, the vocal fragments hidden in Foley, and even the double doors (‘out through the double doors’) as alternative metaphor for the glass ceiling – a lateral move, to broach boundaries traditionally demarcated/coded as male in the workplace.

But of course, sound off-the-record and in-the-live is an altogether stranger material to ‘map’. This is especially so with voice: its ‘sonic substance’ (as philosopher Adriana Cavarero describes the physical material of speech) never forgetting the body it came from.⁴⁹ As Bloom writes: ‘as a consequence of its mobility, and spatial indeterminacy, the voice has the capacity for even greater “flux” than the body.’⁵⁰ The voice is unfixed. In an early modern context, she argues that this peculiar motility of voice can ‘effect surprising forms of subversion’ of gender ideologies.⁵¹ The voice can confuse where bodies are located, but crucially this confusion is also always dependent on the space in which voice is sounded. For the listener of the voice it can seemingly belong in multiple places: in others’ bodies, in objects, in the air – all depending on the atmosphere, environment and architecture it is sounded in. We are, as Bruce Smith writes ‘surrounded – and filled – by a continuous field of sound.’⁵² When we voice into this humming, drumming sonic world we can only do so much to direct how it will sound from our own bodies – the rest is up to the surrounding space, the place in which we speak, which is not always predictable.

As R. Murray Schafer reminds us: ‘sound, being more mysterious than scientists would like to believe, inhabits space rather erratically and enigmatically.’⁵³ I have noticed an increased interest in women sounding out the spaces they inhabit as artists through building or rebuilding (or is this re-pitching?) their sonic environments through voice and the sound of their bodies: both choosing particular methods for vocalising, and (most importantly given the practice of echo to occupy space with sound) particular *spaces* for performing these voice artworks within (*and* without).

Bouchra Ouizguen’s *Corbeaux* took place in the Serpentine Pavilion in summer 2017. A group of twenty women (ten from Morocco and ten from London) took a place in turn in the centre of the crowded and very small space and once gathered started. They started. There are no words for the

sound that exploded relative silence in an instant, pushed me against the wall and simultaneously made me want to laugh and sob. My responses were a mess – I was in the wake of an incredible sonic onslaught made by women standing still, only heads rocking back and forward – necks like bending rubber. I realised I wanted to compose myself, I wanted to have a coherent reaction (whatever that might have meant), but the collective wailing (was it wailing?) was stripping me of all sense making. I was already against a wall, everyone was – we had lined the Pavilion wall as we walked in and now everyone was pinned to it. In his writing ‘against soundscape’, Tim Ingold reminds us that ‘the sweep of sound continually endeavours to tear listeners away, causing them to surrender to its movement. It requires an effort to stay in place.’³⁴ He is talking about the sound around us in the environment ‘out in the open’, sound as wind, sound like the wind, sound which never stays put – we have all experienced I am sure, following sounds and shifting attention, moving our bodies in relation, in order to apprehend. In artist Nic Green’s performance *Turn*, for example, at Glasgow’s graving docks last winter, her choir’s voices hovered in the distance then filtered through torrential rain to reach an audience lining the great sunken amphitheatre of Govan’s dry dock. Green’s voices out in the open, in the weather, could only go roving in the immense site. But *Corbeaux*, provisionally sheltered in the Serpentine Pavilion, had walls, however temporary and minimal. And in collaboration with the container of the Pavilion, *Corbeaux*’s vocal force held its audience captive – the focus of the sound so powerfully concentrated in the centre of the space and exploding outward that, at least in my experience as auditor to this work, I was being asked to surrender not so much to sound’s movement, but to its volume, its huge and booming scale effecting this pushing outwards. A scale not containable in the too small Pavilion, but having to be contained nonetheless. Women’s voices with no amplification technology – *loud*, so loud a microphone would distort the sound. I made no effort to ‘stay in place’ because I was already in place, held there by the voices and the architecture – in a room like a shell.

Bouchra Ouizguen has said of *Corbeaux* that ‘everything remains to be done’: even ‘though it has been created, each time there are things beyond my control’.³⁵ To work with sound, to work with the voice, is to work with something beyond control. This is part of Bloom’s project in *Voice in Motion*, where her development of subtle strategies for women gaining vocal agency articulates the woman’s understanding of vocal control and, crucially, her ability to let go of it. Bloom argues, ‘the breath – ephemeral, mobile, unpredictable, indeed invisible – defies supervision and resists

choreography.³⁶ But when space is demarcated as place, boundaried and contained by physical elements like walls, the sound of the voice must submit to some conditioning/some choreography. There are alternative ways to practice subversively with voice even within walls, and this simple but startling performance demonstrated one of these. The version of *Corbeaux* I saw and heard took place within walls, but in practice the voices effected something that challenged those walls to hold, and in turn challenged those present 'to hold', because lining the walls of the Pavilion our spectating bodies became the wall – the point of contact and reflection for the women's voices to bounce from and to. We were the sounding board with no choice but to resonate with and for the women gathered in the centre of our strangely shaped circle.

But the particular place these women voiced within also lends dimension to the voices', social and political, if not physical dimension. The Pavilion walls were made of blue painted wood, with small gaps between the triangular 'bricks', like a textile. The building was light while enclosed. It was designed by architect Francis Kéré who grew up in Burkino Faso and imposes its own history (and the history of its architect), its concept and materials on the voices of *Corbeaux*. One compelling detail that struck me in reading a news article on the Pavilion's opening is how 'Kéré spoke of a way of making floors in Burkina Faso, whereby women dance on the earth until it is compacted and hard.'³⁷ Ouizguen's troupe of women from Morocco and London, whose bodies are still-in-place while 'crowing' sound out differently again, as this detail adds to my own 'building' of the performance space and my listening to the voices in and out of time. I can now perceive stamping, dancing feet where the troupe's feet are grounded, even if not hearing them. An impression in the air for an impression in the ground. Women define the space of the Pavilion through the echo, as acoustic and as metaphor: I hear the repeated and dissonant vocal punch of *heb-yeh. heb-yeh. heb-yeh.* of the gathered women as much as I hear the pounding of the ground by a group of imagined women.

2018

On one of the first days of the new year, January 2018, I am standing in the opening gallery of *Sounds Like Her* on its closing day: an exhibition on gender, sound and sonic cultures developed and curated by Christene Eyene with Melanie Kidd. The exhibition aims, they write in the introduction, not only to challenge 'the patrilineal trajectory that has defined the history of sound art', but equally 'the Eurocentric frameworks that

continue to dominate the scene today.³⁸ And it is in this first room – an installation of Sonya Boyce’s *Devotional Series* (1999-present), her ongoing and expanding archival project spanning nearly 20 years– that another history, an other framework and trajectory for critical, close attention to women making/working with sound is offered. The names of two hundred black British females in the music industry fill the gallery walls: emboldened names within patterns of fluid lines making up Boyce’s *Devotional Wallpaper*. Stacked against the walls are placards detailing images of these women from print material including posters and magazines collected together in groups, in solidarity.

Boyce’s installation is devotion as active, political force: a method of making audible those who ‘like background noise ... had been erased from popular consciousness.’³⁹ What, for me, is most striking about Boyce’s graphic foregrounding of these musicians is the insistence of the multiple rings hand-drawn close around each name – a repetitive and expanding affirmation for each individual artist. While these provide visual stimulation, as the names (... Sade, Sinitta, Sista Culture, Shirley Thompson ...) buzz in the optical trickery of their surrounding lines, *Devotional Wallpaper* draws on the most classical depiction of the movement of sound waves: the stone dropping in water and concentric circles radiating outwards in rings on the surface. On this familiar ‘visual analog’ for sound, Douglas Kahn reminds of the ‘long-standing association of water and sound in observational acoustics from antiquity through Chaucer to Helmholtz and beyond’ by illustrating how ‘the sound of a stone hitting water’ produced ‘a visual counter-part, which was then mapped back onto the invisible movement of sound waves.’⁶⁰

Boyce appears to have made her own visual counter-part to the sounds of those not so easily known or fixed. Her concentric circles are abstracted – they are no uniform shape around an originary sound source as the stone in the water example depicts. The typed names at the centre of each brick-like space on the wall create concentric *shapes*, modelled on the names they surround. These concentric shapes are lines repeated until the limits of their rectangular border and no two are the same. A sonic work on paper, the names leave their mark as well as their reverberations, their vibrations through space. Boyce’s line drawings *look like noise*.

Boyce’s archival project uses the materials of protest in still life – the placards are arranged against the noisy wallpaper, names of sonic women popping from the surface. But this is an installation for being in and with, for discovery, education and for action in the continuous – so while at first a room of objects, the room vibrates with the promise

and possibility of hearing society differently, of opening up a far greater sonic field and calling attention to it, quietly but forcefully. In Jennifer Nash's work on black feminist love-politics she writes how it 'has long been invested in the "open end," in radical possibility, orienting itself toward a yet-unknown future.'⁶¹ *Devotional Series* makes such an investment in the continuous, exploring over time how the social acoustics of the work changes, as the world changes, following the ethos of a black feminist love-politics which

constantly evokes what 'has yet to be known, seen, or heard' (Puar 2007, 216) or what Kelley calls the labor of 'talk[ing] openly of revolution and dream[ing] of a new society, sometimes creating cultural works that enable communities to envision what's possible with collective action, personal self transformation, and will' (Kelley 2002, 7).⁶²

With this evocation of *dreaming towards*, and most vitally as collective project rather than individual pursuit, I want to close by returning to the practice of trans-historical listening I began with, in relation to listening ahead. Because feminism is not only composed by those who have listened back, but crucially and critically by those who listen ahead – those who gauge the direction of wind blowing from elsewhere. Nash's project can inform those who work with sound and historically under-represented subjects in radical ways – to speak to the histories of feminism yet to be made, to gather together and act as sound does. For in practice sound reflects, echoes, resonates, reverberates – moves in its own continuum – not simply to play-back what has come before, but to vibrate on.

Notes

- ¹ Jennifer Nash, 'Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality', *Meridians* 11.2 (2011), 1–24 (p. 13).
- ² See Sarah Jackson's articles for the *Guardian* and the British Library, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/12/suffragettes-white-middle-class-women-pankhursts; www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/women-quite-unknown-working-class-women-in-the-suffrage-movement.
- ³ In her article for the British Library, Sarah Jackson cites WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) member Mary Gawthorpe's exclamation to Lady Constance Lytton in relation to the rough treatment received by working class women arrested for political action: 'Oh, and these are women quite unknown – nobody knows or cares about them except their own friends. They go to prison again and again to be treated like this, until it kills them!'

- ⁴ From LGBT Policy Team, Government Equalities Office document: *Reform of the Gender Recognition Act – Government Consultation*, July 2018, p. 20, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721725/GRA-Consultation-document.pdf.
- ⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 14.
- ⁶ Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 14.
- ⁷ Lal Zimman, 'Transgender Voices: Insights on Identity, Embodiment, and the Gender of the Voice', *Lang Linguist Compass*, 12 (2018), p. 11.
- ⁸ Zimman, 'Transgender Voices', p. 2.
- ⁹ I gratefully acknowledge the generosity of Marcia Farquhar, Flora Pitrolo, P.A. Skantze and Jacqueline Springer, who have each informed so much of the work in this chapter.
- ¹⁰ Anna Feigenbaum, "'Now I'm a Happy Dyke!": Creating Collective Identity and Queer Community in Greenham Women's Songs', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 22.4 (2010), 367–88 (p. 374).
- ¹¹ Feigenbaum, "'Now I'm a Happy Dyke!'".
- ¹² Mark M. Smith, 'Echo', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 55–64 (p. 55).
- ¹³ Joan W. Scott, 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 27.2 (2001), 284–304 (p. 291).
- ¹⁴ Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', p. 285.
- ¹⁵ Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', p. 292.
- ¹⁶ Daphne A. Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?": Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood', *Amerikastudien* 55.4 (2010), 617–27 (p. 618).
- ¹⁷ Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?'" , pp. 625–6.
- ¹⁸ Ann Carson, 'The Gender of Sound', in *Glass, Irony and God* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995), 119–42 (p. 121).
- ¹⁹ Carson, 'The Gender of Sound'.
- ²⁰ Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2018). Beard's manifesto is in part a response to her own experiences of these mechanisms, especially abuse she has suffered online. Significantly, for this chapter thinking through echoic methods as feminist, Beard has found agency in re-posting offensive tweets targeting her, effectively throwing the comments back out as echo into the twittersphere.
- ²¹ Emma Bennett and Ella Finer, 'Mending Speech: Glenda Jackson's Verbal "Caring-for"', in *Amending Speech: Women's Voices in Parliament, 1918–2018*, ed. by Maggie Inchley and John Vice (London: Hansard, 2018), pp. 230–5.
- ²² Smith, 'Echo', p. 55.
- ²³ For more information on these artworks visit: Ain Bailey, https://soundcloud.com/ain_bailey/the-pitch-sisters-edit; Bouchra Ouizguen, www.bouchraouizguen.com/corbeaux and Deborah Pearson and Anna Snaith, www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/-/projects/the-filibuster.
- ²⁴ Nash, 'Practicing Love', p. 11.

- ²⁵ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 6.
- ²⁶ Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*, p. 12.
- ²⁷ Mieke Koenen, “‘Loca Loquuntur.’ Lucretius’ Explanation of the Echo and Other Acoustic Phenomena in “DRN””, *Mnemosyne* 57.6 (2004), 698–724 (p. 710).
- ²⁸ Koenen, “‘Loca Loquuntur.’”, p. 719.
- ²⁹ For more on echo in the ‘in-between’ space, see pp. 185–6 of my essay ‘Strange Objects/Strange Properties: Female Audibility and the Acoustic Stage Prop’, in *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*, ed. by Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 177–87.
- ³⁰ P.A. Skantze, *Stillness in Motion in the Seventeenth Century Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 69.
- ³¹ Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 161.
- ³² Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 164.
- ³³ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 185.
- ³⁴ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 164.
- ³⁵ Douglas Kahn, ‘Acoustic Sculpture, Deboned Voices’, *New Music Articles* 8 (1990), 3–7 (p. 6).
- ³⁶ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 242.
- ³⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 110.
- ³⁸ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 171.
- ³⁹ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), p. 325.
- ⁴⁰ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 161.
- ⁴¹ Kahn, ‘Acoustic Sculpture, Deboned Voices’, p. 6.
- ⁴² Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xvi.
- ⁴³ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 13–14.
- ⁴⁴ Eldritch Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 27.
- ⁴⁵ Although Ron Grainer who had scored the work gained the credit and 100 per cent of royalties. Despite offering Derbyshire half the royalties the BBC would not allow this.

- ⁴⁶ Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 88–9.
- ⁴⁷ Jo Hutton, 'Radiophonic Ladies', interview with Delia Derbyshire, 24 February 2000, <http://delia-derbyshire.net/sites/ARTICLE2000JoHutton.html> [accessed 27 February 2019].
- ⁴⁸ Hutton, 'Radiophonic Ladies'.
- ⁴⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 220.
- ⁵⁰ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 16.
- ⁵¹ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 16.
- ⁵² Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 9.
- ⁵³ R. Murray Schafer, 'Acoustic Space', *Circuit* 17.3 (2007), 83–6 (p. 84).
- ⁵⁴ Tim Ingold, 'Against Soundscape', in *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, ed. by A. Carlyle (Paris: CRISAP and Double Entendre, 2007), p. 12.
- ⁵⁵ Leila Tayeb, 'Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*: A Horde of Crows, Disparate and Together', *Walker Art Centre Magazine*, 18 September 2017, Performing Arts section, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/bouchra-ouizguen-crows-corbeaux> [accessed 28 October 2017].
- ⁵⁶ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 109.
- ⁵⁷ Rowan Moore, 'Serpentine Pavilion 2017: Francis Kéré's Cool Shades of Africa', *The Observer*, 25 June 2017, www.theguardian.com/artand-design/2017/jun/25/francis-kere-serpentine-pavilion-2017-review-burkina-faso [accessed 27 February 2019].
- ⁵⁸ Christene Eyene and NAE, *Sounds Like Her* Exhibition Guide (Nottingham: New Art Exchange, 2018), p. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Eyene and NAE, *Sounds Like Her*, p. 3.
- ⁶⁰ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, p. 75. Kahn points out however that this is a particularly popularised antiquated visualisation of the motion of sound. Regarding the development of inscriptive practices in the late eighteenth century loosening 'the reliance of acoustics on music,' Kahn writes 'There had of course been numerous means in the past to visualise sound, but the ability to make the invisible visible and to hold the time of sound still entered a new phase. The concentric rings on the surface of water that had since antiquity provided a visual analog in time for advancing spheres of sound within the air gave way in 1785 to the inscriptive stasis and intricacy of Chladni's sound figures of sand on the surface of plates and subsequently to other instrumental means for tracking and trapping time' (1999, 75).
- ⁶¹ Nash, 'Practicing Love', p. 16.
- ⁶² Nash, 'Practicing Love', pp. 16–17.