

Phonophobia

stereo and multichannel and sound

public engagement, performance, radio, installation

Background

Phonophobia began as a participative and interactive project (*What if we could hear ourselves as other hear us?*) commissioned by Skimstone Arts as part of a residency in Newcastle upon Tyne in May 2017. A conversation is recorded, then played back to the participant, bringing the speaker into a direct and often confrontational relationship with his or her own voice. The subsequent comments and observations are again recorded. In the unfolding of the process complex social and personal issues are brought to the surface, asking questions of orthodoxies and assumptions around identity, self-esteem, self-awareness and belonging. The work is accumulative, and open-ended, designed as a public engagement performance piece, a hub or forum around which people can gather to share values and discuss topics such as identity, inclusion, self-confidence and political readings of voice, accent and dialect.

Development

In 2018 I exploited the versatility of the source material by channelling combinations of voices through customised instruments designed in max/msp. These instruments re-articulate, randomise and loop sections of sound or speech according to certain hierarchies, from the syntactic/semantic level (clearly understandable phrases and sentences) to the phonetic and sub-phonetic level, affording some depth in the examination of the voices under scrutiny. I added short reflective passages by way of oblique commentary, read in my own voice, and music played on nylon string guitar which accompanies closely the ‘phrasing’ of the phonetic and sub-phonetic passages

The result is a reworking of the original material as a multichannel piece for installation and live performance, into which the original public engagement event can be integrated. You can listen to a stereo radio mix here:

The title is chosen to refer to the somewhat complex web of signification that seems to hang from the notion of voice, in its personal, anatomical, social, theological and various other manifestations.

James Wyness, June 2018

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