

**Salomé Voegelin\*, Mark Peter Wright\*\***

## **Points of Listening: Reflections on the Participatory and Polyphonic Potential of Communal Sonic Practices**

### Abstract

How might polyphony operate across the collective, communal, and participatory dimensions of sonic practices? What aesthetic and political observations can be gleaned from listening and sound making that attend to the simultaneous affects of shared sonic experiences? This essay reflects on the possibility of plurality in collective and participatory listening and sound making in relation to the project Points of Listening (PoL), an ongoing series of workshops and discussions, co-convened by the authors, in association with Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice, CRiSAP, University of the Arts London.

### Keywords

Participation, Collectivity, Communal, Polyphony, Listening

### Introduction

This essay reflects on the participatory and polyphonic potential of communal sonic practices by discussing two events staged as part of Points of Listening (PoL), an ongoing series of workshops and discussions involving collective and participatory sonic practices. These are led by musicians, geographers, students, technologists, artists, scientists and more, and are co-

---

\* CRiSAP, London College of Communication  
Email: s.voegelin@lcc.arts.ac.uk

\*\* CRiSAP, London College of Communication  
Email: mark.wright@lcc.arts.ac.uk

convened by the authors, in association with Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice (CRiSAP), University of the Arts London. PoL takes place in many contexts and forms: in shopping malls (Ian Rawes), the cinema (Maria Papadomanolaki), in archives (Andrea Canova) and parks (Catherine Clover); it is technologically driven (Marla Hladi), or pursues hands on, material production (Alex De Little); it creates séances (Victoria Karlsson), deep listening experiences (Ximena Alarcón), narrative environments (Antoine Bertin) and sonic pedagogies (Kevin Logan); it investigates climate (Andrea Polli), gender (Antye Greie) and hearing diversity (Tom Tlalim), and illuminates many more issues from sound. PoL's main focus is not what we hear, but how we listen and make sound together; and its main concern is what that activity generates in terms of sociality and sense, with and between the participants.

We take the opportunity of this special issue of *Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, on "Listening and Polyphony", to review and reflect on the methods and aims of PoL through the lens of a plural sounding; to come to grasp the radical collaboration and relational community proposed by sound. Each author chose one of the over 50 public events staged since the series started in 2014. And each pursued, from memory and documentation, through recordings and in conversation, an applied discussion on how we listen and make sound collectively; to ask what consequent and plural voices might emerge, and how this might impact on our sense of self and how we live together. In this way, we hope to start a conversation about how we participate in listening and sonic thinking; and to reflect on the possibility of a different sense of community, generated from and through sound.

Points of Listening is a phrase that in the first instance refers to the geographical point of London, as the mapped place that this listening and sound making performs and explores. Moreover, it invites other points and denotes the multitude of positions and subjectivities listening may generate—physiological, aesthetic, political and social—and those that listening makes available or denies. The title also queries *the point* of listening: what it enables and what it challenges and disrupts. And it hints at plural points and positions available through sound. More implicitly, it refutes the aim to pinpoint what it is we hear in favour of a generative sense of what it is we produce when listening alone and together: the social, political, aesthetic, bodily and material realities we conjure rather than recognise.

The sense of the title reveals itself differently in every event. It presents itself as fluid positions and positionings around certain points that every episode performs in its own way. In that sense, this series never tries to es-

---

establish a certain line or insight about listening collectively, or a particular way that we can engage the participatory nature of sound. Instead, it works through trials and experimentation, as “works-in-progress”, that are neither a conventional talk nor an exhibition or a performance, but that work in the hybrid imagination of sound, as process and material, to trial what we can do together in its plural sphere and polyphonic potential. From the beginning we were clear that we did not want a forum to replicate established formats of exchange *about* sound: talks, lectures, presentations, etc., and neither did we want to present finished works. Instead, we were interested in fostering exchanges *from* and *through* sound. To give artists, musicians and researchers the opportunity to practice rather than present their work, to sound with others, rather than for others.

The participatory and the collective are therefore not topics of discussion, but modes of working; and although each episode has a theme or pursues a question, the insights generated are not, or not only, about the theme of each event, but about how the practice of these themes in sound provides an understanding from and through the community it produces. In that sense, Points of Listening is not about listening to a particular topic or work. Instead, it listens to keep social relations in reach: to be able to think and practice the space between human and more-than-human things; to generate and determine how we might live together, what points we may take vis-à-vis each other and every other thing. In this way, PoL creates diverse and even potentially contradictory experiences from which we then can know how things are as plural possibilities, by the way we perform and listen with them together.

The following discussions of two Points of Listening events, chosen separately by the authors but written about while in conversation, aim to perform these reflections to debate how we listen collectively, what community we build in sound, what voices we come to make and hear, and what that might mean as plural and participatory interventions into disciplinary conventions and hierarchies, from the practice of art and the everyday. We hope such inquiries might aid us to locate another point to Points of Listening, where sound equivocates a being-otherwise, as a plural and connected sense of self.

**Performing Objects, Sarah Hughes, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**Reflections by Salomé Voegelin**



Fig. 1. Performing Objects. ©PoL.

I chose to reflect on Sarah Hughes' 'Performing Objects', *PoL* #36, which took place on Wednesday July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in the hallway of the media block at the London College of Communication, UAL, Elephant and Castle, in London. This was an event with a deliberately small number of participants, 16, to allow for personal contact and interaction, and room, literally and emotionally, for more than human protagonists to become part of its co-production. Its aim was to refocus our view on everyday objects by bringing them to performance and expand them in compositions triggered by instructions and structured by the group. Each participant was asked to bring an object and to engage in its material quality in order to from this object compose the space by installing it in different places (see Fig. 1). In turn, its installation would influence the way we move and experience the space differently together as human and more than human things. The instruction to the participants, included by Hughes in her announcement of the workshop, read: "Please note, attendees are politely asked not to bring animal products—leather/fur etc.". This made it very clear that the expectation was not for us to choose a functional object or to set up a hierarchical relationship, but for

a more considered and expanded interbeing: enabling the being together and with each other of human and more than human things in a responsible and ethical frame. The note immediately set up the expectation of an ethical relationship of care and equality between fleshed and material participants, and foresaw a reciprocity as the source of a new understanding of place and of things.

In this same ethical frame, the objects were not “used” to make a composition, in an instrumental or instrumentalised way. Instead, they were approached for their own agency: by the way they triggered, changed and transformed the space, its sounds, its visual appearance; the way they influenced how we moved around that space, and the way that things got moved around. The workshop moved through instructions, scores and improvisation to create different combinations and positionings of things and people, to rethink actions and re-actions, and what it means to place things: how that performs a site through installation, and how our performance, singular and together, of that installation changes with and because of it.

There was no actual sound in the sense of an articulated, amplified, or acoustically produced deliberate sounding. However, there was the sonic atmosphere of the building, and particularly the sound of crossing, walking through and “performing” the space by people in the group as well as by others, external to the event’s intentions, who moved in the open hallway, where, the installing and performing took place. And there was also Hughes’ request that preceded the gathering, that we translate the textures, materials, colours, density, etc. of our chosen objects into an auditory imagination, which would focus the subsequent demand to organise things not according to their visual appearance but in terms of this sonic aspect we had just rethought them through.

The space, a roughly 20 by 20-meter square on the first floor of the media block of the London College of Communication, has a very particular sonic atmosphere (see Fig. 2). Its wooden floor is cut from squares that in a rickety fashion move and sound the tread of every passer-through. To the side there is a metal grid, 2 meters wide along the wall, that sounds a change in footsteps and exposes the floor below to create a sense of vertigo and an awkward, insecure awareness of hovering above. At the same time, the Guggenheim-like but squared balconies of the floors above allow you to see the edges of each level to the ceiling three floors up, making you feel small and very much down below. The design of the place makes a structured view but creates an equal sound: representing a visual perspective from above, which is answered by an upward funnelled audition.



Fig. 2. Performing Objects. ©PoL.

In Hughes' description of the workshop she outlines how it will "explore different types of composition [...] and will discuss how different material combinations affect our responses to object and to space". Using the material qualities of the available objects (such as form, texture, colour, hardness, transparency, etc.) as metaphors or triggers for a sonic imagination that is not what the object might sound like, but what sound it conjures, participants were encouraged to place and replace objects, to rethink their position and how we position ourselves in relation to them and in relation to the space we are in. From there, we were asked to question how the resultant composition can be thought of in relation to our sonic environment, and they were invited to consider how the installation acts as a performance and how we perform in it.

On the day of the event, the 20 by 20-meter square and its upward scaled balconies had just been the site of the postgraduate students' final year show. Plasterboard boards and wood pieces were leaning against one of the walls still. Screws and nails lay in small piles at their foot. This is was place-in progress, in take down mode, and thus the items became inadvertent participants of the workshop. The community of students had left the remnants of their joint endeavour, into whose energy we stepped to install our own more temporary but equally collective "show."

We moved through this arrangement in pensive, private and yet communal actions (see Fig. 3). It was impossible to retain a solitary line as bodies and things co-create positions and positionings in conflict and in coherence: walking around objects, walking around bodies, trying to place things and ourselves in relation to an imaginary or possible sound; in relation to the space; and in relation to people, some of whom I knew and some I had only just met. We were all guided by the same basic instructions to work with what sound things conjure. And so we composed together, in relation to invisible and even inaudible but sonically imagined possibilities that are not absolute but given contingently, guided by Hughes' instructions and filtered by the place, by each other, by the people passing through, and by the remnants of an exhibition that had just taken place.

Our community of flesh and material bodies was tenuous and in process. It formed a community of practice whose communality is the moment of doing together rather than a belonging to a particular group or identity. We were communal in our listening, placing, and moving. Thus, we were a 'community-in progress' and entirely dependent on the desire of each to participate to keep the tension of this collective endeavour going: to compose an invisible sonic sphere from things that do not sound but have the potential to trigger sonic imaginaries, and which through these imaginaries hold the group in an invisible place composing it continually.

Discursively, the notion of a 'community-in progress' can be accessed through feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's idea of 'work-in progress': her interpretation of the posthuman subject not as an individuated, liberal subject, but as a relational identity (Braidotti 2019, 41). Following her, the sound-performing-community enabled by Hughes' instructions is in progress too. It is not an individuated, liberal and identifiable community but a relational dimension and activity. It is an ephemeral community of moving and swaying together to an invisible rhythm triggered by the imagined sound of arbitrarily but ethically chosen everyday objects, placed in relation to each other, to architecture, place and bodies.

The complex interactions of this community can be imagined through techno-feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway's idea of 'building worlds in concatenation', as a connecting of things, between humans and others, or what she calls unlike actors (Haraway 1992, 311). Similarly, in "Performing Objects", we performed place and things, and ourselves with Hughes. However, we did not string a world together on a line or in sequence. Instead, we silently moved and transformed, from one possible organisation into another, producing a possible world through disorderly interactions with objects, architecture and bodies; and from the tenuous sonic sense of how

we work together rather than as cause or outcome of a certain order of events. Because, as Haraway suggests, a cause or outcome, the speaking for or as, disengages the community through representation: “The represented must be disengaged from surrounding and constituting discursive and non-discursive nexuses and relocated in the authorial domain of the representative” (Haraway 1992, 311). Thus, it becomes organised in relation to the authority of normative language and loses its disorderly and polyphonic voice.

By contrast, the community that we were so tenuously performing in this workshop, between architecture, things and flesh, and in the non-image of an imagined sound, was not a representable community but a relational, entangled and contingent communing. Representation depends on (visual) distance and differentiation. It depends on the certainty of what things are in a lexical referentiality, which disregards their contingency and grants the authority to speak for them. In “Performing Objects”, however, everything is by the way it is with each other, by the way it is moved together, placed together, heard together, in an inaudible sound. Nobody and nothing was spoken for or referenced. Everything spoke through the movement it made, enabled or denied. In this context, bodies too lose their sense of form and image, their liberal identity, as I do not so much see you but feel you with me, as fleshly matter, same as that of things, passing by me, moving alongside and against me, to perform another contingent placing of ourselves with things placed: in our shared plurality.



Fig. 3. Performing Objects. ©PoL.



For this reason, and in this context, the images that accompany this text are not representations or documentation of the event. Instead, they can be engaged with as instructions to perform: to join the ephemeral community, to choose and place your own things from their possible but unheard sound, to create a space in chaotic concatenation with every other thing and body placing theirs. You are encouraged not to read the images, not to see their distancing representation, but to respond to their invisible sound that acts as a portal to the contingent community of doing, placing, performing the world together in a plural tone.

Given that the recordings of “Performing Objects” are missing from the archive of PoL events, and that this workshop happened three years ago, I have no recourse to documentation or reliable recall. Thus, for the purpose of this text I conjured, between images and architecture, from what I remember and from feelings that are confirmed and confused by the images, a sonic fiction that is an unreliable memory but a sonic truth. It is the truth of what is relevant still now, established in my re-performance of the event, guided by the images and by instructions: creating a knowledge of the event not from reading the details I have about it, but from the practice of restaging it now, to reach an understanding of it as a physical and relational knowing, between then, now, things and space, architecture and how we install and perform in it. The aim is not to ventriloquise Hughes, or the objects, or any of the participants, but to make room for their movements to matter now.

To stage this re-performance, I decide to email Sarah to ask her for the instructions and scores she shared on the day, so I might follow her intentions more closely. To give a frame to the material and physical memory of people moving around with me and with objects, and around objects, making a new place from an imaginary and plural sound.

She answers promptly, telling me that she too cannot really remember very much. That it was a long time ago and she cannot recall individual instructions or what she might have said for an introduction. But then she helpfully goes on to explain why and how she came to do such events. She mentions that they form a kind of ecology of spatial relations, to mobilise things in order to create a collective composition from between actual and material bodies. She wants to “weave a sociability” and try “manifestations of mutuality” to reach a “common language” (Sarah Hughes, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

This process, so she explains, is how she normally works on installations by herself, producing different spatial organisations of things to form a sculptural work that is visual in appearance but has a sonic sense and a per-

formative demand. Similarly, this PoL event also produces a different organisation of things and bodies as temporal sculptures performing space. Unlike her solitary work, however, such a collaborative installing never finds a certain form, but continues to perform what Hughes calls the “chaos of collaboration”. Together, the solitary and communal processes unperform the distinction between space and time, me and you, us and objects, and instead reperform them as simultaneous pluralities: as a dimensionality of invisible and indivisible relationships between bodies, sounds and things that create place as chaotic expanse that is not without intent or structure, but without a singular form. Collectively walking, listening, and experiencing this expanse, allows us to reconsider, beyond art and performance, the politics of how we live together, as a politics of what world, what socio-political dimensionality, we generate from our plural interactions and interactivities: listening, placing, and moving, paying attention to each other and other things.

The workshop wasn't intended to be about sound, but composition, and listening as a paying attention to (Sarah Hughes, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

### **Walking with Crickets, Lisa Hall, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016** **Reflections by Mark Peter Wright**



Fig. 4. Walking with Crickets. ©PoL.

Sat in a dark room bodies shuffled with anticipation, chairs creaked among the omniscient hum of a projector as artist Lisa Hall presented her practice-based research (see Fig. 4). We time travelled a thousand years backwards, to the Tang Dynasty, China and learnt about the trend of keeping live crickets as part of domestic and personal space. Crickets became desirable because their stridulating calls were deemed a pleasant sonorous addition for both dwelling and peripatetic acts. Hall tuned our attention towards the latter in that crickets were often concealed in clothes; their interwoven sonic identity became mobile through the act of walking. An ancient precursor to portable media, live crickets were deployed as hubristic sonic accessories, performing an intervention into everyday life.

After 45 minutes to one hour of presentation we were told we would be going outside, to walk and listen together, with a digital cricket of our own. Hall invited the group to approach a table where tote bags were laid out. Inside each was a small set of speakers that had the pre-recorded sound of a cricket uploaded, ready for playback via an MP3 device. The recording was made by Hall and would be on a constant loop for our journey. We carried these bags tentatively. Some digital crickets were moved into coat pockets as the group filtered out through the ambient space of the London College of Communication, each participant shaped as if holding a living organism. Exiting the building, security beeps merged with the shuffle of bodies, traffic and the high frequency pulse of electronic purring. We were outdoors and fast becoming a stridulating corpus.

The primary method deployed during the event was soundwalking, a practice with a rich history and contemporary legacy in sound arts. From the 1970's onwards, a mixture of art historical, anthropological and social science contexts began to accommodate the need for multisensual and participative approaches into their research praxis. A pioneer of soundwalking, Hildegard Westerkamp describes the method simply as walking through an environment whilst paying attention to listening. She states, "no matter what form a soundwalk takes, its focus is to rediscover and reactivate our sense of hearing" (Westerkamp 2007, 49). Having been on various soundwalks in the past, I was drawn towards the interplay of individual and group, not necessarily what a soundwalk is, but more how it co-creates relations and actions. Soundwalks are often full of rules and regulations such as "no talking." These codes of conduct can, at worse, eliminate participatory potential. Too many rules, and listening becomes a hierarchical regime that bludgeons participation into a corner. Hall's invitation, however, was open ended. The only demand was that we walk and listen with our electronic critters, individually, and as a unit, in relation to the city and events we encountered along the way.

Zigzagging the streets of South London, 20 to 30 people were brought together through the activity of listening, stretched apart by geography; and connected with the sound of crickets (see Fig. 5). Some members of the public noticed our group, others were too engrossed in their own portable listening habits. Sound offered an invisible infrastructure for participative action, not always known but nevertheless apparent, agential and affective. Our stridulating team drifted apart, coalesced at traffic lights and disbanded under bridges. As time went on, the group became more playful with its communal yet dispersed nature, actively gathering and sounding in small groups, guided through the non-verbal impulse to collectively amplify. Overhead, trains fused with cricket song and the stomp of feet. Participation was thickened by and with the sonic, as a plethora of human and nonhuman identities blurred. At its most physically disparate, the group was stretched beyond vision, yet the electronic cricket song managed to keep participation constant: the mutability of sound's long reach enacted an elastic band of connection.

Experimental educator Elizabeth Ellsworth notes the importance of moving from conventional indoor settings to more irregular or "anomalous spaces of learning" (Ellsworth 2005, 7). For Ellsworth, mixing media, architecture and social space is crucial in shaping participation and consequently, learning. Hosting an event such as Hall's within the milieu of public space entangled bodies, sounds, sights, and smells; transformed the individual experience into something more collective and communal. Participation became a relation of affects that may be said to produce a "sensational pedagogy", a phrase Ellsworth borrows from educational scholar Stephanie Springgay (2011), which alludes to extra-human sensory knowledge. This was meaning made by doing. In the flux of soundwalking, as an anomalous space of learning, we were embroiled in what participation did rather than what it meant. Shifting focus from the concrete and material, what might we say of the sonic? What of participation and learning made with and through sound? Can we think about the anomalous task of listening as a sensory liberation of all that is solid?



Fig. 5. Walking with Crickets. ©PoL.

There were no visual sign posts or semantic clues for participation, no leader or map. Just the fragile, intimate and shared understanding that we were sounding together, whether heard or not. In this sense, participation can be understood through the sonic: an itinerant medium with both subjective and transboundary affects. As environmental and electronic sounds pierced bodies, materials and imaginations it was clear that while we might have all been participating in cricket sound, every experience brought its own unique perspective, there could be no one homogenous story, no one truth.

Carrying the call of a cricket expanded perspective, from human to more-than-human, including the technological. Over the course of the walk I developed an ethical commitment to the creature in my bag. Clearly, there was no animal inside, just small speakers, a playback device and wires (see Fig. 6). But the emanating sound engendered a sensibility of care towards the bag and its sounding presence, towards the group, and towards each and every thing I encountered. Care did not stay in the bag. It leaked with the porosity of sound and its polyphonic impacts and effects. On the most absurd scale, I found myself listening to traffic lights, and becoming curious about levels of programming and labour otherwise hidden; the human hands and technological codes that wire such infrastructures; sonic signs that instigate warning or invite permission to cross. I checked myself and those around. "Were we all ok?"

Cricket song moved out into the world but it also moved within me. It prompted questions and dilemmas. Could the group hear me? Could I really hear them? Did the public register its presence and what was the artificial song tuning my attention towards? Was I listening *to*, or *with* the cricket? Perhaps most curious of all was the feeling of companionship that evolved with each twist of the road and stridulating call. Sound became more than an ornate accessory. It was a companion that I felt entrusted with and responsible for.

Discussing her work on companion species, Haraway (2008, 35) explores the “multispecies knots” between humans, animals and technology. For Haraway (2008, 41), such knots are entangled and disentangled through care and accountability, the point is not necessarily to celebrate complexity but to respond and participate. Companion species such as dogs, wolves and genetic hybrids, generate lively encounters for Haraway, often within asymmetrical relations of power. They are negotiated through touch, as hand and fur interface ethical thinking and commitment. Haraway (2008, 36) asks “whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?”

In thinking with Haraway’s work we come to consider the nuances of a companion sonic species. The electronic critter in my bag had no fur to stroke. When my hand reached inside I felt the anonymous surface of technology. It was not through its visual and tactile appearance but with and through the sound of cricket song that I came to care. It was not the touch of skin but the touch of sound. Elastic, piercing and porous, cricket song provided an invitation to notice bodies, buildings and the tapestry of sounds it comingled with. Its rhythmic electronic purring merged with bus wheels, moved in walkways, nested in park spaces. Never quite still, it shifted between my bag and the environment. Moreover, it kept the group in communal connection without having to use words or signs. If we became too stretched and lost each other, one could listen for cricket song like a signal or flare. Sound functioned as a wayfinding device, a call and response organism for participation.

In an email exchange Hall explained the intimate practicalities of the companion sonic species she was entangled with.

I kept them as my pets for a while in a large plastic box with airholes, sawdust and egg cartons. I had about ten, but only one was a singer. I think the heat of the studio encouraged it to let loose. So, the recording is a single cricket’s solo song (Lisa Hall, personal communication, September 16, 2020).

Perhaps the individual voice is the reason I felt so connected to its song? Yet this singular sound is no more authentic due to the documentary conditions hinted at by Hall. The fact that a cricket has to be recorded in a studio tells its own story in that “the field” is as much an acoustically treated room as it is an outdoor environment. Sound’s duplicitous nature makes it ripe for creative interpretation as Hall went on to tell me:

film and tv portrayals of crickets have over emphasised cricket song into our ears. So, there was some editing involved to make them more recognisable as the on-screen insects we’re familiar with (Lisa Hall, personal communication, September 16, 2020).

The sonic companion sonic species that I and others walked and listened with, was no more truthful because of sound. In fact, the opposite was the case as the sonorous charms of a cricket brought me further from the real in terms of verifiable origins.

Haraway (2016) suggests moving away from self-actualizing (auto-poiesis) modes of knowledge production is required for staying with the trouble of increasing political and ecological crises. Her emphasis rests on the term “sympoieses” describing it as “a simple word; it means ‘making-with’. Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (2016, 58). Haraway goes on to say sympoiesis “is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it” (2016, 58). Similarly, sonic participation is a making-with process, it is shared, relational and cannot exist in and of itself. The medium teaches us this as sound needs contact, friction, and the coming together of things to exist at the mechanical level. Yet it also makes-without. Sound constantly kicks us out of representational meaning, it operates at scales beyond the human, and never sits still.

I was no more in the cricket sound than I was outside of it, unaware of its situated and specific meaning as a biological process. Cricket calls can function outside the human range of hearing (20-20,000 Hz), more so as this range narrows with age. Specialist equipment such as bat detectors can be deployed as a prosthetic aid to reach into what is otherwise inaudible. Post-production allows out of scope sounds to be scaled back into something we humans can audition. The inaudibility of cricket sound reveals the edge of the collective composition. It is a zone of difference and shifting accessibility that needs to be transposed or translated to enable participation. Polyphony must therefore consider the radical space of alterity within its claims, particularly when dealing with the proposition of a companion sonic species. Reality might be physically shared but it is experienced otherwise depending on perceptive scales of the human and nonhuman.



Fig. 6. Walking with Crickets. ©PoL.

Hall's cricket walk was a symposium event, formed in the anomalous spaces of media and environmental listening. Companion sonic species—cricket song—extended the polyphony of relations and meaning making. The effect was one of estrangement rather than immersion, unknowing rather than outright certainty. Participation was fluid, collectively distributed and communally present. Boundaries of the human and nonhuman, audible and inaudible shifted throughout. I was no more in, than I was outside of sound, and with that revelation I came to appreciate that sound prepares me for non-dualist thinking and doing; for noise as much as signal. Holding and moving with a companion sonic species plugged into so much more than me, identity morphed and merged, knowledge and authority constantly ebbed and flowed. To re-wire Haraway's guiding question on touch, it might be useful to engineer a similar query of the sonic as a final listening prompt: who and what do I hear, when I hear my electronic cricket?

What I heard was not so much the sound of cricket song but the ethical prompts and questions it encouraged in me. I heard care, power, participation, community, action, hesitation. I listened with uncertainty and nurtured responsible curiosity, towards myself and other species, across scales.



---

## **Conclusion**

The two PoL events reflected on in this essay provide a framework and opportunity to engage with the participatory and polyphonic potential of communal sonic practices: thinking and doing as Haraway's "unlike actors", from the plural and mobile dimension of sound, with other bodies and things. In this way, both case studies expand and rethink what bodies are, what things are, by how they are constituted in relation to each other, in progress and in transformation: in polyphonic simultaneity; through a compositional intent and in terms of an ethics of care; and with the hope for benevolence and the danger of abuse. They permit us to practice the sonic not so much as sound but as an access point to Hughes' invisible "chaos of collaboration" between material and flesh bodies. And help us to consider how we position ourselves and things vis-à-vis each other, how we listen and walk together, not organised by visual cues but by the ethical prompts of sound and the demands of its uncertainty. In this way both these workshops created an opportunity to re-think an expected composition and singular trajectory: generating a plural space and plural paths, from a shared sonic practice in the world. Thus, they engendered the possibility of a being-otherwise in sound, that is relational and practice-based and provides a participatory sense of a polyphonic world.

In both events, we were continually performing a different communication, listening between bodies, crickets and technology; between architecture, objects and their possible sounds. The interactions were being triggered by written or verbal instructions, couched in worded documentation, titled, spoken or heard as sentences and seemingly represented in photographs. However, both events did not articulate and explain, but performed and composed, sculpted and walked, so that as embodied bodies and bodied materialities, we performed the "chaos of collaboration" that is the radical practice of a sonic sociality as the being together of human and more-than-human things in simultaneous and plural sounding and listening. In this way, both events produced a community of practice, whose communality is contingent and temporal and needs to be composed continually without the expectation of a finishing point or outcome. Instead, they remain unfinished, unrepresentable and untheorisable, and produce a sonic fiction that generates its truths from practice, continually. To reach its meaning, the work needs to stay in practice: it needs to be re-performed on the body of the object and the flesh, to retain relevance and agency and to sound its polyphony as polymorphy—as plural formlessness.

For this reason, this text does not try to theorise or conclude on what has happened. It does not summarise an outcome or define what the polyphonic potential of these events is. Instead, it suggests modes of practice to experience it: to become aware of it, to hear and feel its contingent potential in a continuous performance of the plural sociality of the everyday.

The workshops' social and communal practices generate a relational sense of being in the world and of the world being a relational place. It makes thinkable a register of time and of bodies, solitary and together, producing a material corpus that makes different forms and different shapes to know the world by its plural and reciprocal complexity. This "sympoetic doing" depends on participation for its communication and comprehension. It is in doing that we know each other, the crickets and the world: knowing in listening as "paying attention to and with". This knowledge might remain elusive or even unintelligible within conventional and expected modes of sense. However, unlike semantic comprehension, it has the capacity to invite everything into its doing. Since, while participative sonic knowledge stands in excess of, and is unintelligible to conventional language, it is able to hold the inexhaustibility and inclusivity of sound as a currency of doing together, as a being-otherwise, that leads to a knowing-otherwise of a boundless community in its polyphonic potential.

### Bibliography

1. Braidotti Rosi (2019), *Posthuman Knowledge*, Polity Press: Cambridge.
2. Ellsworth Elizabeth (2005), *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy*, Routledge: New York and London.
3. Haraway Donna (1992), "Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others", [in:] L. Grossberg *et al.* (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge: New York, pp. 295-337.
4. Haraway Donna J. (2008), *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
5. Haraway Donna J. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press: Durham, NC.
6. Springgay Stephanie (2011), "The Chinatown Foray as Sensational Pedagogy", *Curriculum Inquiry*, 41(5), pp. 636-656.
7. Westerkamp Hildegard (2007), "Soundwalking", [in:] A. Carlyle (ed.), *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, Double Entendre: Paris, pp. 49-54.