

GRAZING

on the grandmaocene

tina

stefano u

It takes a village
to raise an artist.

ACKNOWLEDGE MENTS

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1 *These songs take place in the Greek underworld, the Rebetika is a sonic practice of socio-economically displaced people from the Greek-Turkish war in 1920. There, poetic pathos was made of words and scales, called "droimi," ("roads" in Greek). These droimi were born in the hash dens and prisons of the urban diaspora on the coastal towns of Greece. The immigrants who sung Rebetika were known as Rebetis. The Rebetis were "living outside the accepted standards of the traditional Greek society" and with their songs and culture, they challenged the upper and middle classes. They would sing with hoarse quiet voices, "unforced, one after the other, each singer adding a verse which often bore no relation to the previous verse..."[1] Tina Stefanou, "Archipelago" (unpublished manuscript, 13, June 2019), pdf files.

[1] Elias Petropoulos, *Rebetika: Songs of The Greek Underworld*, (London: Alcyon Art Editions, 1992), 13.

NOTES TO THE READER

This paper consists of a series of what I call 'Travelling Verses'. The verses take their form and inspiration from the Greek folk song tradition "Rebetika."¹ These songs are structured by the continual adding of verses, which creates a stream of lyrics that are linked, but do not necessarily relate to one another. My practice follows the philosophy of *tentacular thinking* from Donna Haraway's, *Staying with the Trouble*.² It embraces unexpected complexities, collaborations and life histories, and goes beyond individualism. This practice is based on the far-reaching feely fingers of tentacular vision, which is made up of multispecies' stories. Haraway calls this the *Chthulucene*.³ The approach here consists of "theory, experience, and critique stitched together,"⁴ and therefore, interconnections between my art practice and the everyday are not interrupted by concrete conclusions, or a fixation on finding an answer. Instead, my observations are shaped as a travelling family of words that herd through an ongoing cross-species and cross-generational song. My practice is interdisciplinary: I work with my family, animals, a variety of musicians and voices. I explore autoethnography to understand my practice, using the diary as my experiential record and critical sounding board. This method is qualitative and intimate, a doorway into processes, human lives and relationships, and comes from grazing on ideas, and putting them into practice.

S. Jones Holman, "Creative Selves/Creative Cultures: Critical Autoethnography, Performance, and Pedagogy," in *Creative Selves / Creative Cultures: Creativity, Education and the Arts*, ed. S. Jones Holman and M. Pruyn, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5. https://doi-org.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/10.1007/978-3-319-47527-1_1.

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Donna Haraway and Martha Kenney, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies," eds. Heather Davis and Elzanne Turpin, (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016) 229-244. https://monoskop.org/Donna_Haraway.

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In the *Travelling Verses*, I largely focus on the voice of my grandmother, which functions as a living map. Her voice becomes, in the words of Rosi Braidotti, “a transformative account of the self.”⁵ I also focus on my relationship with three elderly horses, whom I have been collaborating with throughout this year. I am interested in the correlation between the two and the significance of grandparents’ contribution to the social, cultural and biological success of human and non-human species.

I have also added a sonic component to accompany the reading of this paper, with an audio recording where I read the opening section, *Prelude to grandma*, and closing section *Coda (exit music)*, and in between these read moments, there is a recording of sounds from my local environment, combined with some musical instruments to accompany the remainder of the verses.⁶ This soundtrack goes for one hour, allowing time for the verses to be read, before the *Coda* part is heard. This timing is approximate, so if you are a faster reader, you may like to skip ahead to the *Coda* at the end. Please click on the ***listen here*** prompt next to the *Prelude*, and this will take you to a SoundCloud link where you can press play to hear the track.

**This is a prelude to my Greek grandmother.
I address her in a hybrid vernacular of Greek and English,
and like her, the reader is subjected to language gaps as a non-Greek speaker.**



prelude to grandma

listen
here

I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT AFTA POU KANO. YOU SEE ME IN AND OUT OF YOUR SPITI, BATHING, DRIVING STO SKOLIO. YOU MAYIREPSI FOR ME, FEEDING ME YOUR MENU OF PHASOLAKIA, SPANACORIZO, KAI PITA. I AM ALWAYS GRATEFUL FOR IT EVEN IF I APPEAR BUSY. SOMETIMES WHEN I HEAR THE PAPAKIA, I THINK IT'S YOU. YOU AND THE PAPAKIA HAVE THE SAME TONE OF VOICE. ONCE I RAN OUT THINKING YOU WERE IN TROUBLE, BUT IT WAS JUST THE PAPAKIA. IT'S AS IF YOUR VOICE AND THE PAPAKIA HAVE BECOME ONE. THE REASON I ASKED YOU TO BE IN MY ARTWORK IS

BECAUSE I
REMEMBER

hi grandma

WANT TO
YOU IN

MANY DIFFERENT WAYS WHEN YOU ARE GONE. I WANT TO HEAR YOU SING AND I ALSO WANT TO CREATE MOMENTS BETWEEN US THAT ARE BEYOND THE EVERYDAY. EVEN THOUGH AYAPAO THE EVERYDAY MAZINESS OF US. SINCE I HAVE MOVED BACK TO MELVOURNI I HAVE BEEN SO HAPPY SPENDING MORE TIME WITH YOU. AYAPAO HEARING YOU SING, TALKING TO YOU WHILE YOU ARE SOWING, AND WATCHING YOU MAKE KOURABETHES. I FIND YOUR CONSTANT WORRY FOR OTHERS UPSETTING BECAUSE YOU ARE PUTTING OTHERS AHEAD OF YOURSELF. I SEE YOU GET KOURAZMENI – YOU USE A LOT OF ENERGY THAT COULD BE KEPT FOR YOU. YOU CAN BE A STUBBORN MULE – WITH THIS NEVER-ENDING LOVE FOR YOUR FAMILY. WHEN I WAS WITH THE ALOYA, I FELT THIS GENTLE STRENGTH THAT I FEEL FROM YOU. I THINK OF ALL THE ALOYA THAT HAVE CARRIED ANTHROPI, KAI PRAMATA ACROSS DIFFERENT PLACES. I MAKE ARTWORK ANAPOTHA, I HAVE THE ITHEA, KAI KOUREVI APO MESA MOU AND THEN I SPIT IT OUT. IT'S ONLY AFTER THAT I SEE WHAT IT IS AND EVEN AFTER THAT, THE ARTWORK STILL HAS KATI NA PI. IT IS A PROCESS OF TRYING TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING MEYALO AND ENTANGLED, LIKE THE IKOYENIA.

TRavELLiNG

VerseS

Verse one: Horse play

I step outside my caravan on my grandmother's farm in Wattle Glen, Victoria. My ears come alive and ground me to the environment internally and externally. I hear the omnipresent ear-tingling polyphonic choir of crickets. I hear the nearby ambiguous ruffling of branches and shrubs. In this moment, I reflect on the previous night when I heard my grandmother singing a prayer in her mother tongue - her voice was hoarse but sweet. I witnessed a private moment between her singing self and her non-singing self. She is losing her hearing; she was unaware that I had entered her house. I paused to get a glimpse of her inner world. I could hear it in her phrasing, her pulse, her vocal texture. There is a youthfulness to her sound - she is not putting on a performative voice; she is her voice.

Verse two: Get back on the horse

There is no silence, only life singing through the farm, droning critters create a bed for the other sounds to emerge. Calls of the night bird scratch the air, and distant hums from dinosaur machines echo through the valley. The way I am listening is determined by a hierarchy of senses, favouring the *natural* sounds over machine sounds. As I spread my perception across the sonic landscape, Timothy Morton's words in *Ecology Without Nature*⁷ come to mind; "the very idea of 'nature' will have to wither away in an 'ecological' state of human society."⁸ There is a danger in representing nature through artistic and writing praxis, for it to become a romantic reaction. Morton argues that the modern idea of *nature* is a symptomatic reaction to the despoliation brought by European capitalism.⁹ This creates an ideological position which mystifies ecology into: *nature* as balanced and harmonious and human as a disruptive hubris – placing nature on a problematic plinth.¹⁰ Tucked away in our abstractions, romanticisation creates a distance between the human and the living Earth. It limits the *response-ability*¹¹ required in encountering places and beings. It is an imitation of ecology, but not ecology itself. Morton calls this reaction *ecomimetic*.¹² I observe my own ecomimetism and wonder how does one live with a *deep ecology*?¹³

7 Timothy Morton's, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

8 Noel Castree, "Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics." *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 4 (2010): 539. doi:10.1177/0309132509340971.

9 Castree "Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics." 539. University Press, 2007).

10 Slavoj Žižek, "Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets," directed by Astra Taylor, May 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_K_79O21hk.

I am affected by the idea of *nature* that has been passed down through the canon of art, and this affects the way I listen to the soundscape on my grandmother's farm.

This problematic and dynamic relationship between ecology and the concept of nature parallels the entangled interdependence of theory and storytelling. Working with my grandmother's voice is not about arriving at stable and finished theories, rather it is engaging with the voice as a shifting material animated by feeling and imagination.¹⁴ I ask again: how does one live with a *deep ecology*? I may begin to answer this question by observing the stories I tell about the ecologies I inhabit, and the social relationships I engage with. Perhaps living with a *deep ecology* is experiencing interventions within my art praxis, which includes sharing stories with non-human and cross-generational voices.

11 Response-ability "is an ethic of care and justice, premised on a relational ontology rather than bounded individualism and competitiveness" Bozalek, Vivienne & Bayat, Abdullah & Gachago, Daniela & Motala, Siddique & Mitchell, Veronica. "A Pedagogy of Response-ability," in *Socially Just Pedagogies: Posthumanist, Feminist and Materialist Perspectives in Higher Education*, eds. Rosi Braidotti, Vivienne Bozalek, Tamara Shefer and Michalinos Zembylas. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018) 97. doi: 10.5040/9781350032910.ch-006.

12 Castree "Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics." 539.

13 *Deep ecology* is a notion from Environmental Philosophy that provides a holistic approach to facing world problems. It brings together thinking, feeling, spirituality and action. "It involves moving beyond the individualism of Western culture towards also seeing ourselves as part of the Earth. Ecology is not just seen as something 'out there', but something we are part of and have a role to play in." Chris Johnstone, "What is Deep Ecology," The Green Fuse/Topics, accessed 12 October 2019, <https://www.thegreenfuse.org/johnstone.htm>.

14 Holman "Creative Selves/Creative Cultures: Critical Autoethnography, Performance, and Pedagogy," 6.

Verse three: Flogging a dead horse

In *The Tuning of the World*,¹⁵ R. Murray Schaffer asks: which sounds do we want to “preserve, encourage, multiply?”¹⁶ As we filter and ignore some sounds and give precedence to others, Schaffer states “that only a total appreciation of the acoustic environment can give us the resources for improving the orchestration of the world soundscape.”¹⁷ I think of my grandmother’s soundscape located in her voice and its aging descent, with its own vocal history coming to an end. I hear a gentle extinction taking place, a final epoch of trotting horses and “rattling jolts of carts on the road”¹⁸ that we seldom hear anymore. How can I preserve, encourage and multiply my grandmother’s sounds?

Through the qualities of her voice, I am reminded of non-linguistic utterances that index presence beyond word; the sounds of wild and domestic animals, and of all those that a human can make “without either speaking or singing.”¹⁹ In the process of exploring the multidimensionality of voice, I begin to treat the world as a “microcosmic musical composition.”²⁰ Schaffer contends that this position allows for an appreciation of sound beyond spaces like the concert hall. By implication, this also extends to gallery spaces. In listening to my grandmother’s throat, I am situated in the soundscape and socialscape of her and my entangled life history.



Verse four: Get off your high horse

A child of the Greek civil war, my grandmother came to Australia as an economic refugee in 1954. She began her Australian life in the rural immigration camps on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. Throughout her life, she encountered multitudes of sonic ecologies, such as the changing environment from Greece to Australia. The air, forests, water, plains, birds, and insects which constructed the geography and climate of her life were fragmented. John Berger calls emigration a type of dismantling of the center of the world, a movement “into a lost, disorientation of fragments.”²¹ I contend, that in listening closely to my grandmother’s voice I will hear these fragments and traces of her ecological stories.

Grandmother’s voice is paradoxically metaphorical and literal; it is immediate and at the same time it is a cultural constitution. My grandmother has a relationship to the environment and sound, and also a direct relationship with me through the character of her voice. Her voice leaves an imprint on me and informs my microcosm of making and composing. This effect is similar to the way the ecological soundscape imprints and impacts the experience of the listener. Through a system of archetypal sounds like bird song, cicada rhythms, and the ocean—the sense of self and soundscape become inextricably linked.²²

Andrew Whitehouse unpacks this psychological effect of sound and selfhood when speaking of sonic disappearance. He references the account of a farmer’s experience when encountering the absence of bird song after a spraying program was implemented to control fire ants in his town. The local residents experienced a shock that was “unexpected and unnerving.”²³ Their lives were accompanied by these familiar companions and highlights the emotional effect of changing sonic ecologies on the listener. Whitehouse argues that there are “symbolic and moral connotations of listening to birds in the Anthropocene that follow from their iconic and indexical grounding in places.”²⁴ This produces a series of *anxious semiotics*, where even positive affiliations can have “uncertain implications.”²⁵

I feel these implications when listening to my grandmother’s voice as I witness her eventual disappearance.

21 John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 57.

22 Andrew Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene, The Anxious Semiotics of Sound in a Human-Dominated World,” *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, (2015), 55. <http://www.environmentalhumanities.org/arch/wol6.3.pdf>.

23 Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene,” 56.

24 Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene,” 56.

25 Whitehouse, “Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene,” 56.

Verse five: Straight from the horse's mouth

A voice reveals its age, cultural ties, personal afflictions: it is a direct message of its place in the world. It is an indicator of the social and environmental conditions which produce it.²⁶ I become an earwitness to grandmother's sonic time capsule. Through her voice she creates a series of signals that are "events heard not objects seen."²⁷ Listening is a way of touching "lower frequencies" that become "tactile vibrations," a way of touching at a distance.²⁸ The voice travels through culture, history and time - I touch my Grandmother's voice.

I am mapping a vibrational force that is located within my grandmother's voice, which is part of larger historical and cultural affordances. In this mapping, I begin to touch a part of my own history. Grandmother's voice becomes a time travelling technology into prior environments and social togetherness. In this localised space, the ear points inward and I can listen to the voice of an aging female Greek immigrant that has largely been left out of social discourse.

In the process of finding ways to work with my grandmother's voice, I take cues from Anita Gibbs and her research practices with family-based social work. She speaks of the importance of storytelling from personal frontiers of lived experience, and how that may not qualify as research, as the "business of the researcher is to deconstruct and reconstruct."²⁹ In the process of analysis, voices can be lost but found through storytelling where the "voice of the voiceless" are heard, and the possibilities for collaboration emerge. Writing about family life histories and experiences become empowering agents for the "voiceless to speak,"³⁰ thus being with my grandmother becomes an act of loving translation instead of speaking on her behalf.

In the words of John Farnham via Irene Poutakidis "You're the voice try to understand it make a noise and make it clear."³¹

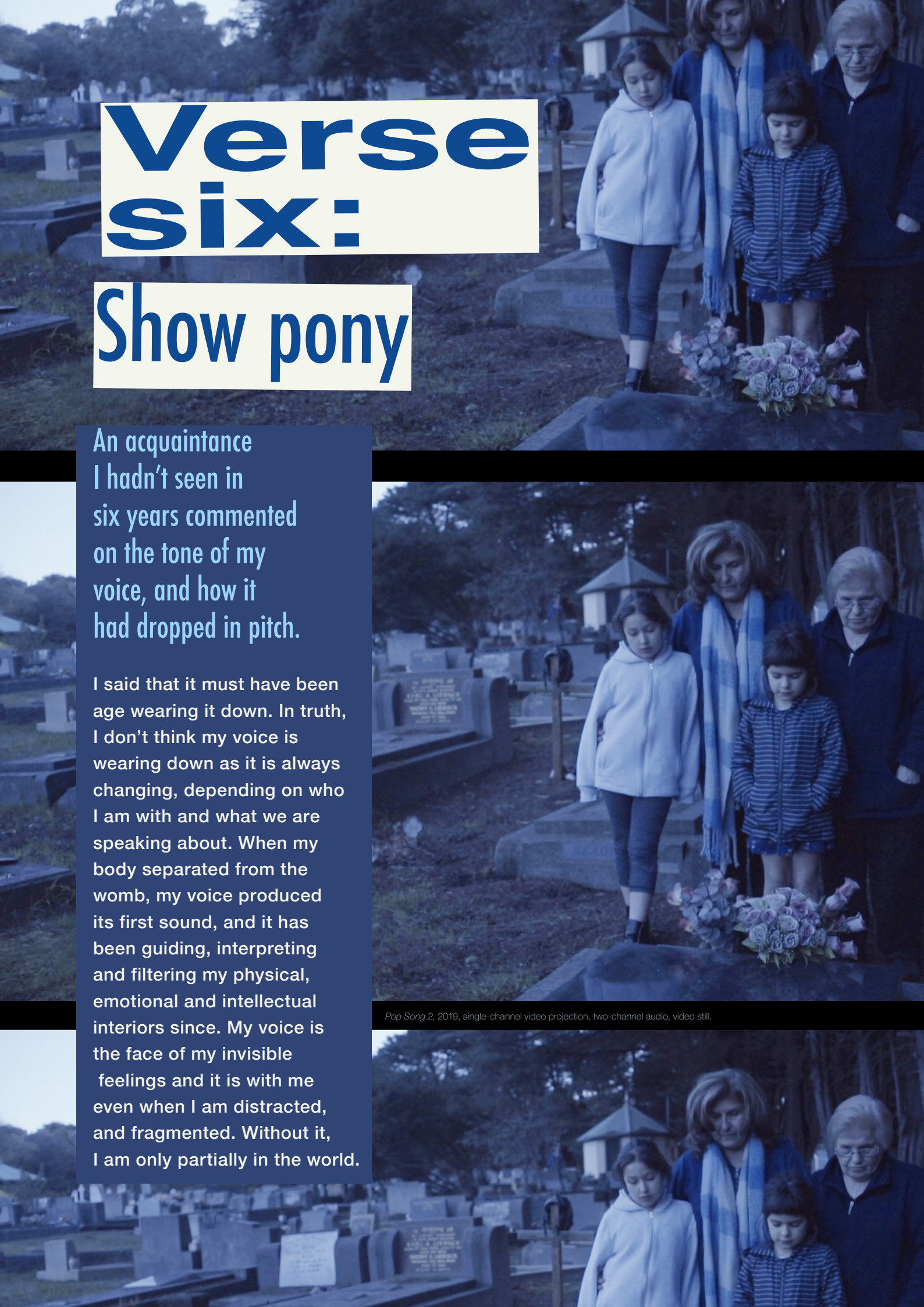
Verse six:

Show pony

An acquaintance I hadn't seen in six years commented on the tone of my voice, and how it had dropped in pitch.

I said that it must have been age wearing it down. In truth, I don't think my voice is wearing down as it is always changing, depending on who I am with and what we are speaking about. When my body separated from the womb, my voice produced its first sound, and it has been guiding, interpreting and filtering my physical, emotional and intellectual interiors since. My voice is the face of my invisible feelings and it is with me even when I am distracted, and fragmented. Without it, I am only partially in the world.

Pop Song 2, 2019, single-channel video projection, two-channel audio, video still.



The voice is “in a narrow sense is distinctively human,”³² and bares the tentacular sensual fingers of Haraway’s *Chthulucene*. This figure is composed of connections which help us to “avoid the fantasy of the one true meaning.”³³ The tentacles represent a singing of the world, that transforms the voice into a *string figure*: a worldly force with an entwining and curving hyperbolic presence.³⁴ The auditory dimension dissolves the boundaries of subject and object, inanimate and animate, where an “interchange of vibrancy” occurs.³⁵ This expands the audible into a polyphonic force. These metaphors are not just a poetic attempt, but a serious reflection on cross-species *intra-action*,³⁶ where vocal phenomena signals a deep sense in which all “things of the world, have voices.”³⁷ This also speaks to Karen Barad’s theory of *Agential Realism*, where the intermingling of matter and people produce a mutual “constitution of entangled agencies,”³⁸ where the voices of the world become invitations for encountering *Other*.³⁹ Sound is never one thing. The auditory dimension breaks down the romantic notion of the individual as an island, rather voices “exist because of the existence of given interactions.”⁴⁰

My voice is a central part of my artistic practice and it has connected me to people, animals, disciplines and environments across cultures. My accent and intonational flourishes scatter across the room, revealing the manner of the self. These resonances speak to sonic phenomena that expand into forms that encompass, light, shadow, colour, shape and perspective. These multiple associations within the voice speak of an intimate architecture, where the voice is felt and heard through its invisible forest terrain.

Everything has a voice, when you tap a table or shut a door, your earlids open to the *voice of things*. Among these voices there is an opportunity for sonic play which extends the voice into an instrument of praxis.⁴¹ In his philosophy of listening, Don Ihde describes sonic play as a “kind of music to the things of the world,”⁴² where “high or fine art is a refinement of the discovered possibilities in the voice of things.” This discovery is not limited to mere language of words but rather, the material qualities of voices themselves. The voice transports modes, methods, relationships and systems from one location to another. It is a direct device for moving knowledge across materials and places. Furthermore, songs have the power to transfer information and language, reformulating the “same phenomena in different vocabularies.”⁴⁴ Voices of the animal kingdom are more than material qualities of voice, they are instead expressions of “action and emotion.”⁴⁵ This mode of expression is exemplified in whale song. After listening and recording

Verse seven: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth



Grandma and Buster, 2019, digital photograph.

whale song for years, acoustic biologist Katy Payne discovered that each aspect of the songs was continually evolving. Furthermore, she suggests that “all the whales in the ocean or in that singing population were changing their songs in the same way.”⁴⁶ Through a process of migration and imitation, one phrase can evolve over a five-year period. This sonic migration is an example of cultural evolution in a non-human animal, where voice is at its center.

This slow continual becoming and unfolding of song speaks of other time conditions that are outside of human histories; where Earth and other animals operate within different time ecologies. Furthermore, the term *deep time* describes a course of slow geological events that shape and shift the Earth. The terms *deep time* and *deep space* ask humanity to listen for and confront the limits of our understanding.⁴⁷ When I listen, perhaps I can hear these deep ecologies of time and culture as constitutive aspects in my grandmother's voice.

Verse Eight: Hung like a horse

Puns and other “wordly associations”⁴⁸ can be a medium of understanding the connections between sounds in human language and animal language production. For instance the pun ‘horses feathers’ (*now you try and say it*) is devoid of logic but produces a quality of sound

*hoss
sft
hh
hs
s,*

that sings to what Walter Redfern calls “raw animal music.”⁴⁹ The sonic production of the pun, and the reaction to it can illicit “toothy, lispy, guttural

grunts and warbles.”⁵⁰ The pun becomes subversive where both the reaction and sonic production of the pun, points to an origin of language. This type of play speaks to a deep quality of sounds, rather than structured and refined linguistic conventions.

The threading of non-linguistic mumbles, yelps, and phonetic associations lie in the core of vocal production. Jonathan Culler argues that puns produce new connective tissues of meaning, by disturbing the methodical process of labeling and perceiving the world through the Word.⁵¹ The use of puns by the artist Karen Bolender are an

example of such transformation. She uses the word ass in relation to her American Spotted Ass (donkey): where she walked with her ass for seven weeks through the Southern United States of America. During her slow durational and becoming-with ass performance entitled *Unnamed ‘Aliass,’* she realised that the word ass had a powerful effect because of its double meaning. She says the wordly play of the ass becomes an instrument of “ethical, aesthetic, even ontological action.”⁵² There is an embodiment that comes alive through

the pun, where words can shift across a wide range of bodies and spaces. For Bolender, puns are a type of music that destabilise “the authority of logos and makes our most sensible pronouncements precarious.”⁵³ Thus transforming our relationships with words into malleable, travelling assemblages of sound and material.



Antiphonia, 2019, single-channel HD video, two-channel sound, video still.

I saw myself in the eye of the animal today ... who is seeing who in this moment? As I listen carefully to horses sing out for food, I compare their vocal sounds to car engines trying to ignite. Due to this instant association, metaphors unfold, and the biases of ocularcentrism⁵⁴ dissolve. When my grandmother sings John Farnham's Australian pop ballad *You're the Voice*, it is reminiscent of Bulgarian mountain singing. The way she has to strain her voice to project the sound creates a metaphorical distance between her and the song, as she tries to

embody the English her singing voice I ations associated with and Middle Eastern The subtle vocal notes in Greek laments, phrases, are full of melisma.⁵⁵ There is a abstraction of melody mother's voice: many

Verse nine: Mare's nest

language. Within hear ornaent-Eastern European singing traditions. inflections between with their drawn-out colourful vocal painterly in my grand-tiny bells

producing microtones⁵⁶ and vibrato, that scatter across the vocal plains like a herd of baby elephants. Listening to her voice is a means to appreciate deeper associations with voice. ⁵⁴

⁵⁴ "A perceptual and epistemological bias ranking vision over other senses in Western cultures." Oxford Reference s.v. "ocularcentrism," accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100245338>.

⁵⁵ "A group of notes sung to a single syllable." Michael Kennedy, "melisma." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, edited by Bourne, Joyce, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). <https://www.oxfordreference.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-5959>.

⁵⁶ "Any musical interval or difference of pitch distinctly smaller than a semitone." Paul Griffiths, Mark Lindley, and Ioannis Zannos. "Microtone." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 15 Oct. 2019. <https://doi.org.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.18616>.

Verse ten: Horsepower

I recorded my grandmother singing *You're the Voice* again today and witnessed the shift in her physical energy and voice.

She was tired and dry, as opposed to the first time when adrenaline propelled her voice forward with a shocking revelation that she could sing. With her tired voice she could still sing but I could hear the struggle, the years compounding in her vocal cords.

From the hoarse voice of my grandmother I transition to being with horses at Jockelbeary Farm. As an uninvited guest, I walked into the center of the paddock and played a percussive wooden instrument. I started singing and experimenting with sound textures and wondered how the horses would respond to my presence. Suddenly, all the horses turned from their grazing to look at me. I closed my eyes and slowly the horses came closer and closer. They began interacting with my body. One horse placed his head underneath my armpit, while another made noises and began kissing the back of my neck. Suddenly, when I opened my eyes there were six horses surrounding me – an ensemble of large resonating bodies.

watch here

A sound-making-through-kinship begins, where physicality and metaphorical presence becomes the medium.

The metaphor can highlight qualities in “bio-organisms and biodiversity,”⁵⁷ that the habitual eye bypasses. Deleuze refers to this as *Becoming-other*.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Braidotti describes *Becoming-other* as something that does not approximate itself with “pre-established normative models.”⁵⁹ Instead, it dissolves binaries and becomes rhizomatic: nomadic zigzags full of flows and intensities that fold into “alternative figurations.”⁶⁰ Figurations that Braidotti sees as a departure from traditional modes of thinking (i.e. theory and politics).⁶¹ Singing with the horses invites me into new figurations and types of presence that signals a *becoming-other*.

Verse

e | e | e | v | e | r | n | = | H | o | r | s | e | s | e | n | s | e

Deleuze argues that something genuinely new is created and experienced when the artist engages with material outside of their habitual tendencies.⁶² He speaks of composer Olivier Messiaen's work with birdsong, as an example of an artistic process that encompasses working with non-human sonic phenomena. In this way, the artist encounters a becoming-other which later extends to a *becoming-animal* or *becoming-molecular*.⁶³

The task for an artist according to Deleuze is to "disrupt the patterns of faciality and disengage the forces that are regulated and controlled by the prevailing regime of signs."⁶⁴ He suggests that an artwork is only successful when the artist renders the "invisible metaphoric forces" that run through faces, bodies, landscapes and voices, visible.⁶⁵ This induces a metaphoric gaze, what Deleuze calls a *transverse becoming*.⁶⁶ Like the voice, the metaphor can travel through many systems of knowledge and support new understandings and responses. In this liminal space, the voice induces a metaphorical gaze where listening reveals a "mediation that looking does not require."⁶⁷ Thus, the metaphorical forces within the voice lead us directly into the territory of sensuality, where a becoming of rhythmic exchanges blur the distinctions between inside and outside.⁶⁸ This interplay creates zones in which the metaphoric forces within the voice and the experience of voice are indiscernible: what I call the *open field*.

The *open field* is a sound practice that constantly shifts between metaphor and the physical experience. It is a reflective practice and is an ongoing process of self-formation, where the artwork and the self-become part of a developmental melody, much like whale song.⁶⁹ The *open field* speaks to the intermedial explorations of art from the 1960's and beyond and leads me to *painting in the expanded field*.⁷⁰ By extension, I consider my practice as *voice in the expanded field*.

Vocal practitioners such Cathy Berberian, Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara and Bobby McFerrin work with the voice in virtuosic ways. Here, virtuosity is the central tool for expanding beyond the singing traditions they have trained in. I am not interested in this type of virtuosity. Rather, I seek to expand the notion of voice through a variety of technical apparatuses such as objects, text, sites and bodies; that include - but are not necessarily limited to - the human voice as *singer*. The voice functions as a ready-made element that is anti-aesthetic in its use of aesthetic material.⁷¹ *Voice in the expanded field*, becomes a way of making new vocal dimensions rather than a set of literal singing applications.

watch
here

Peter Osborne, "Contemporary Art is Post-conceptual Art", Public Lecture, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Villa Suota, Como, July 9, 2010. [http://www.fondazioneratti.org/mat/mostrre/Contemporary%20art%20is%20post-conceptual%20art%20\(Legg%20il%20testo%20della%20conferenza%20di%20Peter%20Osborne%20in%20PDF.pdf](http://www.fondazioneratti.org/mat/mostrre/Contemporary%20art%20is%20post-conceptual%20art%20(Legg%20il%20testo%20della%20conferenza%20di%20Peter%20Osborne%20in%20PDF.pdf)

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Gustavo Fares speaks of painting in the expanded field as a practice that makes it possible to locate different artistic manifestations taking place today in society. The expanded field also affords the possibility of transformations and movements in one or more dimensions at the same time, shifting from one form of expression or given object to another, and even expects the possible addition of new visual dimensions." Gustavo Fares, "Painting in the Expanded Field," *Janushead*, published 2004, 485. <http://www.janushead.org/7-2/Fares.pdf>.

watch
here

Verse twelve:

Giddy up

Female elephants travel closely together and have over seventy vocal calls. These calls signal different circumstances and interactions – organizing the family meshwork as they travel across large distances. These subsonic calls are at frequencies that are below the human capacity of hearing. Like horses, whales and grandmother, elephants are long-living social creatures that take care of one another across generations. They are informed by deep memories and attachments and led by the oldest elephant in the herd. The matriarchy makes most of the decisions in the group and is very protective and attached to her grandchildren. Payne observed a herd of eighty elephants travelling across a large forest clearing when suddenly she heard the “scream from a baby way over on the east side.” Through the herd, a large adult came charging from the west side of the forest, running the entire length of the clearing. It was the grandmother. The intimate connection and ability to hear the sound of her granddaughter’s voice signals a deep listening that has life and death implications.

I think of the implications of an art history where the voices of grandmothers are silent. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit speaks of the lineage within art history that directs itself towards the male line of knowledge. She says that “Art History in particular is often cast as an almost biblical lineage, a long line of beats in which painters descend purely from painters.” In contrast to this, medieval polymath and composer Hildegard von Bingen – the grandmother of western art music disrupts this lineage. The lost grandmothers in the canon of art, creates a drought in the cultural landscape. Everything depletes, where other encounters of dreams, stories, doubts and politics, come to a dead-end. Instead of these neat beats, history is made up of untidy entanglements, noisy voices, crossroads, knots and branches. Solnit refers to these histories as grandmothers, the giant elephant in the room. Grandmothers voice becomes a constellation of materials, mediums and technologies for remembering, transforming, laboring, and informing the social landscape.

Verse thirteen: Dark horse

Sound art encompasses installation, performance, music and sculpture. The term *sound art*

itself is problematic as it dilutes the potent nature inherent within sound ecologies – meaning, there is more to sound practices and studies than the institutional applications of it.

Christian Marclay defines *sound art* as something that transgresses the art institution because it can go anywhere - “it is sound’s nature to be free and uncontrolled and through the cracks.”⁷⁹ This idea challenges and informs my practice. Both visual arts and new music are still grappling with what a sonic phenomenon-based practice means. By adding sound to an object or a video, or capturing sound, we can create *sound art*, but in this case, what distinguishes this work from a TV show or a movie? In this question, I am aware that the context in which we listen to sound affects how we hear it. *Sound art* is largely institutionally determined and placed among an ocular-centered art history. In staying with the trouble of *sound art*, Gavin Stiengo and Jim Sykes speak of sound as a discipline with a “deep ideological framing as the Other of vision.”⁸⁰ This alludes to sound practices remaining on the “peripheries of knowledge,”⁸¹ and thus there is an anorexia of language around *sound art*. A turning to the auditory dimension reveals the linguistic limitations inherent in the languaging of sound. For example, “it is worth noting that there is no auditory

equivalent in English of the word gaze.”⁸² Kramer points out that even the term soundscape implies site, and he argues that “ocular-centrism is a disorder, a bias, a bad habit or a covert ideology.”⁸³ The habit of referencing sight blinds the aspects of listening that are implicit and taken for granted. As Berger suggests, the visible both includes the viewer because they can see, and also excludes the viewer because they are “not omnipresent.”⁸⁴ The voices of rivers, factories, streets and homes, places and people lose their value in the face of ocular-centrism. I am interested in exploring a wide range of approaches and interventions within my practice that combine, rather than simply enhance, sonic or ocular territories.

82 Kramer, *Hum of The World*, 10.

83 Kramer, *Hum of The World*, 11.

84 Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, 50.

Verse fourteen:



Grandmother's voice is an infinite series of accumulated objects and techniques, "through which *culture* is always already constituted."⁸⁵ This moves away from the notion of technology as a set of mediations constructed at particular places and historical crossroads.⁸⁶ My research conceptualises a sonic history that is not perceived through a linear set of conjunctures, but rather, a narrative of jagged and tangled lines that live among various practices and peoples. Through these sonic explorations, I am aware of a neo-colonial narrative around sound that enforces a Western influence, an influence that is felt through the audiovisual litany in Western audio technologies.⁸⁷ Instead of viewing the distribution of sonic material and experience in terms of "efficiency, inexhaustibility, and increasing isolation of the listening subject,"⁸⁸ I seek to understand the deeper social and phenomenological implications of the Western ear. I am calling for a more open sonic terrain, where boundaries between "premodern, non- technological humans, and modern, technological ones" blur.⁸⁹

Horses for courses

85 Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 11.

86 Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 11.

87 Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 7.

88 Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 12.

89 Steingo and Sykes, *Remapping Sound Studies*, 12.

Verse fifteen: Workhorse

During the process of collaborating
with my equine friends, I felt **alive**.

I was not inside a studio – I was outside amongst bodies, hooves, wind and bells. I experienced what Deborah Bird Rose describes as “the shimmer of the living world, the bling of the living world, the bling of life.”⁹⁰ It was a meeting that was physical and caring, in which I was listening with great attention to the nuances of the horses and the environment.



Shimmering 2, 2019, documentation. Photo by Andrew Kainerder.

Like the bells and keys on the horse costumes, my body was reactive. In a similar way, the horses were calmer when I was grounded, and restless when I was meek or unsure. When I began to treat them as allies instead of inferior objects, we became companions. The sound-producing costumes transform Buster, Breeze and Duke into delicate, resonating and sensitive travelling masses, creating a *shimmer* where a sense of care and liveliness, closeness and intimacy, reconfigures the sublime. This *shimmer* centers around labours of love, which are parallel to my grandmother’s forty years of factory work, from which her body bears the scars and inflammation of labour. She was, and still is a workhorse and she shimmers. Her labour was not born out of choice, she was forced to work from the age of thirteen, and two years later, forced into marriage. The horses and grandmother walk hand in hand, enmeshed bodies of hard labour. They have a shared history of producing and transmitting goods and services to others. Both are immigrants to Australia and loyal to the hand that feeds them. Both ignite the heart with empathy and awe for the great distances travelled.

INTERLUDE

Horsing around



Fig.1 Henri, Matisse, *Dance*, 1920, oil on canvas, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. Accessed October, 13, 2013. <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3523871>



Fig.2 *Rite of Spring*, 1940, image still from the animation *Fantasia*. Accessed October, 13, 2019. <https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/disney/fantasia/images/9/9a/Ceratosaurus.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20140225022309>



Fig.3 Upper Paleolithic cave painting, Lascaux Cave complex, Dorodogne, c. 17,300 years old. Accessed October 14, 2019, <https://marcivermeersch.wordpress.com/2011/01/25/a-virtual-visit-to-the-lascaux-cave/>



Fig.4 Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*, 1986, Videotape, colour, stereo, sound: 89 minutes, film still. Accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhv6dDRL-RI>.

I am looking out into the green pastures. Spring is closer than ever. I am taking stock and collecting my notes like seeds. Whilst grazing on metaphors, Matisse's painting *Dance*, 1910 (fig.1), comes into my line of sight. Its composition brings forth a swell of connections where bodies and music collide into a single luminescent moment. A whirling string of ideas come together that bring me to the *Dance of Young Girls in Rite of Spring*, 1910, by Igor Stravinsky, a piece that Matisse was inspired by when painting the *Dance*. I am also reminded of Disney's classic film *Fantasia*, 1940, in which animations are paired with famous music works. In this work, *The Rite of Spring* (fig.2) is paired with an animation where dinosaurs are in combat with each other and the process of extinction. The work follows the process of life: forming in the primordial soup of oceans, to the destructive forces of earthquakes and lava pools that devour the surface of the planet. We see the slow decay of large bodies folding into the earth and the dawn of a new ecological era. I chew a little deeper into this stringy past, and land on a patch of paleolithic cave paintings (fig.3), where I see images of horse-like animals. Voices of grandmother drift in again but this time it is 17,300 years old. The cave walls reveal a spirit of imagination, an attempt to communicate to self, to other. The tongue is now wet with tentacles and I see a kangaroo joey playing in the valley. I am reminded of the philosopher Heraclitus when he states that "the course of the world is a child playing."⁹¹ Here, the *metaphor of play* runs down my throat,⁹² and a process of fermentation takes place. Bill Viola's *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* (fig.4) is stuck in my teeth,⁹³ and I am "filled with a direct and childlike innocence of play."⁹⁴

I am shifting endlessly, as the afternoon sun ruminates on my back.
The field is full, and I take delight in the multiple grasses growing.

Verse sixteen:

If wishes were horses,

After I witness the traumatic vocalisations from my grandmother, directly after she crashes her car into a tree on the farm, the elephant calls of life and death return again. In my grandmother's wounds, vocalisations ripple and increasingly amplify through the valley. As the pain becomes more and more conscious, I witness and hear it in real time. Like a wounded animal, the voice of grandmother's cries are moans for help. I charge across the clearing to be of aid.

Alphonso Lingus speaks of the process "by which a wound, a pain gives rise to vocalization", something he calls "consciousness backed up to itself."⁹⁵ The rising of pain becomes a situation one is unable to flee from, there is nowhere to retreat. The pain is total. Grandmother is praying through the whimpering and sobbing, thanking god it was her and not me. Now grandmother needs to learn a new vocabulary. In order to live "the sufferer must acknowledge her debilitated or surgically mutilated body."⁹⁶ She will need to bring to voice "her shock, her fear, her hopes and despairs."⁹⁷ Like the lyrics in *You're The Voice*, she will have to find the will to *turn the page over*.⁹⁸ All I can think of is the journey she has ahead – the pain, the ageing body and death.

beggars would ride



Buster and Grandma, 2019, black and white, digital photograph.

Verse seventeen: Unstable condition

As I approach the public hospital,
I encounter an interweaving matrix
of body parts living and dying together.

I am confronted by the focus and quick movement of the nurses – all women in monochromatic polycottons. I see toxic waste bins, trays of food, an old man being wheeled off to surgery with a black leaking eye. Then there is my grandmother, a tentacular body hooked up to beeps and cords that run to and from her body. She has bags of fluid that read like texts, inner monologues of the corporal. Nurses come in and extract her body data, drawing blood from veins and pumping antibodies in. The depths of her bile are being drained and the plastic wrapped waste bags ornament her bed chamber. Her room feels like a thoroughfare for her biometrics – organ data being dispersed to departments, computers and labs to be read like tarot cards. What will be the fate of my damaged cyborg grandmother? The giver of life now being given life through mechanical means. I see her as a metaphor of old ecologies, as felt through the *Chthulucene*, where the vital grandmother entity is the body of the planet. A body exploited by capital and machine practices, and yet it is the machine that can sustain her. A life beyond the human body she once knew. A new grandmother ecology emerges: *Borgmother*. Neither artificial, nor organic.

Is this the future of the body/Earth?

Biomechanical combinations to sustain life
under the effects of the *Capitalocene*?

Transfusions take place, transference of stories through blood thinners and hydro lights. Voices begin to collapse, and the discarded treatment of an ageing population mixes into an O positive blood machine. Here the *Grandmaocene* is precarious and all consuming, hanging on by a thread, made up of voices, bodies, machines and stories travelling together into unknown futures.

Coda (exit music)

THE POULIA COME AND EAT STRAIGHT FROM YOUR HAND. THEY KNOW YOUR PHONIE. I WAS SO HAPPY WHEN YOU WERE SINGING ESIE TO PHONIE. YOU WERE WORRIED THAT I WOULD GET A BAD MARK BECAUSE YOUR VOICE ISN'T KALA. YOU WERE LAUGHING SO MUCH WHEN I ASKED YOU TO DO IT. YOU SOUNDED WONDERFUL LIKE A REAL TRAGOUTHTRISTRIA. THE SOUND OF YOUR PHONIE WAS LIKE A NATIONAL ANTHEM FOR GRANDMOTHERS.

IMAGINE YOUR
WHEN YOU
SINGING. LIKE
GALLOPED INTO
TAKING YOU OUT OF THE

**Every day
I hear you
call trelo
pouli.**

I TRIED TO
YIAYIA'S VOICE
WERE YOUR
AN ALOYO YOU
THE SONG. I LOVED
FARMA AND INTO THE

GALLERY WHERE PEOPLE LISTENED TO YOU. YOUR PHONIE ESPACE TO KRIO OF THE WHITE WALLS. YOU ECHOED IN THE SPACE LIKE A MOUNTAIN SINGER. WHEN I LOOK IN YOUR EYES, I SEE THIS YOUNG BIRD IN YOU. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU SAID TO ME OTAN PETHENIS YOU WANT TO COME BACK AS A GARDEN? PEOPLE ALWAYS COMMENT ON HOW MIKRI EISE AND AS A CHILD I FELT SAFE WITH YOU BECAUSE OF THAT. YOU ARE SO MEYALI IN YOUR LOVE. I THOUGHT FILMING TA ALOYA WOULD HONOUR THAT.

HORSE APPENDIX⁹⁹

Horseplay: Rough or boisterous play.

Get back on the horse: To return to or resume an activity that one has previously failed.

Flogging a dead horse: An attempt to revive an interest which has died out; to engage in fruitless effort.

Get off your high horse: A request to someone to stop behaving in a haughty and self-righteous manner.

Straight from the horse's mouth: From the original or most reliable source.

Show pony: A person who tries to be the center of attention; show-off.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth: If you receive a gift, do so graciously, without voicing criticisms.

Hung like a horse: To have a large penis.

Mares nest: A much vaunted discovery, which later turns out to be illusory or worthless.

Horsepower: A unit of measurement of power, or the rate at which work is done.

Horse sense: A robust form of common sense believed to be found in poorly educated but shrewd people.

Giddy up: Command (as to a horse) to go ahead or go faster.

Dark Horse: Someone, who was previously little known, emerges to prominence in a competition.

Horses for courses: People and things have different qualities and skills and so are suitable in different situations.

Workhorse: Large horse bred to be a working animal doing hard tasks such as plowing and other farm labor.

Horsing around: - Indulge in frivolous activity or play.

Unstable condition - To be unstable is to lack stability, meaning things could change without warning.

Horse feathers - Rubbish, nonsense.

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