

# SEVEN SOMATIC-SOUND-THOUGHT FRAGMENTS

Victoria Gray (2014)

*Seven Somatic-Sound-Thought Fragments* is conceived as a performance talk that explores sound not-yet-heard, sound not-yet-made, and sound-not-yet thought. Part academic citation, part '*thinking-with*' (Manning, 2013), the talk proposes seven ways of thinking somatic-sound as a non-sonorous (Ridout, 2008) affective experience.

## 1. THE FEELING CHOIR

*Affect is a chorus of feelings barely felt, through which events begin to take form. A body is an event for affective resonance. It becomes across affective tonalities, in a multitude of vertiginous co-becomings.* (Manning, 2010, p.124)

What might a chorus of feelings sound like? What might an affective resonance feel like? According to Erin Manning, the body cannot be divorced from its immediate surrounding's. So, we might want to extend this and ask, how might bodies articulate their surroundings as a manifestation of soundings; as gurgles, as fears; as sound gestures, as gestures as sound. Aside from the soundings within our surrounding's, the body itself is replete with its own sound.

Look to your right side. Look to your left side.

On all sides there are bodies that are, '*resonant with affective tonality*' (Manning, 2010, p.122) expressed as a vibration, distressed because of resonance.

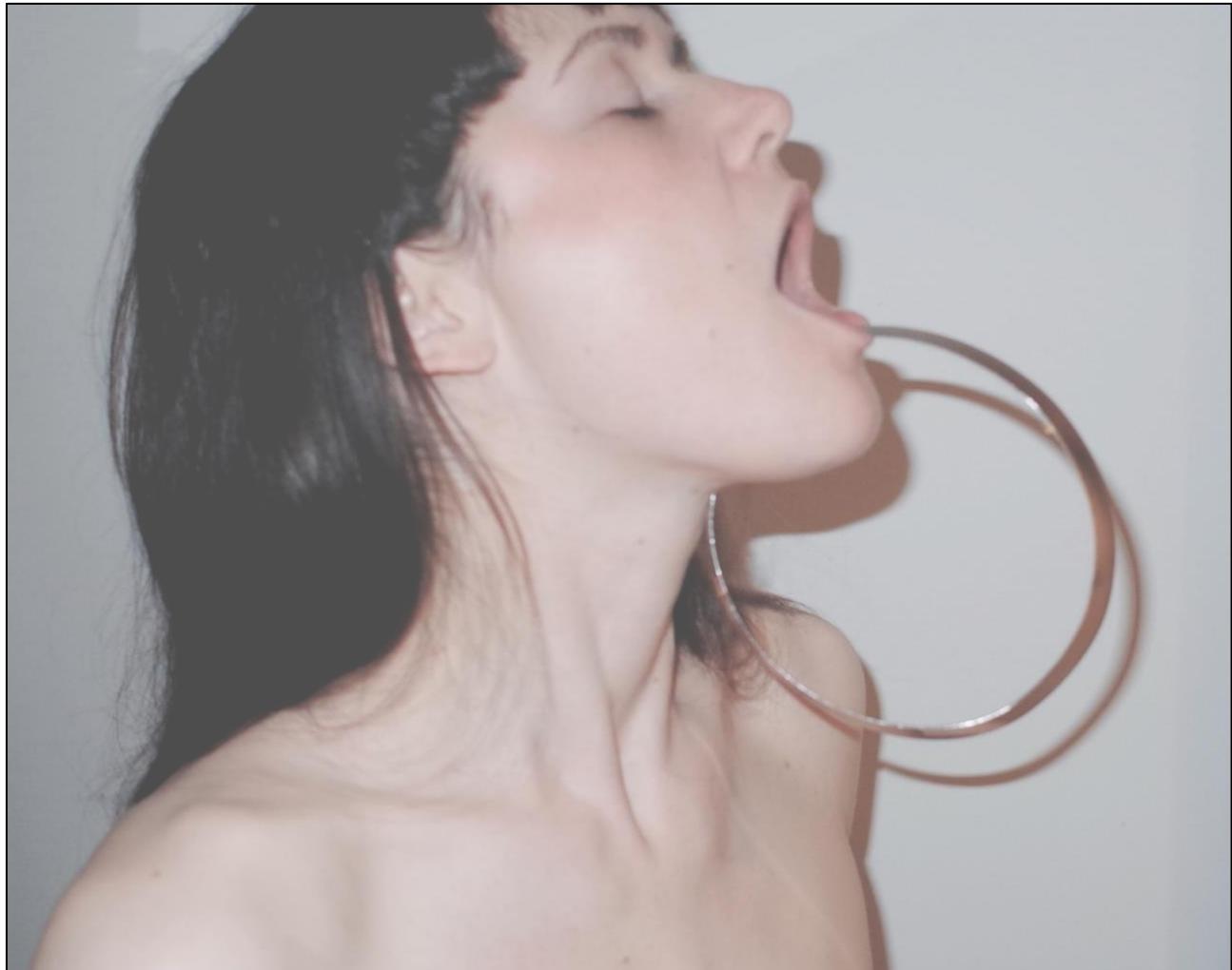
## 2. I DON'T WANT YOUR AFFECT

*Affect is not a thing but rather refers to processes of life and vitality which circulate and pass between bodies and which are difficult to capture or study in any conventional methodological sense.*

(Blackman, 2012, p. 4)

Attending to the body as *Always More Than One* (Manning, 2010), as Manning asks us to do, requires a giving in. A giving in which sets in motion a gifting of affects and in turn, a giving off of vibrations. If affect is not a 'thing' then it must be a 'force', a rumble. This rumble cannot be conceived as independent of the body since it is brought into being by the body itself. This quake is not of a body but of bodies; plural. Affective vibrations do not belong. This resonant force is not mine to give or yours to take, but is ours for the making. A non-optional, trans-subjective, inter-corporeal, intra-somatic, sound track.

And then there are affective sounds, of course. Sounds like crying, like rasped breathing, like breaking, like...sounds like glass. Sounds that are social-like, collectively made and un-made. Sounds that we might collect, sounds (like silence) that might collect us. There are darker sounds that we might recollect, resounding, *re*-sounding; sounds that might serve to heal, sounds that might serve to harm.



### 3. GANGS OF GHOSTS

*The work is organised by gangs of ghosts, there is a constant play between the manifested and the non-manifested. (Charmatz & Launay, 2011, p.34)*

What might a gang of non-manifested ghosts play like? What might that distant blood relation, that trans-generational haunting sound like? How might we sound absence by turning our selves inside out, tuning ourselves to what has already sounded before us, bodies that are behind us.

I don't like the way this ghosts sounds.

Can we absence sound, can we make sound absent; gagging the ghost. Lisa Blackman argues for a disclosure of this ghost which she names, the humanities '*absent present*'(Blackman, 2012, p.XXV). This vapour-like vibration, this ghost sound, has been silenced in the theorization of affective mediation between bodies. The body is a potential for psychic and psychological attunement. A potential for a musicality of psychic and psychologically tuned fibres. Fibres that rattle and are rattled by extra-sensory perceptions, psychic suggestions, voice hearing and telepathic rhythms. Ghost noise is the noise of Ghosts. How might the absence of sound be staged as sound? How might sound vapour be framed? How might the séance conduct?

### 4. DANCE HALL

*It is as if the human being is an instrument of concord and discord, consisting of thousands upon thousands of finely tuned circuits; each with its own control of pitch and loudness.*  
(Oram, 1972, p.27, cited in Henriques, 2010, p.75).

This is the vibrating subject, according to Daphne Oram, pioneer of electronic music. The concord and discord of thousands upon thousands of affected and affecting bodies shivering as an always already infinite dance hall floor. In the context of a dance-hall music night in Kingston Jamaica, Julian Henriques describes the phenomena of this transmission as the propagation of sound waves and vibrations. Most importantly, this propagation requires both sound *and* movement, or perhaps sound as movement, or even movement as sound. Developing upon Oram's *vibrating subject*, Henriques draws attention to ways in which sonic vibration is

propagated through the media of bodies. He makes the vibrating subject, the subject of vibration. Maybe we could dub this as a sub-vibration, a sub that is no less than the fundamental basis with which we constitute the subject, the bass with which we play, ground our vibratile subjectivities. If subjectivity is such a dance, then this choreography must also be composed within a concept of time, of rhythm and of duration. If paused, these time-frames have the radical potential to de-compose the flowing subject. More drone-like less 'music' like, a glitch, an itch.

Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato asserts that, '*Only an interruption in the flow of temporality can change subjectivity*' (Lazzarato, 2010). Felix Guattari reminds us that time makes [...] *an immense complexity of subjectivity possible - [rendering] harmonies, polyphonies, counterpoints, rhythms and existential orchestrations, until now unheard and unknown*' (Guattari, 2006, pp.18-19). How can we dance the wavy equation between time, vibration and subjectivity?

## 5. LIKE SNAKES

*Snakes do not react to music because of the mental ideas it produces in them, but because they are long, they lie coiled on the ground and their bodies are in contact with the ground along almost their entire length. And the musical vibrations communicated to the ground affect them as a very subtle, very long massage. Well I propose to treat the audience just like these charmed snakes and to bring them back to the subtlest ideas through their anatomies.* (Artaud, 1993, p.91, cited in Ridout, 2008, p.228 )

Developing an Artaudian concept of theatre, where sound and light are considered for their resonant and not necessarily signifying potential, Nicholas Ridout develops a notion of the '*vibratorium*'. The vibratorium has the capacity to affect a physiological experience in the spectator via what theatre theorist, Gay McAuley terms, '*energy exchange*' (McAuley, 2000, p.246, cited in Ridout, 2008, p.224). In the vibratorium Ridout asks us to develop a theory of, '*sonic vibration according to non-sonorous principles*' (Ridout, 2008, p.229). Let's repeat that idea, '*sonic vibration according to non-sonorous principles*'. Let us loop that notion, '*sonic vibration according to non-sonorous principles*'.



How can phenomena, most commonly attributed to sonic and aural sensing, be experienced kinesthetically, as the body's potential to vibrate; as a theory of the body according to non-representational principles; as a choreographic strategy for making the sonic felt not heard. Through skin and bone let's sense a non-sonorous resonance, a somatic vibration according to non-sonorous principles. Let's sense sound like the snake.

## 6. ELECTRIC INFECTION

*Once more, sounds enter the body and break down its limits. When a sound resounds in the listener's chests, inflicting physical pain or stimulating goose-bumps, they no longer hear it as something entering their ears from outside but feel it from within as a physical process creating oceanic sensations. Through sound, the atmosphere opens and enters the spectators' bodies. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.119)*

Teresa Brennan considers the *Transmission of Affect* (2004) as a process of chemical and electrical entrainment between bodies. Electrical entrainment, as a nervous entrainment of the nervous system, sparks and snaps; the effect being that one nervous system can have an affect on another. As my gut tightens my muscles grip, their contraction innervates the muscle producing actual electrical potential in and through my body. My gut causes an electrical potential that can and will infect bodies with affect as energy. Its infection will cause your own gut to grip, producing its own electrical energy. A curious electro-acoustic body sizzles – amplifies, but the body is curiously silent. How so?

Get closer to the speaker, place your ear against the mover, because the mover is the speaker. The dancer is an amplifier of electrical potential, a force heightener, a magician of energy. What '*stream of magic*' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.97) flows in this alchemical process. What is this liminal, cusp like transformation that takes place between muscle and electricity, between electricity and energy, between energy and affect, between affect and sound. Sound breaks the bodies limits, even if it cannot be heard. The body breaks sounds limits, *because* body sound, so often, cannot be heard.

## 7. PARASITIC NOISIFICATION

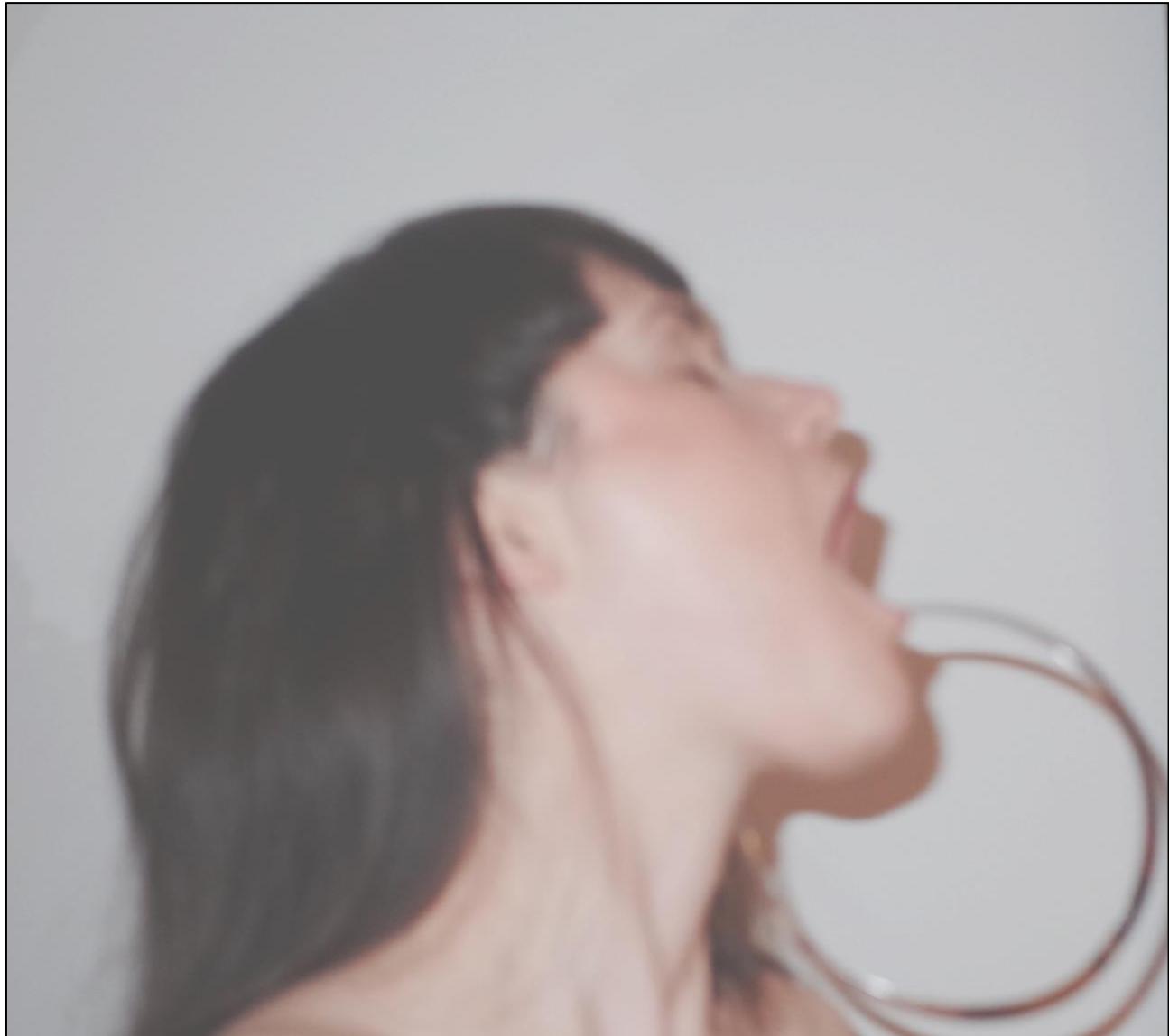
*We are buried within ourselves; we send out signals, gestures, and sounds indefinitely and uselessly. No one listens to anyone else. Everyone speaks; no one hears; direct or reciprocal communication is blocked. [...] The most amazing thing in the world is that agreement, understanding, harmony, sometimes exist.*

(Serres, 1982, cited in Lepecki, 2012).

Andre Lepecki, riffing on the Michel Serres text, *The Parasite* (1982) formulates a theory of '*parasitic noisification*' (Lepecki, 2012). Here, the actioning body in performance is not a stable channel but a stain on the surface of representation. Beyond any communicational imperative, the body affirms an a-semiotic capacity. It is noise amongst the noise of the event of noise, ad infinitum. The body intervenes by making senseless grooves, by grooving itinerant channels, by shouting and muffling its own shout at the same time, in order to activate a disturbance. It is a '*pest*' (Serres, 1982) and therefore becomes parasitical. If, as Lepecki provokes, something

interesting happens when we abandon the project of communication in favour of a fuzz, then we might be obliged to do the same; to make our sound unheard of and unhearing.

The body owns a set of teeth in a mouth that cuts through stiff channels of one-to-one communication. We can be dissident, an always more than one co-confusing-communication.



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*Authored by Victoria Gray (May 2014) on the occasion of DEVOTION, a symposium led by Roberta Jean / Mystery Skin focussed on the alchemic and ancient relationship between sound and dance via independent contemporary female artists.*

