

# Letter from the Editors

Jamie Allen, Lital Khaikin, Isaac Linder

The street-level sonic cultures, acoustic ecologies and personal interventions available to us have, during this long 20th Century, become proliferated by speakers, microphones, synthesised and recorded playbacks, beeps, buzzes and alarms. Roving gangs of indignant mobile-phone music-listeners disrupt the public transit *experience*. iPhones chirp out the sound of something called 'crickets', creatures many a listener may very well never encounter. Airlines pass on the extravagant levy of 'noise charges' to their customers, a kind of psychic and acoustic bandwidth fee. Microwave ovens, automobiles and authoritative ahuman voices chime out an acoustic ecology that is neither 'natural' nor 'cultural', neither 'societal' nor 'technological', but something that is a heterogeneous mixture of all of these sources, causes and categories. These are 'acoustic infrastructures', and although human-made, they are naturalised by their ubiquity and always-on-ness, along with our allover, everyday, experience of them.



The work of the "sound artist", or perhaps even more interestingly the post-media practitioner who undertakes investigations related to sound, acoustics and live and recorded audio, takes shape in a host of environments and architectures. Most often these days, it a space of utmost privacy — the headspace of the single listener, through the

technology of the headphone, in isolation from the world, others, and bodies (including their own). There are also, of course, spaces either permanently delimited or temporarily converted for sonic performance (clubs, concert halls, improvised warehouse venues, art spaces, studios and living rooms). There are street corners where you can make noise if you have secured an appropriate license. There are 'public' institutions where sonic acts and [art with audio elements](#) have (fairly recently, it is always supposed) been [brought into art-historical discourse and prominence](#).

This idea that 'sound' is a kind of poor-cousin within media, media arts and artistic practice and discourse, always [just arriving](#), has become something of what Michel Serres calls a "residual" or "transhistoric" [1] question for the information, expressions and communications we tend to label "art". That is, it is the kind of question that seems to recur with comfortable repetition whenever a technological, media, or communications change in (or of) our world is registered. In a sense, then, the 'question' of sonic creative potentials is never 'new', but one needing reformulation in light of such mondial perturbations, changes in thinking, changes in means of mediation, and changes in technology. New potentials for modulating and creating acoustic phenomena (perhaps most specifically, non-musical ones) perennially provoke concern as to their under-representation amongst representational practices of art and media, and their unnoticed importances in shaping the rhythms, modes and modalities of our lives. Yet, as with the non-death of writing that has become a hallmark of our digital age, perhaps we're both sounding and listening now more than we ever have?

The acronym "P.A.", we often forget, refers to the "Public Address" systems that have evolved within our mediascapes as means of addressing, guiding, convincing, consoling and controlling ever larger 'publics' within their earshot. These systems are amongst the earliest of infrastructures of mediatised urban and suburban experience that have disappeared from awareness, along with visible media architectures like LCD screens and poster advertisements. In expanding this phrase to "public address", a host of other expansions become available: "Who is this 'public' that needs addressing?" "Who has the right to address this public, publicly, anyway?" "What spaces can we

presume to still be public, in which such an address might take place?" In this issue of *continent*, we ask the question: through what devices, technologies, infrastructures and systems are the politics of public space debated? What are the mediations and interventions possible in an art involved in sound that are, in our troubled world of multitudinous crisis, necessarily addressing and controlled by states of emergency, homeland security sound systems, consumer prompting PA's for the incentivisation of purchases and the effective affectation of [Muzak](#).

As early as 2013, *continent*'s [Jamie Allen](#) began discussions with Brooklyn-based art and technology center [Eyebeam](#), toward the hosting of a research and development project around the idea of 'Acoustic Infrastructure'. The project's idea was, in part, initially, intended as a means of responding to the then recent (2013) Soundings exhibition at MoMA in a way consummate to the DIY, DIWO and urban style, orientation and focus of [Eyebeam](#), as well as through an interest in reviving what had become a dormant, and now defunct, 'Sound Research' group at the U.S. media art and technology institution. The conceit of the project? To secure the use of public address systems in the city, and commission artists to create works for these [2].

[Morten Søndergaard](#), Danish sound art curator at large, and for the [DIAS](#) (Digital Interactive Art Space) joined the project soon after these initial discussions and Eyebeam director [Roddy Shrock](#) secured a National Endowment for the Arts grant for the project soon after that. [Michael Clemow](#) was brought aboard in 2016 as Sound Art Associate at Eyebeam during a time of rapidly shifting political, institutional, and racial climates in the U.S. Michael joined the project to perform the instrumental work of negotiating sites, locales and relationships with the purveyors of public address systems within that rapidly diminishing locality we still pretend to call "public space". [His reflections on this strangely and tellingly complex process of deliberation and organisation can be read here](#). A further instantiation of the project at DIAS is planned for 2017, co-organised by Morten Søndergaard, Rasmus Vestergaard and Jamie Allen.

Our *continent.al* collaboration with Eyebeam takes the form of 1) an exhibition of sound works by [Meira Asher](#), [Brian House](#), and [#trashDay](#), played from existing public speaker systems in New York City; 2) the Acoustic Infrastructure *continent.* issue that you are now reading; 3) a project "[Residency](#)" on [Eyebeam's Instagram account](#); 4) An afternoon discussion/symposium about the project and the issues it has raised, at Eyebeam on September 24th 2016.

This issue of *continent.* was borne out of the relationships, discussions and individuals encountered through these months and, indeed, years of research, development, conversation and soundings, and includes the work of a diverse array of artists, researchers, writers, sound-makers, musicians and friends: Adam Basanta, Jacob Gaboury, Brian House, Yujin Jung, Shannon Mattern, Jan Phillip Müller, Julie Beth Napolin, Byron Peters, dave phillips, Gail Priest, Marina Rosenfeld, Morten Søndergaard, Sean Smith, Meira Asher, Richard Chartier and Mark Peter Wright. We thank each and every one of them, as we do you dear reader, for taking the time to share attentions here, where the infrastructures of audible experience are interrogated as another set of conditions for the possibility of the many forms that a thought might take.

[1] Serres, Michel. (2007) Les nouvelles technologies: révolution culturelle et cognitive. Lille, les 10 et 11 décembre 2007  
127. [http://www.ac-grenoble.fr/ien.bourgoinashnord/IMG/pdf\\_Texte\\_de\\_la\\_conference.pdf](http://www.ac-grenoble.fr/ien.bourgoinashnord/IMG/pdf_Texte_de_la_conference.pdf)

[2] Variations on this idea have as well arisen through discussions between [Bernhard Garnicig](#) and Jamie Allen for a [residency project in Moscow](#) and in an [Imaginary Sound Work contribution by Budhaditya Chattopadhyay](#). [Louise Lawler's "Birdcalls" \(1972\)](#) and [Jens Hanning's 1994 project "Turkish Jokes"](#) have been ringing in our ears throughout development of these projects, platforms and ideas.