

EASY LISTENING

Mark Brown

Ryszard Dabek

Alex Gawronski

Camilla Hannan

Nigel Helyer

Lily Hibberd

Bronia Iwanczak

Philipa Veitch

Signal to Noise

The sound was different, not only in magnitude but in quality, from anything known to me...it hung over us. It seemed as though the air were full of vast and agonized passion, bursting now with groans and sighs, now with shrill screaming and pitiful whimpering, shuddering beneath terrible blows, torn by unearthly whips, vibrating with the solemn pulses of enormous wings. And the supernatural tumult did not pass in this direction or that. It did not begin, intensify, decline and end. It was poised in the air, a stationary panorama of sound, a condition of the atmosphere, not the creation of man.

An NCO of the 22nd Manchester Rifles describes the bombardment during the attack on the Somme 1916, quoted in Wade Davis, *Into the Silence*

For what does a literary work 'say'? What does it communicate? It 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not a statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential.

Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator*

Easy Listening explores the material and conceptual parameters of the literary and vocal artifact known as the audiobook, reflecting on the vexed processes of translation, interpretation, adaptation and representation that arise in rendering an event into text, a text into speech, and experience into its future recollection. Coinciding with the 100th anniversary of Luigi Russolo's manifesto *The Art of Noises*, as well as addressing speculations about the current and future state of the book, *Easy Listening* investigates what it means to listen, read, speak and act in a world of absolute media saturation that does not 'begin, intensify, decline (or) end.'¹

Defined as either a sound, or combination of loud, confused or disturbing sounds, *noise* became a conspicuous feature of the urban environment with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. While the sonic environment of pre-industrial societies consisted of mostly 'discreet and interrupted'² sounds, the new, mechanized soundscape was transforming into one of low-information, high-redundancy sounds, 'continuous drones...rough edged...or punctuated with rhythmic concatenations.'³ Disenfranchised agricultural workers, now operating machines in factories, were the first to experience sound's 'powerful relationship to affect'⁴ as well as its 'power to terrorize and dispossess.'⁵ The atomizing, destabilizing effect of industry on the social fabric and on the subjectivity of the labourers themselves, was addressed by Marx who described the manner in which it dispelled

all fixity and security in the situation of the labourer; how it constantly threatens, by taking away the instruments of labour, to snatch from his hands his means of subsistence, and, by suppressing his detail function, to make him superfluous...(a) mere fragment of a man.⁶

Experience itself likewise 'fell in value.'⁷ A world of qualities without

a man⁸ emerged, a world 'of experiences without the person who experiences them'⁹ and with it, the ability to relate one's experience 'mouth to mouth'¹⁰ began to dissipate. Walter Benjamin charted the decline of the oral tradition of storytelling and the increasing domination of the printed novel in the years following the end of WWI in his 1936 essay *The Storyteller*. The ability to impart one's experience to another, to be an adequate, competent and worthy narrator, and likewise, the ability to be an adequate, competent and worthy listener¹¹ was something that seemed to finally wither in the face of the war's annihilation of subjectivity, of physical and psychological form and sense.¹²

All through this period, amidst the radical transformations and upheavals taking place in and between industry, society and the individual, new forms of speaking, reading and listening were slowly beginning to develop. In the 19th Century, the electric telegraph, Morse code, the electric telephone and long distance telephone lines were invented, while the first radio signal was transmitted by Marconi from Cornwall to Newfoundland in 1901. Thomas Edison, who patented the phonograph in 1877, held great hopes for its eventual application as a talking machine which would 'speak to blind people with no effort on their part,'¹³ envisioning its possibilities as a new means of recording works of literature that could then be 'read by ear.'¹⁴ As the magnitude of the cities and of the new commodities being enjoyed by the middle class continued to grow, the sounds of industry, crowds, motor cars and trams, of radio broadcasts and phonograph recordings, gradually came to form a familiar part of the urban landscape, its background noise.

The futurist painter Luigi Russolo was one of the first artists to recognize *noise* as a singular phenomenon that had emerged along with the Industrial Revolution, and to grasp its inherent possibilities. His argument, set out in his 1913 manifesto *The Art of Noises* was,

as Michael Kirby observed, 'simple, profound, and far-reaching'¹⁵ - a demand for the recognition and inclusion of *all sounds* in a new form of music.

Futurist musicians must substitute for the limited variety of tones possessed by orchestral instruments today the infinite variety of tones of noises, reproduced with appropriate mechanisms... The variety of noises is infinite. If today, when we have perhaps a thousand different machines, we can distinguish a thousand different noises, tomorrow, as new machines multiply, we will be able to distinguish ten, twenty or THIRTY THOUSAND DIFFERENT NOISES, NOT MERELY IN A SIMPLY IMITATIVE WAY, BUT TO COMBINE THEM ACCORDING TO OUR IMAGINATION...¹⁶

The meaning of noise can also be understood within the context of information theory. In a system consisting of sender, channel and receiver 'anything that arrives as part of a message, but that was not part of a message when sent out, can be considered as noise introduced in transmission.'¹⁷ When today we may distinguish the thirty thousand different noises Russolo envisaged, we can also consider that the noise is itself the effect or measure of some form of information being transmitted. If we apprehend an infinite quantity of noise, we can infer that there must also be an infinite amount of information. *Information overload* can be defined as information transmitted in excess of the receiver's capacity to assimilate it, and is often referred to in the context of our participation in a newly democratized media, where anyone with access to the internet or a phone network can disseminate their views via blogging, social media, twitter and the like. Our immersion in this omnipresent, 'naturalized' media environment has arrived at a point where publications such as *Forbes* discuss the rise of the 'digital detox' - holidays and retreats where executives can take a vacation from

technology.¹⁸ The ideal expressed by Brecht of ‘a huge linked system... capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of allowing the listener not only to hear but to speak, and did not isolate him but brought him into contact’¹⁹ has been realized, but only in its technological, rather than in its emancipatory form. Our capacity to be subject to information overload, as well as the subject of practices such as data mining, targeted web advertising, and in many jurisdictions, aggressive surveillance and censorship, suggests that our relationship with information technology in its various forms remains deeply problematic.

It can be increasingly difficult to distinguish the difference between information and noise, as more often than not the two have become interchangeable, deployed at different times and in different measures in an interminable play of appearance, concealment and subterfuge. Yet *noise* can also be understood as something that works against the predictable outcome of a communication process,²⁰ and that within the closed system of communication of which we are necessarily a part, we take an active role by calibrating, decoding, disrupting and overturning the transmission of information and noise, as well as combining them according to our imagination...continuously enriching the field of noise-sounds.²¹ *Easy Listening* will explore this complex exchange between writer, reader and listener, and the circuit through which meaning and affect is produced, channeled and amplified, activating a new awareness of the tensions between writing and its sonic afterlives.

Philipa Veitch,
May 2013

END NOTES

¹ W Davis, *Into the Silence: The Great war, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest*, The Bodley Head, London, 2011, pp. 26-27

² R Murray Shafer, *The Tuning of the World*, Knopf, New York, 1977, p.77

³ *ibid*

⁴ S Knox, ‘Hearing Hardy, Talking Tolstoy: The Audiobook Narrator’s Voice and Reader Experience’ in M Rubery (ed.) *Audiobooks, Literature and Sound Studies*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p.127

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ K Marx, ‘Capital’, Moscow, 1954, cited in D McLellan, *Karl Marx, A Biography*, Palgrave MacMillan, Houndmills, 2006, pp.320-321

⁷ W Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, in H Arendt (ed.) trans H Zorn, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 2007, p.87

⁸ R Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 1, trans S Wilkins, Vintage International, 1995, p.158

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Benjamin, loc. cit.

¹¹ D Carroll, ‘The Memory of Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: “And let’s not talk about that”, Forward to *Heidegger and “the jews”*’, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p. x

¹² Two decades later, survivors of The Shoah would struggle with this simultaneous impossibility of / responsibility to speak, testify or bear witness to an event that became synonymous with ‘the unrepresentable’.

¹³ M Rubery, ‘Introduction: Talking Books’, in M Rubery (ed.) *Audiobooks, Literature and Sound Studies*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p.3

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ M Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, Dutton, New York, 1971, p.33

¹⁶ L Russolo, ‘The Art of Noises’, in U Apollonio (ed.) *Futurist Manifestos*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973, p.87

¹⁷ W R Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1988, p.67

¹⁸ J Abel, ‘The Rise of the Digital Detox’, *Forbes*, May 2012, retrieved 17 May 2013 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/gyro/2012/05/15/the-rise-of-digital-detox/>

¹⁹ B Brecht, ‘Theory of Radio’ 1932, cited in B Barber, ‘Radio: Audio Art’s Frightful Parent’, in *Sound by Artists*, D Lander & M Lexier (eds.), Walter Phillips Gallery, Toronto, 1990, p. 109

²⁰ S Berner, *Information Overload or Attention Deficiency?*, retrieved 22 May 2013 <http://www.samberner.com/documents/KM/infoglut.pdf>

²¹ Russolo, loc. cit.

WARNING

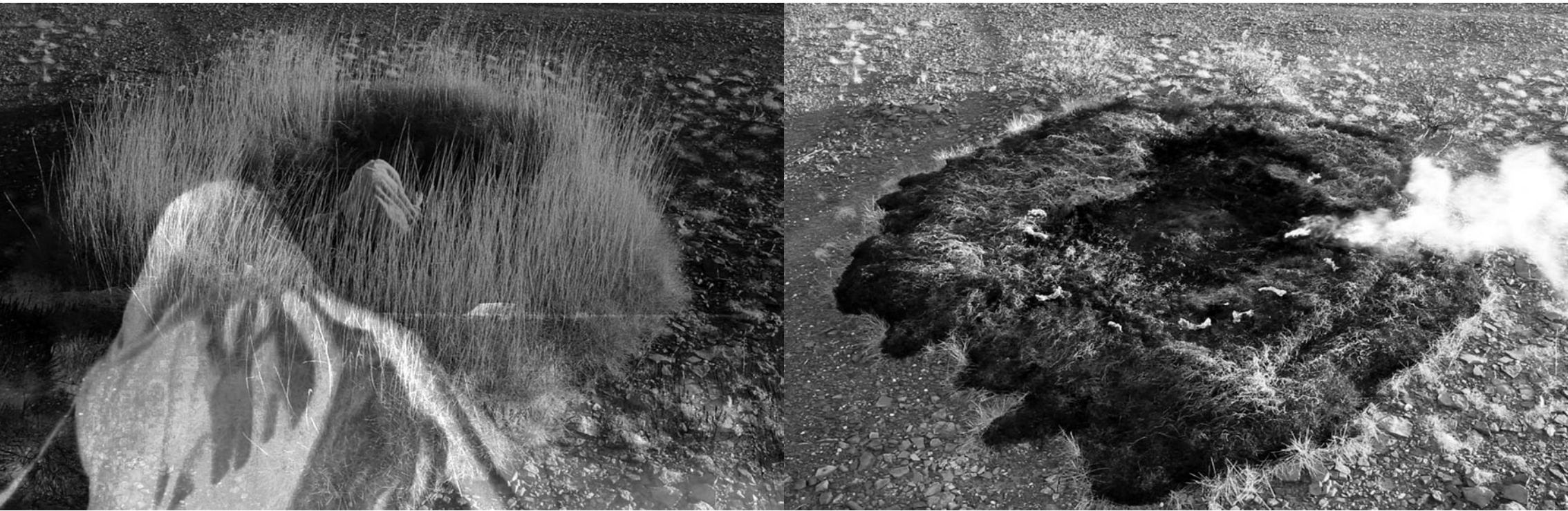
This image contains graphic
or objectionable content

[click here to view](#)





Ryszard Dabek, *Still from Fahrenheit 451*, François Truffaut, 1966



Lily Hibberd, *Sun Slave*, 2013



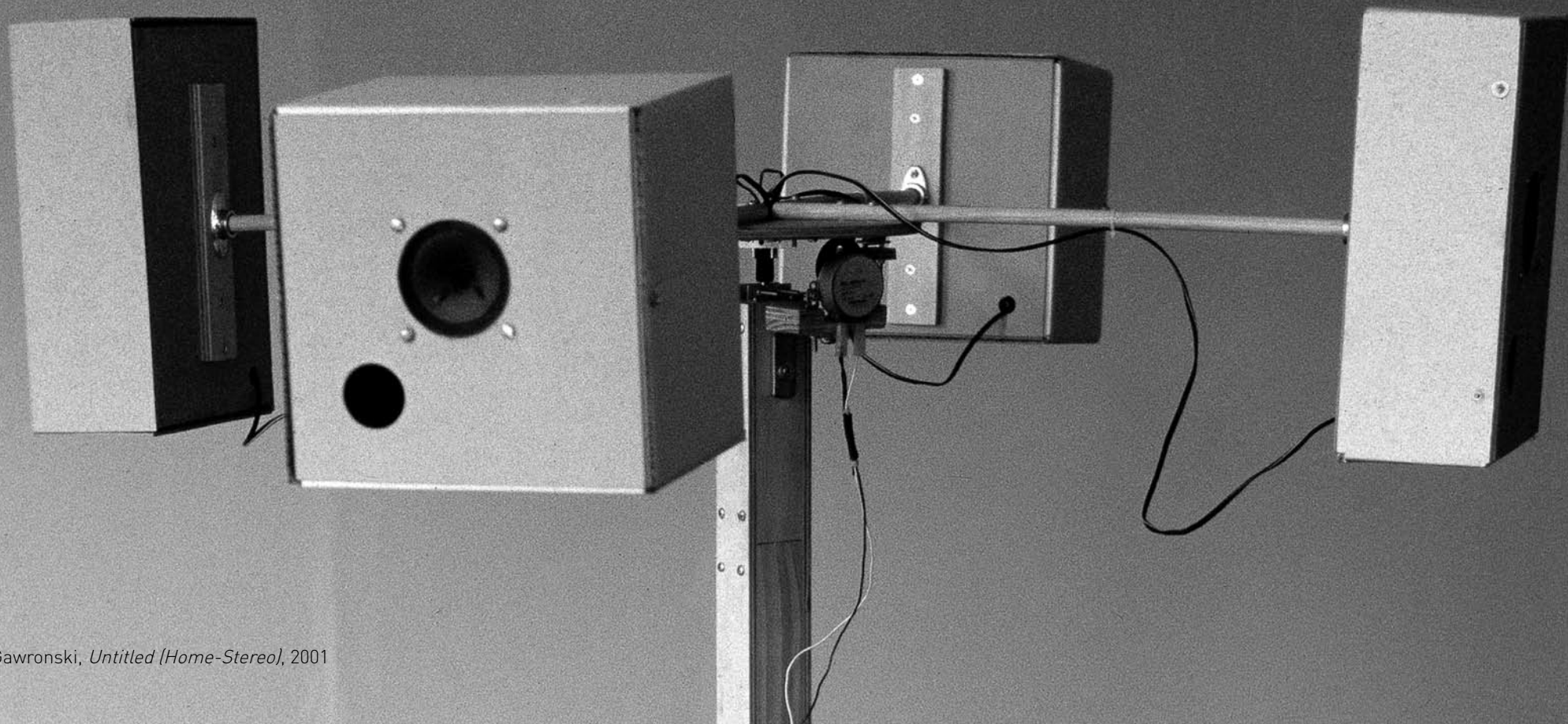
Nigel Helyer, *Songs from the UnderWorld_V1*, 2013



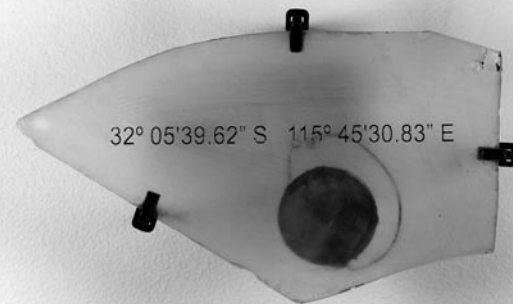
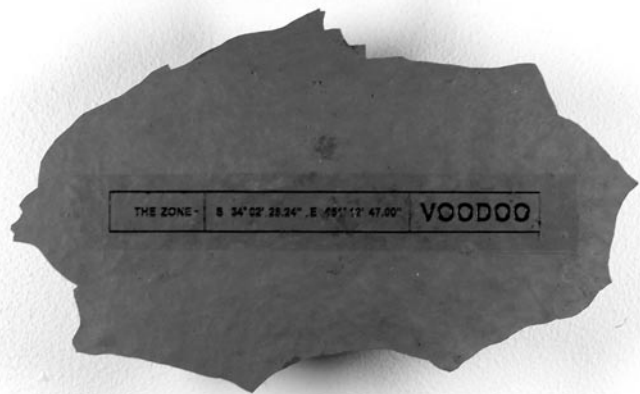
.....So he was like, "Well, we better go check out this field. What are you actually going to do out there?" And I said, "Oh you know I'm just going to go record the wind in the cane." He's like "Oh yeah. You wanna go there in the helicopter?" And I'm like "Whoo hoo." And Laurel's like "Oh you don't want to go in the helicopter love." And I'm going, "I do wanna go in the helicopter Laurel." And so it was amazing! I found out what it was, it was a Robinson R22 helicopter that they actually use for mustering in the Top End. And it was, oh, it was amazing, it was a 2 seater. And it was all the Perspex glass so you know, you pretty much.... you had a full view..... you could see out and we went up and we were on little headphones so we could talk to each other. It was amazing. He's like "Oh so you like this? You like flying?" And I'm like " Yeah I love flying".

Oh yeah, so he drops me in the middle....we come over the cane....and there's a little spot of grass, you know maybe 30 feet square. And he drops me down there and all the cane is blowing with the breeze of the helicopter. It was so great. And I got out and he left me there for about an hour. So there I am, I wandered into the cane, not too far because I was a bit scared of snakes. Then I wandered into the cane and set up my microphones and sat there with my headphones on. And recorded there for an hour. Just the wind in the cane. It was almost a religious experience, you know. It was kinda like, because the microphone picks up stuff so sensitively, You can hear all these fine, all these tiny details of sound and it's just you in the middle of nothing.....

(Extract from an audio letter to my father October 2006)



Alex Gawronski, *Untitled (Home-Stereo)*, 2001





Philipa Veitch, *Gate*, 2013

Artists

Mark Brown is a Sydney-based sound, installation and photo media artist exploring the phenomenology of space, architecture and acoustic atmospherics. Brown's practice has evolved into a poetic response to site, critiquing the history and function of architecture by documenting and making manifest unseen and unheard phenomena in space.

Ryszard Dabek is an artist and academic who has exhibited both nationally and internationally. His artistic practice encompasses a range of forms and mediums including video, film, photography and sound. Recent work includes the curatorial project Re:Cinema (Sydney, New York, 2013) and the solo exhibition Optimum Viewing Distance (I.C.A.N. Sydney 2012). In 2012 Dabek undertook a research residency at the National Film and Sound Archive towards the development of a new body of work based on archival footage of now demolished cinemas. He is a lecturer in the Film & Digital Art studio at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney.

Alex Gawronski is an artist, writer and academic based in Sydney. Alongside numerous group exhibitions, Gawronski has held solo exhibitions at Artspace, The Art Gallery of NSW, Performance Space,

UTS Art Gallery, Peloton, 55 Sydenham Rd, the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (ICAN), Scott Donovan Gallery, Sydney; the Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide; Death be Kind, 200 Gertrude St, Melbourne; The Physics Room, Christchurch, NZ and the British School at Rome, Italy. Gawronski also has a long-standing history as co-founding director of a number of independent artist initiatives. At present he is co-founding director of the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (ICAN). Gawronski publishes widely and currently lectures in Painting at Sydney College of the Arts.

Camilla Hannan is a sound artist based in Melbourne, Australia who works exclusively with field recordings. She processes these recordings into abstract representations of place and experience. She is interested in ideas of the 'sonic object' and sonic abstraction. Camilla has performed in Australia, Europe and the U.S.A. She has performed at festivals including Articulating the Medium (San Francisco), Liquid Architecture (Melbourne/Brisbane) and Totally Huge Music Festival (Perth). Her sound installation work has been featured at Instants Chavirés Paris, the Sydney Opera House, San Francisco MOMA, Gertrude Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne and the AC Institute, New York.

Dr Nigel Helyer (a.k.a. Dr Sonique) is an independent sculptor and sound-artist with an international reputation for large scale sound-sculpture installation, environmental public artwork, museum interactives and new media projects which prompt the community to engage with their cultural histories, identity and sense of place. He is a prominent international figure in the area of art and science collaboration, his poetic works render the abstract conditions of our environment and our complex relationship to it, understandable to a general public.

Lily Hibberd employs memory and storytelling in interpreting significant historical events and sites. Related projects include 'Les Aimants' (2013), 'Coup de Soleil' for 'Build me a city' at AEAF, 'The Phone Booth Project' Western Desert collaboration with Curtis Taylor for 'We don't need a map' at Fremantle Arts Centre (2012), and 'Benevolent Asylum: just for fun' with WART for Performance Space's WALK (2011). Lily is actively involved in producing and supporting critical art writing, and is founding editor of the independent contemporary art journal *un Magazine*. She holds a PhD in Fine Art and is represented by Galerie de Roussan, Paris.

Bronia Iwanczak works predominantly with photography and video. Her work has centered around the unmaking and making of 'worlds' be it through war, ideological conflict or environmental degradation. Intersecting sub themes in her work have included social revolution, spiritual imagination, the politics of religion, ritual performance, the consciousness of objects and technology.

Philipa Veitch's interdisciplinary art practice explores the structural deficits of modernity and the fragility of human endeavor. Her artworks investigate the complex interconnections and radical disjunctions that lie in the interstice between the subjects' experience of the self and of the world. She has curated numerous exhibitions, and was co-director of Firstdraft (1996-1997) and Loose projects (2006-2007). Upcoming projects include *Dark Arts*, an exhibition investigating the machinations of the 2013 federal election, and *No Signal*, which will reflect on the ambiguous role of contemporary art in the hinterland of globalized late capitalism.



Alex Gawronski
Untitled (Home-Stereo), detail, 2001

List of Works

Mark Brown

Field Fragments / Detritical Zone, 2009 - 2011

Found industrial fragments, text engraving and pigmentation, piezo-electric contact speakers, sound.

Dimensions variable

Ryszard Dabek

Some Trust All, 2013

Books, shelf, digital sound

Dimensions variable

Alex Gawronski

Standards, 2013

Aluminium, perspex, speakers, motors, hand-cut records, record players

Dimensions variable

Camilla Hannan

As the Bough Breaks, 2013

Dual Headphone Audio

Duration: 7.01 & 8.45

Nigel Helyer

Songs from the UnderWorld _V2, 2013

Microphone stands, stainless steel, fibreglass, wood, audio actuators.

Two units 2250mm x 2250mm x 500mm

Lily Hibberd

Sun Slave, 2013

Installation of video and found objects

Duration: 8:54

Dimensions variable

Text excerpts from 'Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman'

by Mary Wollstonecraft, published after her death in 1798

Bronia Iwanczak

Twitch, 2013

Bound book, wooden shelf, looped digital sound composition

Dimensions variable

Philipa Veitch

Partisan, 2013

MDF, timber, perspex, telephone handsets, curl cord, MP3 players, sound recording (read by Scott Donovan and Renate Wanek)

Dimensions variable

Audio Works

1. Nigel Helyer

Songs from the Underworld_V2, 2013

Environmental sound installation including extracts from the *Sonnets of Orpheus* by Rainer Maria Rilke and a Maori song recounting a story of Maui who also tried to cheat Death. These two narratives are both convolved with Seismic datalogs of volcanic and tectonic activity in New Zealand to produce a harmonic 'shadow music'.

(featuring Jo Tito and George 'the voice')

6:01

2. Camilla Hannan

As the Bough Breaks [edit], 2013

5:59

3. Lily Hibberd

Sun Slave, 2013

Sound recording / Excerpts from 'Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman' by Mary Wollstonecraft, published after her death in 1798

5:59

4. Bronia Iwanczak

Twitch, 2013

6:32

5. Mark Brown & Ion Pierce

Fontana Musee Incident, 2013

Sound composition using field recordings made in a Museum goods lift and PAR 38 light bulbs spinning on the floor of gallery spaces. Voice recordings made by Ion Pierce of Museum incident reports. Composition mixed with Fontana Mixer, a generative sound environment developed by Karlheinz Essl after "Fontana Mix" by John Cage.

6:00

6. Philipa Veitch

Partisan [edit], 2013

(featuring Scott Donovan and Renate Wanek)

2:33

7. Alex Gawronski

The Kings Men, 2013

(featuring Biljana Jancic, Eleanor Weber, Carla Cescon, Philipa Veitch, Justene Williams, Jelena Telecki Starcevic)

2:33

8. Ryszard Dabek

You have a smile that never reaches your eyes, 2013

5:53

Easy Listening

21 June – 13 July 2013

West Space

Mark Brown, Ryszard Dabek, Alex Gawronski, Camilla Hannan,
Nigel Helyer, Lily Hibberd, Bronia Iwanczak, Philipa Veitch

Author: Philipa Veitch

ISBN: 978-0-646-90513-6

Copyright the author and artists.

All images and audio courtesy of the artists.

Catalogue Design: Beth Pickworth

Catalogue and CD Cover Design: Ryszard Dabek

This project is supported by Arts NSW's NSW Artists' Grant Scheme, a devolved funding program administered by the National Association of the Visual Arts on behalf of the NSW Government.



**Trade &
Investment**
Arts NSW

West Space

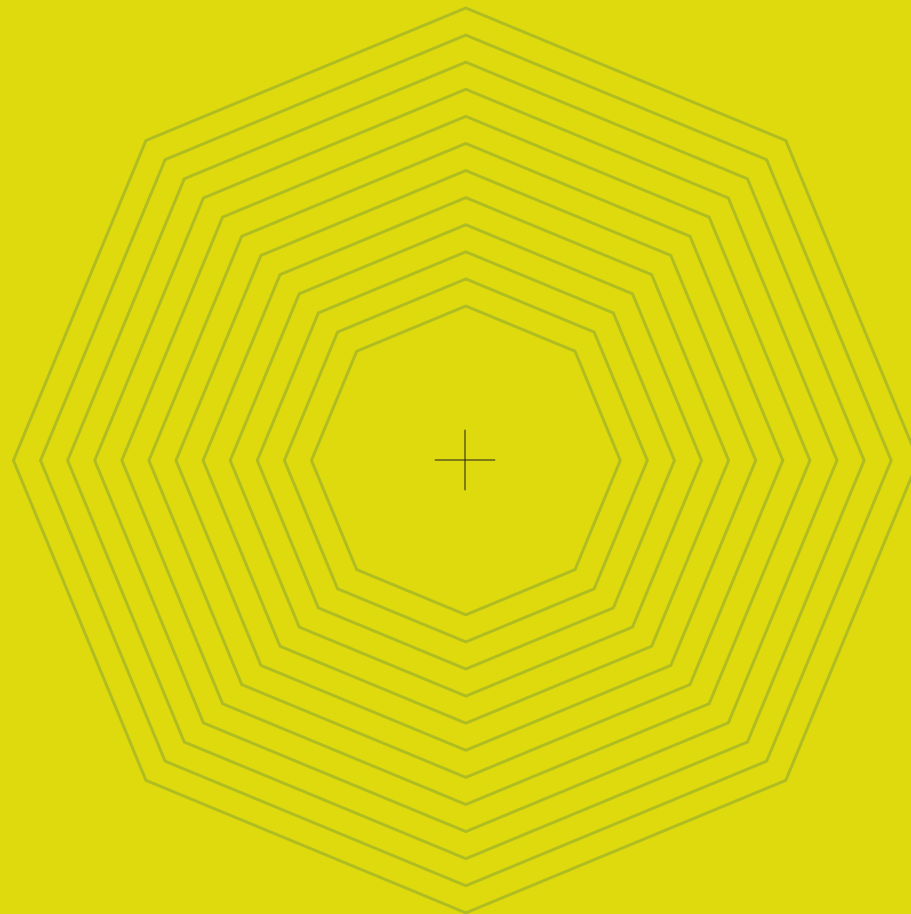
Level 1 / 225 Bourke St, Melbourne VIC 3000

Tuesday - Saturday, 12-6pm

westspace.org.au

**West
Space—**

www.easylisting13.net



Track List

- 1 Nigel Helyer
Songs from the Underworld_V2, 2013 6:01
- 2 Camilla Hannan
As the Bough Breaks (edit), 2013 5:59
- 3 Lily Hibberd
Sun Slave, 2013 5:59
- 4 Bronia Iwanczak
Twitch, 2013 6:32
- 5 Mark Brown & Ion Pierce
Fontana Musee Incident, 2013 6:00
- 6 Philipa Veitch
Partisan (edit), 2013 2:33
- 7 Alex Gawronski
The Kings Men, 2013 2:33
- 8 Ryszard Dabek
You have a smile that never reaches your eyes, 2013 5:53