

## ARTICLE

## Āččēñtβ: Notes on a Distributed Composition

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In 2018 I was appointed to the position of Glasgow's first UNESCO City of Music artist-in-residence. Over the course of a year I worked with numerous community groups and choirs across the city to collaboratively devise and realise a new choral/film work, titled *Āččēñtβ*, which was performed by an audience of over three hundred and fifty people at its premiere at the Glasgow Royal Concert Halls in 2019. *Āččēñtβ* explores *accents* as a sonorous social matter – staccatos and lilts, patterns of difference in our voices, as sonic markers of place and community – sounds that I have come to understand as resonating between our individual and collective identities. This paper presents some of the theory orientating my compositional praxis, *speaking nearby* a reflective account of some of the compositional considerations and processes undertaken through the project. Through it I explore Karen Barad's methodology of *diffractive* thought, Trinh T. Minh-ha's notion of *speaking nearby* within the *interval*, Pauline Oliveros' practice of *Deep Listening*, thinking towards how these might meet through my praxis to come close to Timothy Corrigan's *Refractive Cinema*. *Āččēñtβ* speaks to the complexity of authorship and agency in distributed, collaborative composition and the motive relationships between sound and image, spectacle and spectator – between the individual and the communal.

Keywords: individual/communal, diffraction, interval, sound-image, film sound, accents



Figure 1: Image taken from performance at Glasgow Royal Concert Halls, 11<sup>th</sup> Mar 2019  
Source: generated by the author

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## Composing in the *sound-image*

I work on the premise that sound film, the audiovisual, or what I will refer to from here on as the *sound-image*, is an inherently collaborative performance: a matter performed through sound, text and image, its makers, the object(s) of their investigation, the instruments of mediation and the audience. From this perspective, to reduce this collaborative, dynamic multiplicity into a dichotomy of sound and image, as much audiovisual discourse has historically done<sup>1</sup>, is to rupture the object of our investigation, a fissure that is antithetical to the vibrantly complex lived experience of the sound-image.

It is an event that is more than the sum of its parts. Thinking of the sound-image in this way still allows for, if not relies upon, individuated critical readings of ways sound *and* image might behave; culturally, politically and epistemologically, as different ontological realms, but also allows locating them within a relational “field” (Eco 1989; Barad 2007) or “meshwork” (Ingold 2007; Morton 2013), which relies upon difference in the performance of its whole. As Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “two does not necessarily imply separateness, for it is never really equated with duality, and One does not necessarily exclude multiplicity, for it never expresses itself in one single form, or in uniformity” (Minh-ha 1996, 15). My research, through its collaborative and interdisciplinary nature, speaks to such non-dualist considerations of borders and liminality.

As a composer, most often working with artist filmmakers to realise film soundtracks, collaboration is a fundamental dynamic in my practice. Though my research into the agential vibrancy at play within the sound-image has taken me down numerous avenues, one which has remained a constant refrain has been a consideration of the role that language plays in the composition of the sound-image; with words, irreducible in their relation to concept in a Wittgensteinian sense (Wittgenstein 1953), being the apparatus most readily employed in the practical construction of a common conception. My own works often return to an exploration of the words used between sound-maker and image-maker as being an aggregate of understanding, or knowledge, between actors, a constant performance, a language game of sorts. To do so I often work with groups or collectives such as choirs to compose performances which let us hear a distributed response to a question or provocation, with my compositional ear tuned towards listening to the *differences* between these participants responses, or the choral polyvocality of the field, rather than towards a fidelity of each individual’s response.

To some extent this praxis is an extension of what Nicholas Bourriaud has termed *relational art*; “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space” (Bourriaud 2002, 14) which is “formed by inter-subjectivity, and which takes being-together as a central theme, the “encounter” between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning” (Bourriaud 2002, 15). Though *relational art* was a term coined in response to a specific trend in predominantly European art practices during the 1990s, Bourriaud himself notes that practices seeking the participation of an active spectator draw on legacies “theorised by Fluxus happenings and performances” (Bourriaud 2002, 26), whereby active participation of the audience was of key, if not principle concern, in realising the work<sup>2</sup>. Echoing something of Wittgenstein’s conceptualisation of the ongoing negotiation of meaning around the word as a “language-game”, Bourriaud opens the book by reminding us that “*artistic activity is a game*, whose forms, patterns and functions evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence” (Bourriaud 2002, 11, emphasis my own). He goes on to propose that within this relational field, the artist acts as a

<sup>1</sup> Emilio Audissino points to moves away from a “separatist conception” in film music studies, where “music and visuals are thought of as two distinct entities, with the visual medium being the dominant” (Audissino 2017, 45) towards writers such as Kathryn Kalinak, Nicholas Cook, Ben Winters and to some extent Michel Chion who propose “non-separatist” approaches to conceptualising the sound-image (Audissino 2017, 46).

<sup>2</sup> Here we might look towards compositional practices employing verbal notation such as those of Robert Ashely, George Brecht, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage, Alison Knowles and Pauline Oliveros, to whom we will return later.

*semionaut*; one who “invents trajectories between signs” (Bourriaud 2002, 113). Lauren Redhead expands on this notion to say that “[i]n the ‘work’ of music, the composer, performer and listener can all be thought of as semionauts; they take part in the same processes to create and re-create the ‘work’ (Redhead 2017, 97).

Following Redhead, we might come to a similar understanding around the construction of meaning performed within the *sound-image*, an equivocally time-based medium|material<sup>3</sup>; compositions performed across a *distributed entity*, between the collaborating human and non-human agencies that come to realise the work, the film, or the knot of sounds and images performed in a space, and the listener/audience, or *audio-viewer* (Chion 2009), as active participants. In this way, words might be understood as forming something like gravities of meaning in the semiotic expanse, knots, or masses around which knowledge is drawn through *active* attempts at translation between actors, orientating semionautic collaborators in relation to each other; a framework for making sense.

More broadly my praxis explores this site, the negotiation of a language between collaborators, specifically between filmmaker and sound-maker, as a site to think creatively about new possibilities in sound-image composition. In working across a form as *intersubjective*<sup>4</sup> as film, I understand it to be necessary as a sound-image composer to devise methods that move towards undoing my own subjectivity in composing sonic responses to the image. I understand the dynamics between sound and image in the sound-image as a complex flux of authorship, however this mesh of authorship is not commonly paralleled in the practical composition of sound with moving-images<sup>5</sup>. Through my works I aim to create processes of sound-image composition that counter hegemonic practices in the field, a field that for the most part operates within a demarcated, and pyramidal structure of labour, and recognise the distributed authorship at play within the sound-image.

Thus, my research into this collaborative performance might be defined as an exploration of boundaries, relations and agential flux, of the plurality of subjectivities knotted into the sound-image form. It is this distributed, collaborative compositional process at play in the creation of the sound-image that my praxis aims to speak nearby.



“What does a *music city* sound like?”

In 2008 Glasgow became a UNESCO City of Music, part of a network of forty-six other cities across the globe that have identified music is a vital part of their cultural ecology. Ten years on, in 2018, I was invited to take on the role of being the city’s first UNESCO City of Music artist-in-residence, and creatively respond to this question<sup>6</sup>.

Glasgow, like many cities, has a rich culture of people making and performing music across a vibrant patina of genres and styles, in so many different venues and contexts.

It got me thinking if there might be something like a sound-in-common amongst all the music made here;

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Herzogenrath’s excellent book of the same name; a collection of essays exploring the media|material bind, but which is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>4</sup> As I understand Edmund Husserl’s proposal of intersubjectivity being something like community, or a cross-cultural movement of the self, or ego, constructed through lines of empathy. (Husserl 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Here we might look to the list of credits one will see at the end of any commercial film, whereby each contributor’s creative participation in the realisation of the work is demarcated and categorised (and, theoretically, recompensed accordingly). But in the moment of our encounter with the sound-image, we read these contributions *through* each other; in that the lighting in a scene can change how an audience might hear in the music at that moment, as might a creative decision by a costume designer change how we interpret the script at another.

<sup>6</sup> This document of its inaugural performance can be found at <https://vimeo.com/richycarey/accents>. A short overview of the project’s aims can be found at <https://vimeo.com/richycarey/accentsoverview>.

or if not a sound, then something like an identity.

It was from here that the idea of exploring accents as sounds-in-common came around, sounds that carry something of our communal *and* individual identity; that though every musician, or voice, has their own unique sound, that we might be able to hear something shared amongst them also, like an accent.

I'm interested in composing with materials that perform these kinds of fluidity,  
I enjoy trying to think around the sound of something that is always changing.



## Diffraction

Through this praxis, I have sought to follow Karan Barad's proposal of a *diffractive methodology* (Barad 2007; 2014) by which one "read(s) insights from different areas of study *through* one another" (Barad 2007, 3, emphasis my own) with the aim of providing "a transdisciplinary approach that remains rigorously attentive to important details of specialized arguments within a given field in an effort to foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries". Barad's proposal of a diffractive thought speaks to the optical, and sonorous, effect of waves bending round an obstacle or through a slit, making visible the *effects of difference* as these waves overlap. The figurative depiction of diffraction as a metaphor for attending to difference can be traced back through the writing of Trinh T. Minh-ha and Donna Haraway (Geerts and van der Tuin, 2016), owing "as much to a thick legacy of feminist theorizing about difference as it does to physics" (Barad 2014, 168). Barad proposes that reading texts "through one another", rather than "reading one text or set of ideas against another" (Barad 2007, 30) is a way of "troubling dichotomies" (Barad 2014, 168), offering us a departure point to creatively explore this site of difference. For Barad, what we do and the ways we do it matters – there are real, tangible, material repercussions; read through the specific concerns of my own praxis, the process of arriving at *this* as a sound of *that*, makes a difference.

A principle concern for Barad, and one which is now a key concern in my own work, is an attention to the *apparatuses* we employ in the process of knowing; that the tools we use to know the world have material effects on the knowledges they allow for, and more importantly, those which they do not. They are "arrangements that give meaning to certain concepts to the exclusion of others" (Barad 2007, 147). Barad takes Nils Bohr's two-slit diffraction experiments as a figurative example (Barad 2007, 103), that the apparatus to test if light behaves as a particle confirms that it behaves as a particle, and that the apparatus to test if light behaves as a wave confirms that it behaves as a wave. Barad explores this as a way of considering how we relate to the world, that the different tools we use to know phenomena; language, looking, listening for example, both allow and disallow certain knowledges to be performed through our *intra-action* with them. Barad uses the term *intra-action*, as opposed to interaction, to emphasise the inseparability of entanglement; "the neologism "intra-action" *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction". For Barad, we are constantly configuring, and re-configuring the very matter of the world as we intra-act with it; a collaborative performance.

This has led me to pay particular attention to the different types of knowledge that the camera lens, the microphone, the screen and the speakers, and the languages we employ in speaking between these mediators, might allow and disallow when working at the site of collaborative meaning making with filmmakers. Through the

sound-image, or what Chion has termed the *audio-logo-visual* (Chion 2009, 468), we intra-act with these apparatuses simultaneously, interpreting, *diffracting*, what we come to know through one lens with what we come to know through the other, and the other, and the other... coming to interpret meaning through the patterns of difference made by these intra-actions.

Through Barad, we reaffirm the mutability of matter, vibrantly performed through our intra-action with the world around us. It is through this materialisation that meaning is made, for Barad “meaning is material”, “matter isn’t what exists separately from meaning (Barad 2014, 175). The effervescence of this matter|meaning, impermanent and in flux, rather than fixed-in-place, might be easier to conceptualise through what Cristoph Cox terms *sonic thought* – learning *with* sound as material – “sound as flux, event, and effect” (Cox 2015, 123). For Cox, “sound lends credence to a very different sort of ontology and materialism, a conception of being and matter that can account for objecthood better than an ontology of objects can account for sounds.” (Cox 2015, 124). As a composer, working between sound and the moving-image, the liquid impermanence of these time-based materials is the clay with which I sculpt, and the mutability of meaning that occurs through their difference is what I am interested in exploring through my praxis.

Though conceptualising the sound-image through Barad speaks to the entanglement of these different media, Barad identifies difference as being performed through a relational separability, that “*agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense*” (Barad 2007, 33), enacted through what she terms *agential cuts*. “Intra-actions enact agential cuts, which do not produce absolute separations, but rather cut together-apart (one move)” (Barad 2014, 168). This idea of the together-apart, as inseparable difference, might best be understood through what Trinh T Minh-ha has conceptualised as the *interval*.



As well as being a composer working with film, I, like many other musicians, also work in community settings – leading songwriting sessions in places like prisons and community centres, or doing sound art workshops in schools or with different community arts collectives.

I learn a lot about ways of making music and talking about it by making collaboratively with people from different walks of life. I don’t think being trained in music means you understand it better than anyone else. I might have learned more about specific histories or approaches to making it than some, and I am privileged to have had the opportunity to do so, but the visceral affect – the meanings that music can communicate – this is something that everyone is an expert in.

In researching something as subjective, and politically loaded, as accents, it seemed vital to begin by simply speaking to others about how they think about these sounds. To learn with people by listening to them.

I approached some of the community arts organisations I had previously worked with, as well as others who worked in ways I hoped to learn from, to ask if I might be able to do some creative sessions with their groups. In these workshops we played with instruction scores, sketching sounds, images and writing that that indirectly asked questions around how the participants thought and felt about different ways accents can function.

We also had direct discussions with each other about some the positive and negative experiences they had encountered through an attention to their accents, which often led to us sharing stories of times they had been made to feel excluded due to the ways they sound, and times when the familiarity of an accent was of comfort.

It was through these workshops I came to learn something of the mutability of accents as a material, that these sounds are simultaneously individual and collective:

Sounds that hold something of our histories, the voices we have encountered that resonate in how we sound.

Sounds which can communicate something of an aspiration, how we would *like* to be heard.

Sounds we consciously and subconsciously change depending on the social context in which we are speaking.

Sounds through which one can be othered and excluded as well as identified with and welcomed.

Sounds, in short, which echo something of the social and political conditions in which we reside.



## Interval

Trinh T. Minh-ha, a filmmaker, writer, composer, and theorist, is a voice guiding much of this praxis, and can be heard resonating through Barad's own writing (Barad 2007; 2014). Much of her work deals with plurality, multiplicity, or more succinctly, difference<sup>7</sup>. She has spoken of her work as being "between" filmmaking and writing, not looking at the processes as being inherently separate, but as being related through their difference; "to keep the relation of language to vision open, one would have to take the difference between them as the very line of departure for speech and writing, rather than as an unfortunate obstacle to overcome" (Minh-ha 1999, xi). She proposes numerous ways of considering the politics and practice of representation that have made me thoroughly question my role as someone making sound-with-moving-image, a role which intrinsically requires careful considerations of re-presentation<sup>8</sup>. In her writing and filmmaking Trinh refuses speaking *about* a subject, but rather seeks to *speak nearby* them; when she writes about film sound she is often also speaking to feminist, non-western forms of knowledge making, when she proposes taking the interval in music as a point of departure not a point of distinction, she can be speaking as to how we might understand the difference between sight, sound, saying and knowing as a place of connection rather than distinction, not as a place of opposition but co(m)position.

The notion of the interval is a key concept to which Trinh often returns through her work; that through thinking with the interval "a direct relation is possible" (Minh-ha 1999, xi). As a composer working collaboratively with moving-images, thinking of the sound-image as a site of intervallic difference might allow us to move beyond totalising, "top-down, Grand Theory"<sup>9</sup> (Audissino 2017) approaches to the analysis and interpretation of film sound

<sup>7</sup> It is vital to acknowledge that Trinh, a Vietnamese woman living and working in America since the 1980's, speaks as much to feminist and decolonial theories as she does to those of filmmaking. Though I cannot elaborate fully on these aspects of her propositions in this text, questions around the distribution of power and agency to which these schools of discourse speak resonate through my praxis. I do not speak from a comparable position, though I try to learn from her practice of speaking nearby and listen with an attention informed by her work and writing.

<sup>8</sup> In that I am quite literally tasked with re-presenting images; the sounds I choose to compose with the image, and the ways in which they are collected have, and are of, consequence.

<sup>9</sup> Audissino points to the problem of the "Grand Theory" in film music analysis, "around which the approaches are shaped and to which the practical applications always strive to conform" whereby a "top-down" approach is taken, in which "theory comes first and then a film is selected that conforms to the specific theory" (Audissino 2017, 51).

whilst still recognising that these positions<sup>10</sup> illuminate the specific sound-image instantiations they speak to with an alacrity and insight. As Trinh goes on to say, “the art and science of music making is largely consumed by the complex task of generating, arranging, altering, arresting, modulating, inflecting, distorting, adjusting, tempering, perfecting, purifying, setting and standardizing intervals” (Minh-ha 1999, xiii) and I suggest that these intervallic relations extend to how we might hear/read the intervals between the seen and heard in the sound-image.

If, as Trinh suggests, in Western music “intervals are classified as consonant and dissonant and made to hate each other” (Minh-ha 1999, xiii) then might this extend to how we have come to understand the intervals unfolding through the sound-image, that there are “dualistic and hierarchal” notions of how sound should perform in the sound-image? Trinh speaks to this notion further in *The Totalizing Quest of Meaning*, saying “in the general effort to analyse film and produce “theory about film”, there is an unavoidable tendency to reduce film theory to an area of specialization and of expertise, one that serves to constitute a *discipline*” (Minh-Ha 1991, 31), that “what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than a meaning. And what persists between the meaning of something and its truth is the interval” (Minh-Ha 1991, 31)<sup>11</sup>. To move beyond the “problem... of control and standardization of images and sounds” (Minh-Ha 1991, 32) might we need to call for an *emancipation of dissonance* in the ways we listen to, and compose within, the intervals of the sound-image?

Trinh’s methodology of *speaking nearby* as a form of indirect language offers us an apparatus for thinking and relating, positioning ourselves, within the site of the interval. Trinh describes speaking nearby as being; “a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object and as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing it or claiming it” (Minh-ha 1999, 218). Speaking, or in my case composing film sound, from this perspective might offer a reminder to routinely question the multiplicity of meaning materialised through the “synchresis”<sup>12</sup> of sound and image, and as such work towards composing gestures in the sound-image which embrace the subjectivity of the work’s audience, to creatively attend to difference and give space for layers of meaning to perform through their intra-action<sup>13</sup>. As Trinh goes on to say; “these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language. Every element in film refers to the world around it, while having at the same time a life of its own. And this life is precisely what is lacking when one uses word, image or sound just as an instrument of thought” (Minh-ha 1999, 218).

This way of thinking, with a view towards making and writing with film sound, a position that is not about ownership or authority, that seeks a poly-vocality in trying to make space for plurality, is one I am still working towards, but is one which offers me a form to articulate my understanding of the role that *distributed composition* might play in the collaborative construction of the sound-image. Trinh extends this indirect language towards thinking about what it is to use “speech-text” to articulate the filmic, “words as words cannot speak for or be subordinate to the image. They can, however, deploy their own logic to indicate a direction, to bring into relief a landscape through which a film moves, and when treated as a sound world of their own, they render audible and readable the multiplicity of the interpretive process itself” (Minh-ha 1999, xi).

<sup>10</sup> Here I am speaking to canonical texts of film-music theory such as Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* (1987), Michel Chion’s *Audio-Vision* (1994) or Edward Branigan’s *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992).

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most easily accessible evidence of this comes in a later chapter *Holes in the Sound Wall*, whereby “HIM who knows the rules of precedence” declares Trinh’s compositional decision to leave sites of no-sound in her soundtrack a “disaster”; “HIM...who can evaluate with certainty what ranks above and what ranks below in the art of ordering film sound” (Minh-Ha, 1985, 201)

<sup>12</sup> Chion points to synchresis as an amalgam of synchrony and synthesis, “perceiving the concomitance of a discrete sound event and a discrete visual event as a single phenomenon” (Chion, 2009, 492).

<sup>13</sup> This is of course not to attempt to anticipate all possible meaning that could be read into a gesture, rather a way to remind oneself the subjectivity of these gestures and as such compose intervals between the seen and the heard which allows space for the spectator to actively participate in constructing this meaning-making.

Thinking with the interpretive processes inherent in the speech-text, rather than from a rigid perspective of word-as-description, speaks to the inquiry at the heart of my praxis. There are tools commonly employed in filmmaking to circumvent this site of translation, such as the *temp-track*<sup>14</sup>, though I propose that such didactic forms of communication are problematic in terms of the relational frameworks they instigate, leading to a perpetuation of sound-image tropes that reinforce hierarchical, visio-centric, auteurist hegemonies<sup>15</sup> in processes of film-sound composition. Through my praxis I seek to embrace the collaborative venture of *trying* to communicate through speech-text and the potential for new thinking this engenders, rather than trying to circumvent this site as the *temp-track* does. Reflecting on Trinh's writing has led me to consider that one of the problems in using a *temp-track* is that it is a singular response to a moving question<sup>16</sup>, it only gives the composer one point of reference. By contrast, trying to form a consensus around a word, by using multiple references to orientate meaning in relation to it, seems to not only afford the filmmaker, on a rather counterintuitive level, a vehicle to be *more* specific in their communication, but also to invite a more creative response from the sound-maker as an active agent in their interpretation.

Giving space for indeterminacy allows for difference, which in turn draws our attention to the interval; a mode of attention which influences not only my compositional practice but how I have come to consider my actions in life more broadly. As Trinh goes on to say, *speaking nearby* "is not just a technique or a statement to be made verbally. It is an attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world."



It was through these workshops that I began to explore the form which *Áččěñtβ* eventually took.

I had worked with choirs to explore collective responses to moving-image scores in previous works.

I am interested in the texture of these sounds and their relationship to the moving-image.

I sought to compose a work which anyone could take part in singing, where there wasn't a "right" way to sound. Instruction scores, or verbal notation, and the ethos that comes from the history of these practices, welcome this indeterminacy. I wanted to explore the complexity of attending to the dynamics of the moving-image whilst simultaneously listening to the way aggregates of understanding can form around words.

I came to create four short moving-image-instruction-scores, with each movement composed as a creative interpretation of the four icons of Glasgow's founding myth;

Here is the bird that never flew  
Here is the tree that never grew  
Here is the bell that never rang  
Here is the fish that never swam.

<sup>14</sup> The practice of using pre-existing music set to an image by filmmakers to explain to a composer/sound-designer the sounds they would like composed for the image.

<sup>15</sup> Ben Winters critiques the "long shadow" cast by Western Musicology's traditional veneration of the figure of the "genius" composer and its relative in Film Studies; "a mode of thinking that privileged the creative efforts of individuals, most commonly a film's director" (Winters 2016, 52).

<sup>16</sup> Others include the structural relationships it perpetuates (i.e. one-directional, capitalist) and that of unattributed authorship (i.e. the composer being asked to essentially re-create another composer's work).



The ‘bird’ was shot in one long take looking down on the Glasgow Green, the biggest common ground in the city.

The ‘tree’, a 250-year-old tree I used to climb as a child filmed every few weeks over the course of the year.

The ‘bell’, time lapse footage looking out in each direction from Glasgow University’s bell tower.

The ‘fish’, an assemblage of abstract images filmed as I travelled under through the tunnel under the river Clyde.

I approached a number of the Glasgow’s community choirs, some with only around twenty or so members, others with over one hundred and fifty, to ask if I might be able to workshop iterations of the scores with them and was generously welcomed. Through these sessions I would explain what the film-scores were about and how I hoped they would work. We would rehearse versions of the scores, and the choir members would give me direct feedback on what was difficult, what was confusing, what was enjoyable and what was meaningful.

I would then rework the scores, thinking of their creative and practical suggestions, and come back to see if I had managed to address their concerns whilst still accommodating my own creative vision for the work.



## Deep Listening

*Deep Listening* is a practice which composer and educator Pauline Oliveros devoted her life to, and one which could be surmised as a continuous attention to the reciprocity of listening and its relationship to consciousness. For Oliveros “*Deep* coupled with *Listening*... is learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound – encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible” (Oliveros 2005, xxiii). It concerns the composition of situations whereby one can guide one’s own, or a group’s ear towards a heightened state of both “listening and responding” (Oliveros 2005, xxiii); movement in more than one direction. Oliveros states that Deep Listening is “intended to facilitate creativity in art and life” which “means the formation of new patterns, exceeding the limitations and boundaries of old patterns, or using old patterns in new ways” (Oliveros 2005, xxv), which echoes the patterns of thought which Barad’s methodology of diffraction, Bourriaud’s *relational aesthetics*, and Trinh’s *interval* draw our attention to.

Resonating with Trinh’s *interval*, Oliveros goes on to explain that “deep has to do with complexity and boundaries, or edges beyond ordinary or habitual understandings” (Oliveros 2005, xxv). Where Trinh writes that “words as words cannot speak for or be subordinate to the image” (Minh-ha 1999, xi), Oliveros states that “physical descriptions of sound properties and listening do not explicate the phenomenal world of perception that takes place in the auditory cortex” (Oliveros 2005, xxv).

The act of describing sound or sight then, by its very indeterminacy, cannot capture, with all the connotations of ownership that word implies, the phenomena of the sound-image. Oliveros, along with many other artists and composers from the 1950’s onward, sought to embrace this indeterminacy through verbal notation as a form of musical composition (Lely and Saunders 2012). Her *Sonic Meditations*, composed in 1971 for the Femme Ensemble, are a series of instruction scores that began Oliveros’ journey towards *Deep Listening* and which played a considerable role in the research and composition of *Áççěñtβ*. I would often begin the research workshops with one of Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations* as a way of creating a sense of collective endeavour with the groups, and as part of my residency, hosted a free public workshop in the open-air bandstand in Glasgow’s Kelvingrove park, where we

collectively took part in realising a number of these works. These *Sonic Meditations* are “Sonic Explorations which include everyone who wants to participate” and are “attempts to erase the subject/object or performer/audience relationship” whilst being “interested in communication among all forms of life” (Oliveros 1971, 2).

As with Barad and Trinh, for Oliveros words matter, they materialise the world around us. In her paper *Auralizing in the Sonosphere*, Oliveros comments that “the visual is favoured over the aural in our culture. Thus, we have fewer words in our vocabulary to express aurality” (Oliveros 2011, 162). She goes on to propose that to affect a cultural shift away from the visual towards the sonorous, a change in our everyday language is required, a simple but intentional effort to speak with words that are more readily associated with acoustic phenomena<sup>17</sup>. As well as speaking to words as Baradian apparatuses, the relationship between language and the capacity to sense phenomena is studied through the field of psycholinguistics; that the languages we use to articulate the world around us have a measurable effect on our lived experience of it (Boroditsky 2011; Majid and Burenhult 2014).

Working with adaptations of Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations*, as collectively realised soundtrack instruction scores, goes some way towards embracing the instability of the word as a site for difference, opening the interval to let us hear the textures resonating within, reaffirming one’s subjectivity through sound. Quoting Stephen Handel (1993, cited in Oliveros 2011, xxiii) Oliveros notes that “there is no sound pressure variation that will always lead to one and only one perception”, and that “similarly, there is no perception that always comes from one and only one pressure variation” (Oliveros 2011, xxiii). It is my hope that *Āčēñtβ* is a work that enacts the intra-active flow of agency at play both in the performance of the sound-image and in the language that surrounds its composition, creating a standing wave of sound-image-text interplay, a liminal space of vibrating boundaries inhabited by the audience, the performers (the sound-image), and the composer.



The instructions-as-subtitles aim to speak nearby the moving-image-score, with each movement inspired by a different Pauline Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditation*.

There are four key instructions for performing with *Āčēñtβ*:

There is no wrong way to sound.

Listen to the voices around you.

The texts are only lines, follow them, bend them, or forget them.

Let the image be the conductor.

*Āčēñtβ* is not an easy work to perform, though it is relatively straightforward in its design. The demand on the performers’ attention is weighty; simultaneously interpreting the words, attending to the image, and listening those around you is challenging.

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<sup>17</sup> As well as speaking to Barad’s keen awareness to the knowledges that certain apparatuses allow for and disallow, the relationship between language and the capacity to sense phenomena is studied through the field of psycholinguistics; that the languages we use to articulate the world around us have a measurable effect on our lived experience of it (Boroditsky 2011; Majid and Burenhult 2014).

I created a spoken word version of the instructions which played in synchrony with the film and could be listened to through Bluetooth headphones as a way of ensuring those with visual impairments, or for whom written English is a barrier, were still welcome to take part.



### **Diffraction Cinema**

If successful in this regard, *Áččěñtβ* aims to realise something close to film theorist Mark Corrigan's concept of *Refractive Cinema*, which he describes as "art about art – or better put, art through art" (Corrigan 2011, 181). Corrigan states that; "the best of these films about art and film do not simply describe or document filmic or other aesthetic practices but specifically engage them within an essayistic arena that abstracts the very activity of thinking through a cinematic process", that they are "films that enact and disperse the critical act of thinking cinematically itself" (Corrigan 2011, 181). In this sense, it is through the performance of these film-scores, rather than through the documents of their performance, in which this cinematic knowledge exchange is most deeply communicated, an embodied and heightened *feeling* of being immersed in the relations between image, sound, text and most importantly, each other.

In his essay *The Open Work*, which also orientates Bourriaud's *relational aesthetics*, Umberto Eco explores Henri Pousseur's description of his work as a "field of possibilities"; "The notion of 'field' is provided by physics and implies a revised vision of the classic relationship posited between cause and effect as a rigid, one-directional system: now a complex interplay of motive forces is envisaged, a configuration of possible events, a complete dynamism of structure" with "possibility" a "discarding of the static, syllogistic view of order" (Eco 1989, 14). Ludwig Wittgenstein describes words as having their own "field of force" (Wittgenstein 1953, 186), associative images, sound, memories that he equates to the experience of a word being on the tip of your tongue, of knowing, or sensing all that is around, and within the word, but not the word itself. *Philosophical Investigations* explores the specificity of language but also the "intolerable" conflict between what it is and what we logically assume it to be. Essentially, that the further one fractures the constituent parts of language, phonetically, semantically, the further removed one become from the meaning of words.

As the composer operating within this semiotic field, I work to create knots of aesthetic between the image and text on the screen which might guide the *semionautic* spectator-singer towards meanings that come close to those I am trying to communicate, but which embrace the intervals between them as resonator into which these collaborators might materialise their own meaningful experience. *Áččěñtβ* explores accents as a material, as irreducible sounds of difference, relation and identity, whilst at the same time seeking to draw attention to the site of interpretation that is central to my praxis, by inviting the audience to collaboratively compose their own soundtrack to the film. In this sense, it seeks to move towards a cinema that lets us listen to something of the intersubjectivity of the sound-image, to the patterns of difference, towards a form of *diffraction cinema*.



On the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019, as part of the Glasgow Short Film Festival, over three hundred and fifty members of Glasgow's community choirs, as well as Glaswegians who were interested in the project, came together to realise the work at the Glasgow Royal Concert Halls.

Though I had workshopped it many times, with many of these collaborating participants, I was not prepared for how present the feeling of connection, of being part of a larger identity, that the performance generated. There was a palpable emotion in the air that I had felt only moments of through the workshops and rehearsals.

I informally invited the audience to reflect on the work by anonymously writing down any observations they wished to share on pieces of tracing paper as they were leaving the auditorium. Below are some of their remarks;

*“Made me think of my | our place in the world.*

*Where we came from, where we are going and how we think communality and harmony.”*

*“Made me think of how we listen and sound and how that forms us/changes us.”*

*“The most energetic experience on my body since I started to speak in English.”*

*“Made accents feel normal – which is a delight for someone with an accent “not from here”, but here.”*

*“That was such an open, generous experience. Joyful!”*

*“Sincere & true.”*



## Conclusions

The recording linked to at the start of this paper is a welcome and useful outcome, but is not the locus of the work, which of course is the ever-present challenge of documenting live praxis in practice research.

However, following the premiere of *Áččěñtβ* at the Glasgow Royal Concert Halls, whereby over three hundred and fifty participants took part in realising the soundtrack, I informally invited the audience to reflect on the work as they were leaving the auditorium by writing down any observations they wished to share on pieces of tracing paper. Though all the reflections were welcome and generous, one in particular stood out for the clarity with which it communicated back to me what I had, and have been, trying to speak to through this paper and through the film-score *Áččěñtβ*:

*“I felt part of something intense, huge and personal.”*

*Áččěñtβ* audience member, Anon.

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