

Sound Art at its Best: send + receive v16

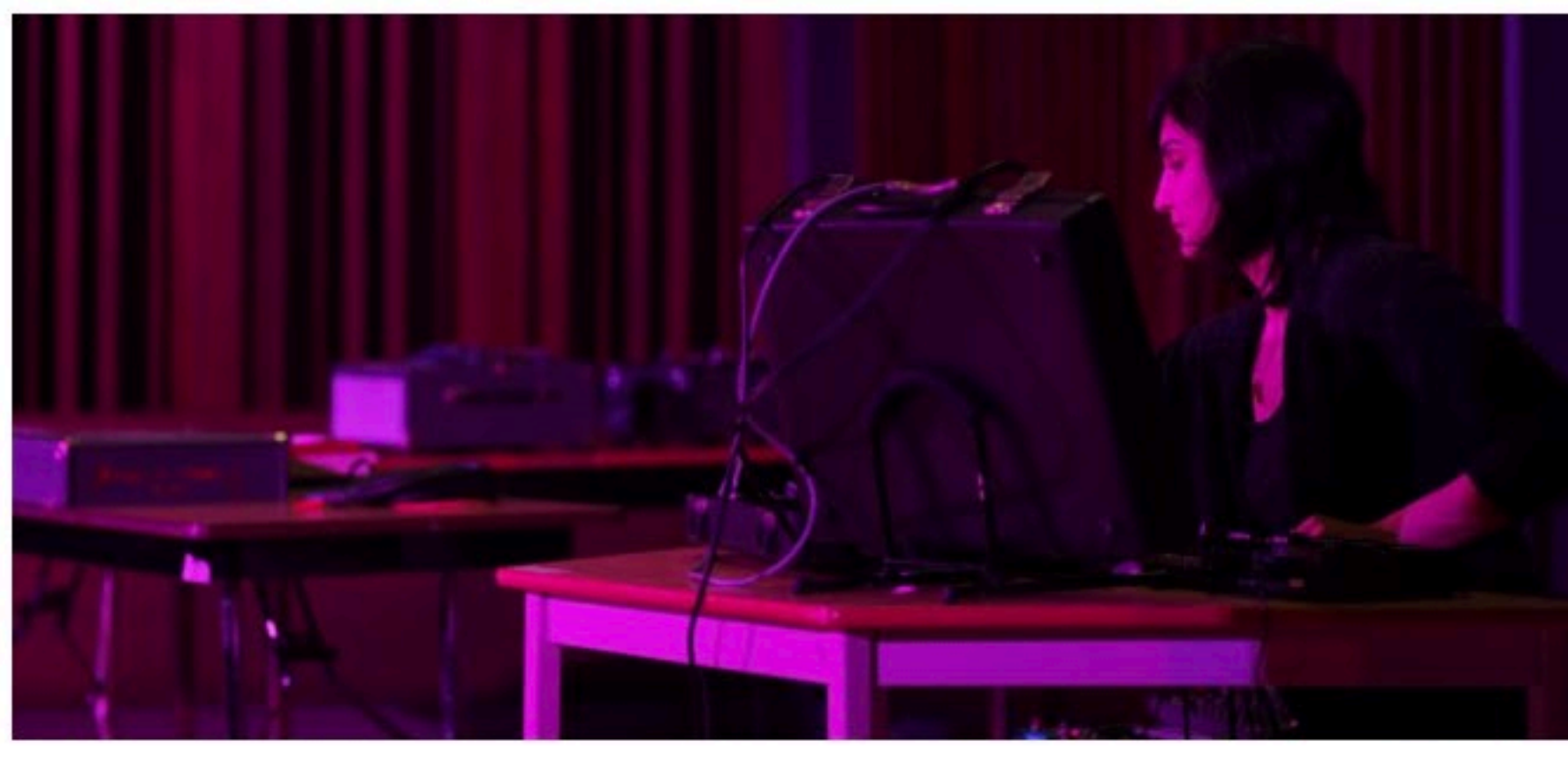
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by Dr. Melentie Pandilovski

Writing about send + receive, and sound art in general, creates a paradox, as one has to rely heavily on the left, quantitative, hemisphere of the brain, the one responsible for “visual space,” as it is the mind-space of civilization proceeding for the last four millennia of linearity, according to the Winnipeg-raised media prophet Marshall McLuhan. And yet in order to write about it one has to attempt to bring forward the notions of “acoustic space” which is a projection of the right hemisphere based on qualitative thinking (multi-centered + holistic, rather than mono-centered).

Send + receive Festival was launched in 1998, as a project of Video Pool Media Arts Centre, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the relative isolation provided by the North American prairies. Since its inception, send + receive has not ceased to tease the imagination of the Canadian and international public by becoming one of the key hubs for sound art, connecting local, national, and international artists, critics, and theorists alike. The Festival has served as an international and inter-cultural meeting place of sound arts and technologies in its acoustic and technological forms, influencing the discussions about artistic practices, critical reflections, and theoretical discourses characterized by electronic culture in general and sound art in particular.

Send + receive has achieved a noteworthy national and international importance by exploring the creation and practice of sound artists such as Michael Dumontier, Ken Gregory, Martin Tétrault, Théophile Billich, Bruce Russell, Stelios Giannoulakis, John Levack Drever, Ed Osborn, Carsten Nicolai, Angela Somerset, Net-Radio pioneers such as Susan Kennard and Heath Bunting, and more recently the historical legends of sound art—Charlemagne Palestine and Tony Conrad.



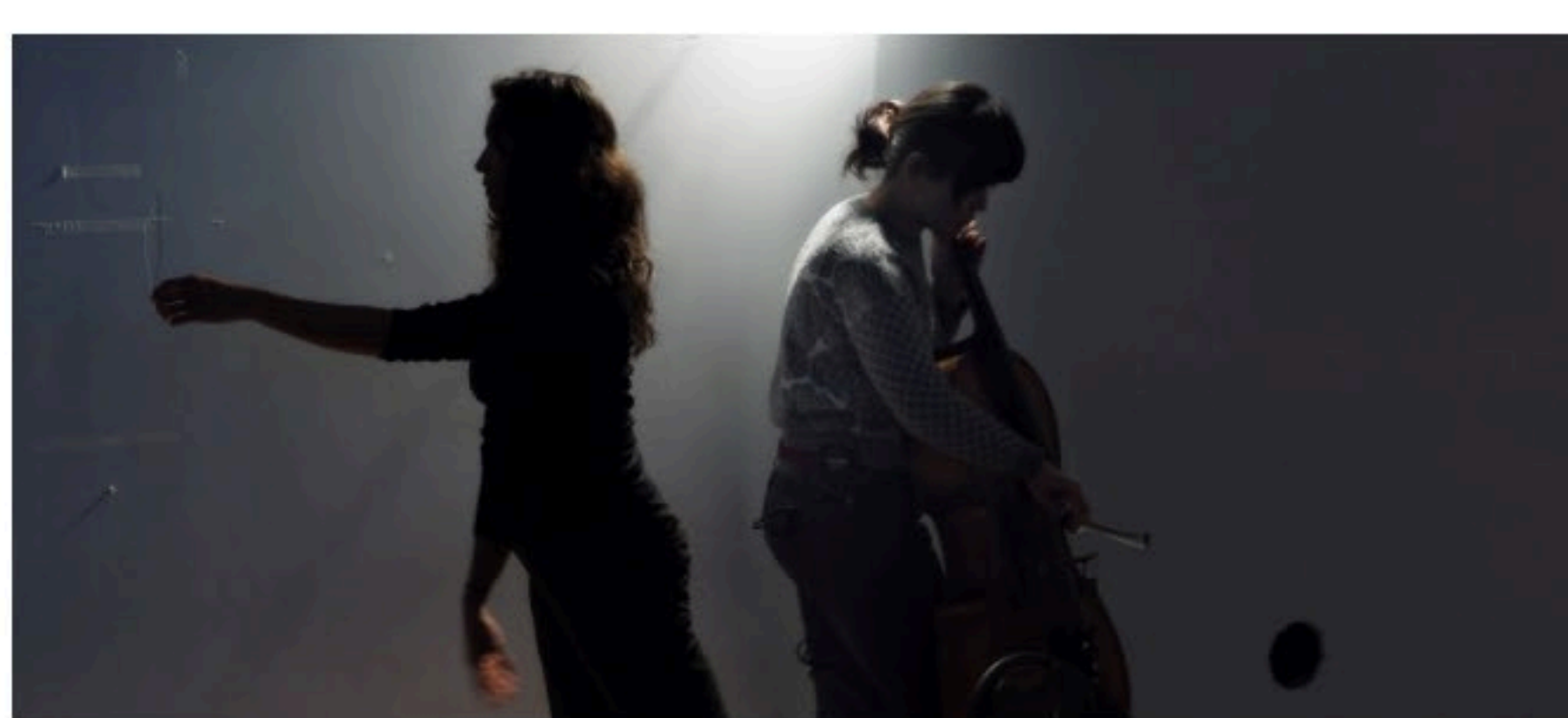
Sarah Davachi at send + receive V16.

This year's overarching theme of send + receive was “physical sound” with emphasis on the physicality of the body which generates sounds, the sensory apparatus, and the physiological and psychological ways in which sounds have effect on us. However, the complexity of sound does not allow for convenient classifications, as it generally challenges standard assumptions by bringing to the surface the experiences of the active listener stemming from their own perspectives, thus resulting in a certain sonic subjectivity. The experiencing of sound art itself becomes itself a phenomenological inquiry of the audience. In other words, sound art becomes the object of the “lived experience.” In effect, the physical sound refers to the notions of corporeality of the body generating the sound. That being the case, our relation to the source of the sound becomes immensely important in experiencing the actual sound artwork. This source of sound can signify a certain relationality to the “lived other,” as evidenced by the spectacular performance work of US-based Ellen Fullman (accompanied by cellist Okkyung Lee) who plays the “Long String Instrument” developed by Fullman, built of numerous suspended piano wires covering the length of the Ukrainian Labour Temple. Or it can refer to the spatiality, or felt space, as is the case with Ottawa-based Donna Legault's site specific installation titled “Subtle Territory.” Whereas Fullman's performance, insists on tones and harmonics being controlled with delicate movements by the rosin-coated fingers of the artist herself, Legault's installation presents us with a certain “defamiliarization effect.” Namely, the artwork was installed within Winnipeg's landmark Cube at Old Market Square, which serves as a stage for various bands and performers throughout the year. The surprising effect stems from the fact that although at first sight the Cube seems not to have any sort of function, passersby are able to experience audible tones coming from the inside of the Cube which are in effect captured and transformed low frequencies from the physical environment itself.



Burden (Doreen Girard, Caitlin Hutchison and Shelagh Pizey-Allen) performing at send + receive V16.

The biggest surprise of S+R was Winnipeg-based trio Burden. Caitlin Hutchison, Shelagh Pizey-Allen, and Doreen Girard were able to impress the audience by fully exploring aspects of physical sound in its temporal, spatial and bodily dimensions by vigorous and spirited pulling and rubbing of the soundboard of a piano placed on Media Hub's floor. The audience was fully immersed in the artwork and responded very enthusiastically to it. Burden is a force to be reckoned with. Calgary-born and Vancouver-based Sarah Davachi was impressive as a performer with her psychoacoustic investigations, as was her lecture at the Black Lodge of the Winnipeg Film Group, where she appeared in the role of historian/theorist of sound art relating to the rise of experimental electronic music in the 60s and 70s, key historical figures, and their artworks. Notions of alternative psychosomatic environments were also explored in the presentation. The physicality of the body and the intersection where the sensory system meets the psychological apparatus was explored in New York-based Okkyung Lee and Michelle Boulé's improvising performance at the Media Hub by means of using sound, light, and dance.



Okkyung Lee practices with Michelle Boulé prior to their performance at the Media Hub for send + receive V16.

Under the skilful organizational and artistic leadership of Director cory cole (herself being also an internationally renowned sonic artist helps s + r immensely) and with a dedicated Board and volunteers, send + receive has succeeded in finding new strategies for the dynamic exploration of sound and media arts, as well as in finding ways to adjust towards the ever-developing concepts and technologies which surround us, as it has become obvious that society and technology co-constitute each other. I remain confident that the broad experimentation platform which send + receive Festival has established for the presentation and research of sound art reflects a cultural transformation happening in the beginning of the 21st century, one that can assist us in the visualizing of our future, and one that points out to the phenomenology of sound, the felt or experienced sound, the thingness of sound. For if we truly exist in a society where we transit regularly between visual and acoustic space, then sound art with its apparent, as well as hidden qualities becomes indicative for the understanding of the current cultural shift between the two mind-spaces.

Dr. Melentie Pandilovski is a curator, media art critic and theorist. He is currently Director of Video Pool Media Arts Centre in Winnipeg, Canada. He has curated more than 150 exhibitions and organized numerous symposia, conferences, and workshops, in Europe, Australia, and Canada. His theoretical research deals with examination of the links between art, culture, technology, individual identity, and consciousness.

Notes

1. Ellen Fullman's Long String Instrument inevitably strikes a chord with Australian sound artist Alan Lamb's pioneering work “The Wires,” an instrument consisting of tightly strained spans of fencing wire that stretch up to 300 metres across the West Australian desert landscape.

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