

Peter Narvaez Student Paper Prize, 2016

Peter Narvaez joined IASPM-Canada soon after it was created in 1983. Through his passionate and engaged scholarship, his love of music and culture in all its forms (but especially the blues!), his sense of and struggle for social justice, as well as his generosity and respect towards others [especially students], he made a significant and unique contribution to the organization.

The student paper prize in Peter's name honors Peter's contributions to the organization and his particular enthusiasm and support for student participation IASPM at all levels.

This year's prize goes to Maria Murphy, whose paper ("Viral Language, Viral Bodies: Sounding Politics in Laurie Anderson's 'Language is a Virus (from Outer Space)') I had the pleasure of seeing presented in an outstanding panel yesterday. The committee had agreed that the paper was a pleasure to read; I can attest also that it was a pleasure to hear and see.

In this paper, Maria Murphy unpacks the complicated networks of knowledge production occurring in and around New York City during the early years of the AIDS epidemic. She links disparate communities of knowledge to remind us of the ways language has an illocutionary—and often under-recognized—force.

The paper develops an image of competing epistemologies and discourses—what she names "competing communities of knowledge"—that came into relationship in the early 1980s emergence of—and growing awareness of—AIDS. It presents a useful and elegant framework for expanding thought about music, language, and the flows of discourse and power in moments of social rupture or change, moments of emergence and emergency, particularly as experienced in marginalized lives, by politicized identities.

Through her analysis of Laurie Anderson's "Language is a Virus (from Outer Space)" and "O Superman," Maria elucidates how Anderson's performances reveal a great deal about the "bodily techniques, apparatuses of verification, and technologies of government that are circulating in, around, and through the AIDS crisis in New York at this time." She suggests that Laurie Anderson's performances participated in a different way of producing and circulating knowledge. A thought of my own that was further concretized by Maria's presentation was that Anderson's songs, voicings, and performances could be understood to have provided a tool for thinking in this new context whose affordances, at the time, may have been primarily accessible through feeling and intuition rather than through a purposive or rational search for counter-arguments.

This paper is satisfyingly rife with moments of close listening, compelling analysis, and political insight. Maria re-animates Anderson's performances with a compelling urgency.