

Songs for Dafoe Rd

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ART

School of Art

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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## Abstract

The body of work discussed in this document is both a meditation on and an examination of long-distance communication within the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The artworks examine the overlap of visual art, sound, and music utilizing artistic modes including sculpture, kinetic sculpture, sound art, music, and performance. Themes from this collection of work include relationality, feedback looping, visual looping, sound looping and anthropomorphism of analog technologies. The artworks were constructed using readily available, recycled, and found materials.

## Acknowledgments

Most of this research was conducted in Brandon, Manitoba. I am grateful to be here and respect the treaties made on Treaty 2 Lands, traditional homelands of the Dakota, Anishinabek, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene and Metis People. It is an honor and a joy to live and work in this community. I would like to thank the staff and faculty at the University of Manitoba, School of Art in Winnipeg, for their guidance and support. Specifically, I would like to recognize the hard work of my thesis advisors: Sarah Ciurysek and Mark Neufeld; thesis committee members, Gordon Fitzell, Lee Ranaldo, and Suzie Smith. Special thanks to Peter Flemming, Gordon Monahan, and Graeme Patterson for studio visits and technical advice. I must also thank my partner Leanne Zacharias, my brother John Kilpatrick, as well as the rest of my family and friends, for all their love and support. Lastly, thank you to the Manitoba Arts Council for their generous financial assistance.

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## Introduction

I am sitting in a Zoom different from the one you have joined.<sup>1</sup> I am listening to the sound of a friend's voice speaking. I am also keeping an eye on the chat function. Their voice is transmitted through the speakers of my computer. Their voice is telling a story of a mutual friend who has recently passed. Their story is profound, hilarious, and heartbreaking. How does this friend know I am listening? I want them to feel heard. I am nodding my head at regular intervals. I am trying to smile and not weep. I will put a red heart emoji in the chat function. I will give support. Listening is giving. Listening is not easy.

The window for communicating with the ones we love and appreciate is finite. I am writing this amidst a global pandemic, where over the last two years citizens around the globe have had to suddenly develop new strategies for communicating with one another. We have been utilizing technologies designed for long-distance communication to visit with loved ones who live just down the street. Some of us do not have the means to access internet-based communication technologies. Some of us have been completely cut off from family and friends.

Over the last two years, I have been making sound-based artworks in my studio and thinking about how they relate to these unprecedented times. Has the sound of the world changed throughout this pandemic? There seem to be fewer airplanes overhead, less vehicles roaring down my street. I haven't spoken, face to face, with my mother, father, or brother in over two years. I have become accustomed to hearing and knowing friends, family and colleagues' voices coloured by telephone and computer speakers. Thinking about long-distance communication has led me to explore the relationship between the Speaker and the Listener. I will begin by giving my definition of these two characters.

When I say, Speaker:

I am referring to something or someone who makes sound or sends signals or messages. This could include a human calling a dog inside for the night but also could include a campfire crackling and putting everyone around it at ease.

When I say, Listener:

I am referring to something or someone that receives signals or messages, and bears witness to the sounds of the Speaker. This could include an audience member at a trombone recital but could also include a tree listening to another tree fall in the forest.

### Discussion

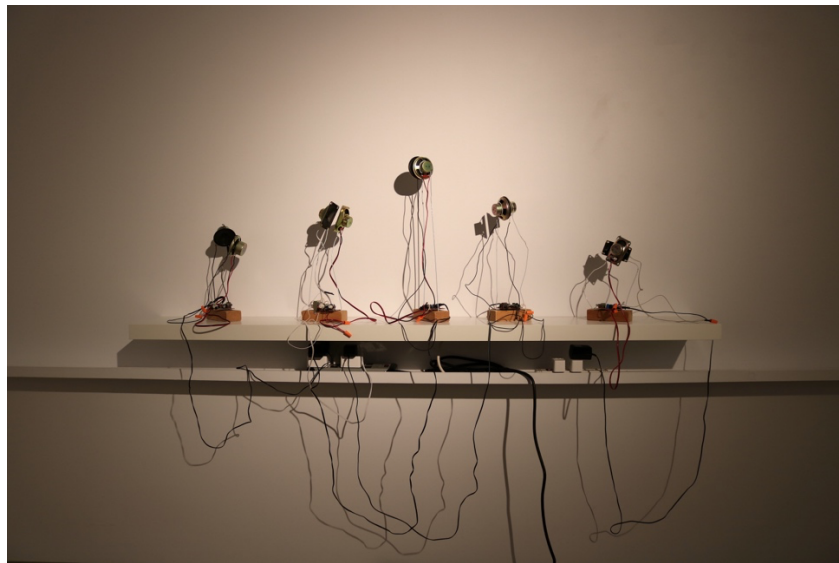


Fig. 1. Jimmie Kilpatrick. *Sound Garden*. 2022

“Sound Garden” is an immersive sound-sculpture/installation comprised of five pairs of recycled computer speakers. This artwork was developed as a meditation on the symbiotic relationship between Listener and Speaker. Each pair of speakers is attached to an audio amplifier which creates a small sound system. Each sound system is set up with one speaker

wired directly into the input of the amplifier, thus becoming a microphone and taking on the role of Listener. The second speaker is wired into the amplifier's output, in essence taking on the role of Speaker. The speakers are then suspended in close proximity, resulting in an infinite feedback loop. Feeding back or looping are themes that emerge within this exhibition. In Sound Garden, each sculpture produces unique-sounding feedback, with the various loops presenting distinctive combinations of pitch, timbre and amplitude. Both the Speaker and the Listener are essential to the operation of the apparatus. If either is removed from the equation, the device falls silent. In the installation, each set of computer speakers is controlled by a timer that stops and starts each feedback loop at varying intervals, resulting in numerous combinations of perpetually-shifting chords and cadences. Consisting of seven identical cassette players arranged in a circle on the floor,



Fig. 2. Jimmie Kilpatrick. *Seven Players, One Loop*. 2022

“Seven Players, One Loop” is a sonically immersive installation.<sup>2</sup> The cassette players have been modified to allow magnetic tape to pass in one side and out the other. A single tape loop runs through and connects the seven players. The tape contains a voice singing a series of individual pitches separated by silence. When the cassette players are activated, the individual pitches overlap, creating a composition of shifting harmonies and unexpected chords. “Seven

Players, One Loop” is a sound installation that underscores the temporal nature of sound, with the magnetic tape acting as a timeline. The cassette players enact human choral behavior, singing with open mouths and taking turns emitting sound.

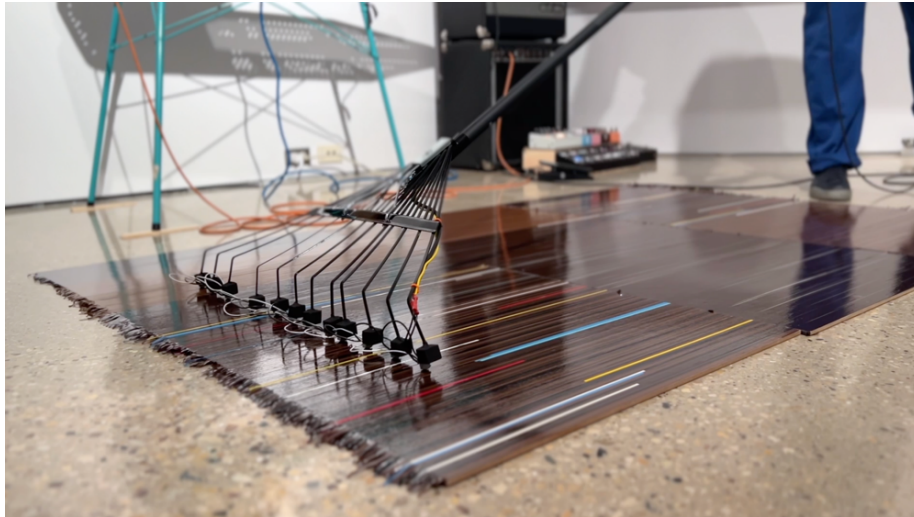


Fig. 3. Christopher Reid Flock. *Tape Raking*. 2022

“Tape Raking” is a solo performance featuring the Tape Rake, an instrument designed and created for this exhibition. The Tape Rake is an electric instrument consisting of a garden rake which has been outfitted with sixteen magnetic tape play heads. During the improvised performance the player, dressed in manual worker’s garb, draws the Tape Rake across several large masonite panels which have been meticulously and completely covered with magnetic tape. The material on the tape is a recording of the album *Slanted and Enchanted* (1992) by the American indie rock group Pavement, though the original sounds of the album are unrecognizable when played through the Tape Rake. The instrument utilizes tape studio editing techniques such as speeding up, slowing down, reversing, and layering of audio material all in real-time. In this performance, the Tape Rake reinterprets and remixes the pre-existing musical content on the panels, making new music that is both connected to and divorced from the original recorded music. I view the Tape Rake as the Listener and the original recording as

the Speaker. This performance suggests that the Listener's role can be active, interpretive, and generative.



Fig. 4. Jimmie Kilpatrick. *Narrative Machine*. 2022

“Narrative Machine” is a self-contained kinetic sound sculpture. The artwork consists of an electric bass guitar, a marble, a guitar cable, a bass amplifier and a mechanized plinth. The guitar is placed on its back atop the plinth and the marble is placed so that it makes contact with two of the instrument’s strings. The top of the mechanized plinth slowly tilts back and forth by a very small degree. The modulation of the plane causes the marble to roll along the strings of the instrument in unpredictable bursts of energy and movement. The sound of the interaction between marble and strings is foregrounded as it becomes amplified. The path of the marble is predetermined by the strings on the instrument, but the velocity, acceleration, and direction of the marble are in constant flux. The recurring motion of the bass guitar creates a visual loop, but the marble’s unpredictable behavior within that loop is what makes the device a narrative-generating machine.



Fig. 5. Jimmie Kilpatrick. *Metronome*. 2022

“Metronome” is a kinetic sound sculpture that marks the passage of time. An electric guitar hangs from the wall and is endlessly sounded by a mechanical bow. The rotating plywood square resembles the face of a clock and is a reminder of time’s relentless march forward. The motor driving the bow momentarily sputters and stalls indicating that its task is an arduous one. The movement of the bow seamlessly flips between moments of grace and clumsiness, resulting in a Sisyphean narrative that is both comical and poignant.

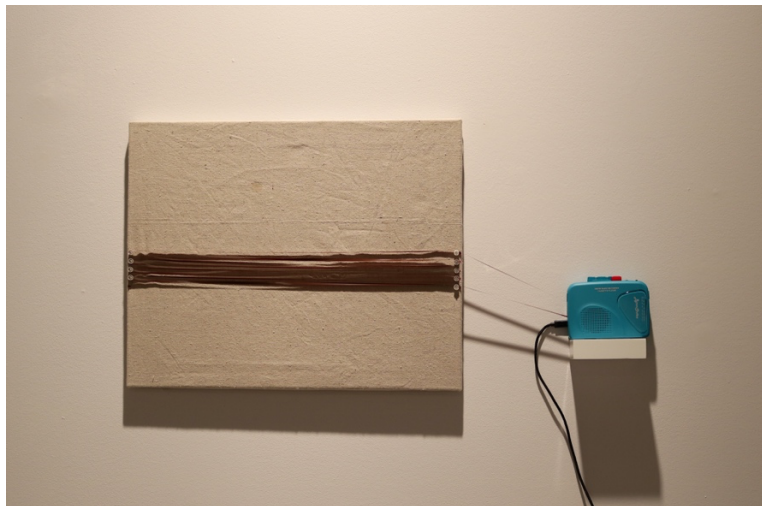


Fig. 6. Jimmie Kilpatrick. *Sad Clown*. 2022

Originally intended as a maquette, “Sad Clown” wormed its way into my heart and into this exhibition. I think of “Sad Clown” as a painting, despite its lack of paint. The apparatus consists of a painter’s canvas - stretched from an old drop cloth - and a cassette tape recorder. The tape recorder has been modified to allow magnetic tape to extend outside of the unit. The magnetic tape travels from the recorder and traverses the surface of the canvas via a series of pulleys. The landscape-oriented canvas, complete with drop cloth stain moon, provides a picture plane for the magnetic tape to visually interact with. The path of the tape is meant to reference either a horizon line, the neck of a guitar, or a musical staff. The recorded audio component of this piece is an excerpt from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century folk song *Au Clair de la Lune*. Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville’s recording of this song is the earliest example of recorded music (Caughie 91).

When a guest enters the gallery space, they trigger a motion sensor activating the exhibition. Their presence is integral to the artwork; without them, the gallery sits motionless and silent. The motion sensor sets off a cycle of events beginning with a single wavering pitch from the “Sound Garden.” This single pitch slowly develops into a series of textures and musical gestures. If the guest continues to move throughout the space during this cycle of events, additional cycles will be triggered by the motion sensor resulting in layering and phasing performances of the other sculptures. This interaction between the visitor and the exhibition serves as a macro metaphor of the symbiotic Speaker Listener relationship.

The writings of Dylan Robinson, Alan Licht, John Cage and Casey O’Callaghan have been instrumental in the development of this exhibition. “Hungry Listening” by Dylan Robinson “...conceptualizes the space of sonic encounter as a space of subject – subject relation. Moving away from a conceptualization of the listener as the sole subject in the act of listening...”

(Robinson 15). Robinson's insights into sound and the Listener have completely expanded my previous conceptions of the sonic realm.

I must also mention artists Rebecca Belmore, Christian Marclay and Bruce Nauman. Their artworks have had an immeasurable influence on the development of this body of work. Belmore's sound installation *Aym-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* remains one of the most important artworks that I know and is a most powerful and beautiful take on the relationship between the Speaker and Listener.



Fig. 7. Michael Beynon. Rebecca Belmore's  
*Aym-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*. 2008

Lastly, I would like to recognize the immeasurable contributions made by my thesis advisors: Sarah Ciurysek and Mark Neufeld and thesis committee members: Gordon Fitzell, Lee Ranaldo and Suzie Smith. Their kindness, generosity and support have had the most profound impact on the development of this research. You are all tremendous Listeners. Listening is giving. Thank you for everything.

Jimmie Kilpatrick

May 2022

Notes

1. Referencing Alvin Lucier's sound art piece, *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969).
2. Due to space constraints *Seven Players, One Loop* has not been included in the exhibition.

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