

Ritual, Noise, and the Cut-up: The Art of Tara Transitory

Justyna Stasiowska

Blog post published October 5, 2015 in *Sounding Out!*

<https://doi.org/10.59350/0mysg-ndk19>

Abstract

Marginalized bodies produce marginalized sounds to communicate things that escape language. The queer body is the site of sounds that engage pleasure, repression, rage, isolation, always somehow outside of dominant language.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Aesthetics, Article, Dance/Movement, Diasporic Sound, Digital Media



Recommended citation

Stasiowska, J. (2015, October 5). Ritual, Noise, and the Cut-up: The Art of Tara Transitory. *Sounding Out!*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/0mysg-ndk19>

Copyright

Copyright © Justyna Stasiowska 2015. Distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



Marginalized bodies produce marginalized sounds to communicate things that escape language. The queer body is the site of sounds that engage pleasure, repression, rage, isolation, always somehow *outside* of dominant language. Sound Studies tells us that we should trust our ears as much as our eyes, justifying our trust in sound, and of the resonating body. Affect Theory goes further, saying that all senses play into a body that processes input through levels of response, experience, and anticipation. Affect is the vibrational space that is both bodily memory and anticipation. So where do sound and affect meet in queer bodies? How do marginalized peoples use sound and the body to express liberation, objectification, joy, and struggle?

Our writers in *Sound and Affect* tackle these questions across a spectrum of the marginalized experience. [I opened the series](#) by offering the concept of the tremble, a sonic form of affect that is necessarily queer in its affective reach. Then, [Kemi Adeyemi](#), [sloooooooooowed thingggggggggs doooooooooownnnnn](#) so to hear the capitalist connections between the work expected of black bodies and the struggle for escape from this reality through the sonic affects, temporal shifts, and corporeal elsewhere of purple drank. Last week, [Maria P. Chaves Daza](#) [explored the connection](#) between voice, listening, and queer Chicana community formation: through space, across time, and with laughter. In the final post of the [Sound and Affect forum](#), [Justyna Stasiowska](#) brings the noise in a discussion of the trans body and the performance work of Tara Transitory. —

Guest Editor Airek Beauchamp

Ritual is another word that needs a new definition... Ritual, as I use the term, refers to an artistic process by which people gather and unify themselves in order to confront the challenges of their existence. —Anna Halprin

The shivering on your skin gradually builds like a soft electric shock that presses you down to the floor. The whole experience feels like an earthquake, with vibrations pricking through bone into organs. The affective tonality of the performance puts the body in a state of alarm, where listening turns into self-observation. Your perception is immersed in sensing the materiality of a room filled with other bodies, all attuning to the low frequencies resonating with the architecture of space, trying to maintain equilibrium. You refocus away from the artist to yourself and the rest of the audience, realizing the depth of your feelings of total connection.

This transcendence comes through dissolving the boundaries of the body and the vibrational disturbance of one's kinesthetic sense of self in a room, or proprioception. As [One Man Nation](#), [Tara Transitory](#) creates noise during her performances to offer out-of-body experiences for her listeners, a ritual where the unity of body and self dissolves. Using samples gathered through field recording and sounds from her midi controller, 64button monomer, and contact microphones on

the tables and floor, Transitory catches her body moving and interacting with the instruments, amplifying the process of making sound in the here and now.



Tara Transitory Performing

Transitory's artistic praxis enables me to explore the ways in which the body creates and receives noise. I define noise here as the unwanted and always-present materiality of (mis)communication. Transitory explores the body as a site of noise and disruption, working to disrupt the false narrative of unity pervasive in Western concepts of gender. Using cut-ups, noise, and ritual, Transitory exposes the falsehoods of gender norms and repositions the body as a locus of possibility that allows for transgression and what [Angela Jones](#) and [Baran Germen](#) have called "queer heterotopias."

Queer Heterotopias and the Rituals of Self

Morning rituals like taking pills and brushing teeth produce the tiny noises of becoming one's self, or at least molding one into a presentable self. Repetition is a key element, making the process seem effortless and automatic. As Judith Butler discussed in [Gender Trouble](#), everyday movements, gestures, actions, and ways of using and presenting one's body are framed by gender categories. Butler also demonstrated that gender is a performance made of repeating gestures and movement that are prescribed to male and female genders.

The everyday routine of Transitory's life, therefore, in a specific socio-political context, can seem unnatural and marginalized. Taking drugs every day changes the meaning of an action, whether the drugs are hormonal, supplemental, medicinal, or recreational. Still, the "natural," as most queer theorists show, exhibits power only through the framing of social categories as transparent, creating an illusion of normalcy. However, while this post-structuralist perspective seeks an antidote to the normalization of cultural schemes, it does not make clear what to do after destroying society's illusion. Deconstructionist perspectives produce a constant grating sound

coming from the friction between the conceptual framing of body and the materiality of fleshly gender performance.

In other words, what didn't make the cut?

Cut-up spaces

As proposed by [Brion Gysin and William Burroughs](#) in *The Third Mind*, the cut-up method, an early analog method resembling sampling, involved artists cutting up pieces of text and reassembling the pieces in a new form. This technique, used across different media, enables artists to create a self outside the limits of the body. In Burroughs' *Invisible Generation*, he describes creating a "cut-up" using a tape recorder. Recording, cutting up the tape, then reassembling it for playback allows the listener and the artist to become aware of a specific socio-cultural programming that Burroughs presents as method of policing the self. However, remixing and repetition also opens spaces to reprogram our-selves. The tape recording cut-up becomes a multisensory stimulant used to create an *other* self through de- and re-construction. Furthermore, the body, working as a membrane, becomes transformed through the repetition of these new sounds; sound affects listeners simultaneously at the level of cognition as well on the level of the body as a corporeal listening apparatus.



*Lady Jaye Breyer P-Orridge on the left and Genesis P-Orridge on the right.
Still from the documentary movie, "The Ballad of Genesis And Lady Jane."*

[Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Lady Jaye](#) also explored the concept of the body itself as a cut up medium in their [Pandrogeny project](#). They underwent the process by cutting up each other's gestures and behaviours through mimesis and cutting up parts of their bodies by undergoing

plastic surgery in order to create a third being. According to a post by a [plastic surgeon in Louisville](#), the cut up material that they used is DNA, which they refer to as the “[first recording](#).” They used the pronoun “We” even after Lady Jaye left her body (passing away in 2007), so the third being is not just a shared body, but a connection of minds and spirits across the divisions of gender and body. Making a cut-up of the body enabled them to create an *other*, a combined Genesis and Lady Jaye, the pandrogyny self, the WE that is now Genesis and Lady Jaye. Pandrogyny is, in their project, a unified being presented as the double self in the negation of gender. It is a performance aimed to create a space for the connected consciousness, the *third mind* within a physical space of the body.

Tara Transitory uses a different method of “cut-up,” focusing on vibrational exchange among bodies to create *communitas*—or common public—specific to ritual in order to disenchant the geopolitical connection of body and gender. Transitory’s “cut-up” aims to create a body in transition, which connects with other bodies through the amplification of noises the body produces. Her work uses vibration to establish communication across genders, within a body or between bodies in a state of flux.



<https://youtu.be/u36OE9hfHH8>

The last day before the end of the world. Somehow I feel my life has been up till now very fulfilling and I really cannot think of what more I want, or what I need to do before the end. My only plan is to take my first pill of estrogen at 2359 tonight Bangkok time, the beginning of the apocalypse of my testosterone. –Tara Transitory, [Ritual](#).

Originally from Singapore, Transitory works as One Man Nation, documenting and developing communities in Europe and Asia. Her project [International //gender/o/noise\\ Underground](#) consists of mapping and documenting lives of trans women in Asia and Europe and creating performances using noise. She, with [Miriam Saxe Drucki-Lubecki](#), also took part in establishing a monthly trans/queer left- field music party in Granada called [Translætica](#). *Translætica* has grown to other countries, with editions (in Paris, Bangkok, Saigon), and includes lectures, workshops and film screenings mixed with electronic music. As posted on *Translætica*’s [Facebook](#)

page, the goal behind the event is to present “the idea of a new world as one borderless living space, with all the shifts and transformations and their irreversible impact on local/original cultures.” It connects local and international artists and activists to create an ever-evolving community without borders.

As Transitory’s name might suggest, she herself is not committed to a national identity.

Throughout her migratory experience, Transitory gathers field recordings then uses narrative to transform them. Her site-specific approach focuses on concrete, situated realities that are entangled in current political situations, where friction arises between the policing norms in Asian and European societies and her own functioning as a nomadic being in state of transition. Her performances are rituals that blur the restrictions that society conveys through noise (screams, samples from field recording, the sound of the moving body) as an affective force, creating a state of meditation and catharsis. For example, while documenting the lives of trans experience, she worked with trans women street performers from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.



<https://youtu.be/SAiN55KoNnM>

These women make fire performances to “Gangnam Style,” moving during the night from one public place to another to perform for unsuspecting audiences. Sampling the street noises and then playing them back during the performance creates a mirror for the audience; interjecting common noise into a common dance song established a specific heterotopia, shifting what might be a normal experience into something uncanny within the conventions of street entertainment.

In her performances, Transitory uses noise as an intentional activity, suspending communication, disabling the recipient from receiving information, leading to an “immersion in noise.” This immersion is similar to sensory deprivation in that it overloads the receiver with stimuli, suspending communication. Its affective force comes from invading the body with frequencies and vibrations, where one feels the body in constant movement – a state of perpetual flux. It becomes the tactic of distancing from the self, enabling the listener to create different experiences, a heterotopian space of otherness and developing new rituals for specific situations.



Angkana Khunchai

One Man Nation's performances end with [Traditional Laotian Molam-style music](#) ("Mo" is an artist and "Lam" is a kind of performance art where the artist [tells a story using tonal inflections](#)) sung by Angkana Khunchai, a 1970's pop-music singer. The pop-ish songs are calming and soothing after the intense experience of Transitory's performance. The text is a repetition of the words "calm down," a therapeutic ending creating a sense of light from this cathartic performance. Transitory's use of Molam eases re-entry into one's everyday existence outside of the performance. The harmonies and softness of the song contrast with the harshness of noise performance as part of ritual – from transgressing the everyday and entering the liminal state that Transitory creates in her performances to better re-enter society.

Transitory's work conjures new rituals of transcendence and distancing one-self from the body. I treat the `//gender/o/noise\\` as a hacking of the everyday experience of body. By creating a temporary heterotopia. Tara's work reveals the tactics of hacking gender, generating a temporary space for alternative modes of existence. She creates flux in bodies and bodies in flux, thus affectively crafting heterotopic spaces, sites which are, as [Brian Massumi](#) states:

[...]an open threshold – a threshold of potential. You are only ever in the present in passing. If you look at that way you don't have to feel boxed in by it, no matter what its horrors and no matter what, rationally, you expect will come. You may not reach the end of the trail but at least there's a next step ("[Navigating Spaces](#)").

The everyday processes of becoming oneself by repeating practices become rituals when performed in different contexts. This ritual is a process of creating an affect, a space of potentiality that enables the body to reshape and change, much like Transitory refits old rituals into new skin. The ritual forms applied to actions of the everyday enable us to change their meaning and our perceptions, creating a sense of the transitory nature of one's body. Sonic rituals like Transitory's are tactics to develop a self-conscious and creative approach to everyday activities and use them, as Anna Halprin says, to confront the challenges of existence.

Featured Image: Tara Transitory in performance mode

Justyna Stasiowska is a PhD student in the Performance Studies Department at Jagiellonian University. She is preparing a dissertation under the working title: “Noise. Performativity of Sound Perception” in which she argues that frequencies don’t have a strictly programmed effect on the receiver and the way of experiencing sounds is determined by the frames or modes of perception, established by the situation and cognitive context. Justyna earned her M.A in Drama and Theater Studies. Her thesis was devoted to the notion of liveness in the context of the strategies used by contemporary playwrights to manipulate the recipients’ cognitive apparatus using the DJ figure. You can find her on [Twitter](#) and [academia.edu](#).



REWIND!...If you liked this post, check out:

Pleasure Beats: Using Sound for Experience Enhancement —Justyna Stasiowska

Papa Sangre and the Construction of Immersion in Audio Games—Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo

SO! Reads: David Novak’s Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation—Seth Mulliken