



Conversations With You

Joey Zaurrini



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Conversations With You is a 4-channel sonic installation presented at the Audain Gallery as part of the Seams festival in May 2019. The piece is inspired by my experiences living in front of Victory Square in Vancouver for over a year during my graduate studies where I was in constant earshot of its unfolding soundscape. In this setting, I experienced what Bharucha would call “a fragile set of [sonic] relationships” (Bharucha 2007) continuously at play and began to understand that the square’s sonic footprint was telling unseen stories about how the space was owned, defined “or contested by those who control the soundscape” beyond its initial application as a memorial zone (Atkinson 2007.)

City squares have historically been approached in their design as “features of significance” that are meant to define the “quality and importance of a city”. (McCabe 2016.) But very rarely have their resulting soundscapes been taken into consideration in their construction (O’Keeffe 2017.) I came to understand Victory Square as a place that is quite literally being used as a stage, sometimes even an instrument in of itself. Victory Square’s structure can be compared to a cymbal waiting to be activated, telling stories of how the square is civically used and experienced.

My composition draws upon field recordings taken from my bedroom window, where I have heard a pipeline protest taking shape from 4 people to hundreds, intertwined with masses of cheering and rhythmic drumming streaming down the alleyway; in that very same alleyway, I have heard extras from a movie set in the 70s yelled “No More War” for 5 hours, again and again at different rhythms and patterns as instructed by the on-site director. I have also heard Remembrance Day speeches and bagpipes, bouts of laughter, concerts, publicity stunts, a man giving a sermon, police conflict, karaoke and fireworks. My favourite sonic experience in the square to date came one night where someone was drumming a stick against a plastic sheet for multiple hours at 2 in the morning, the ringing textures of his makeshift instrument piercing through the wind and into my apartment.

In *Conversations With You*, I use speaker mounts created with metal pipes, exposed wires, a lamp and my bedroom curtains. The materials collide to create an inside-outside juxtaposition. Similar to how Victory Square's soundscape can be heard from even the closed windows of my bedroom, in the gallery setting, the soundscape crosses the threshold of its makeshift confines and pours into the entire gallery. The listener is able to hear the unfolding soundscape before parting bedroom curtains. Once parted, the listener is invited to stand at the centre of the square, where they experience a call and response sonic tapestry between 4 speakers. Here, the micro-details become clearer and the interplay between the speakers can be heard. The speakers are compositionally used as opening and closing windows: each time a window is heard opening, a story begins sounding, joining the other opened windows, and dislocating the listener in fragments of saved time. The position of the listener's body in the installation hints at my experience in my apartment, and can be compared to the centrefold position of the cenotaph in Victory Square: removed and distant from the sonic stories, yet entirely immersed in them, ever listening, unable to stop listening.

In this work, I sought to explore the positionality of the Audain Gallery in respect to Victory Square and my own positionality as an artist living in graduate residence overlooking the square. The gallery and the graduate program that makes use of it are part of the knowledge economy and creative class that surround the square (Barnes & Hutton 2009.) The gallery setting furthermore allowed me to explore speaker diffusion and audience movement therein without disrupting the site in which these sounds take place.

Although designed as a memorial site, Victory Square is a gathering point of protests within the city of Vancouver, it is an area where members of marginalized communities reside year round, and is surrounded by institutions and firms. The resulting soundscape composed of sonic elements from these converging sources is a defining characteristic of Victory Square. In my future work, I will continue to explore

historical and political facets of the square, mediated through site-specific soundscape research.

Sources:

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About the Author

Joey is a sound artist and music composer, as well as an MFA candidate at Simon Fraser University. Using sound to facilitate narratives in dance, theatre and film, as well as create stories of his own, he spends most of his days immersed in a laboratory of noise and electronics where every object is a potential instrument. His areas of interest include decoding the compositions of city soundscapes, playing with interactive technology, and merging socio-ecological concepts with his sound art. He can be found attending workshops and classes, in the middle of deep collaborations, or roaming streets and deserted hallways with a recorder in hand.