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QUEER SONIC CULTURES: AN AFFECTIVE WALKING- COMPOSING PROJECT



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Walking in nature has long been associated with creativity. Yet walking's associated research and artistic practices remain dogged by representationalism. Concomitantly, intersectional concerns of race, gender, and dis/ability determine what kinds of bodies are allowed to walk where (and in this case, the where is Brexit-era Britain). This article attempts to navigate the complexity of these tensions, contextualizing a five-day walking research-creation project along St. Cuthbert's Way that we called *Queer Sonic Cultures*. As academics and artists interested in the relationship between walking and composition, our initial propositions are to become affected as we walked and to create sonic cultures (songs) using whatever affected us along the way. In using research-creation as a research methodology, we understand our artistic compositional practice of co-creating lyrics-melody-harmony-production-arrangement as the research. Unlike some forms of arts-based research that use an artistic form to disseminate research findings, in research-creation the artistic practice is the research and the theory. In the interests of continuing to make this apparent, we shall prefer to describe this contextualizing article as Academic Liner Notes. The Academic Liner Notes begin with a brief description of the location of the walk, contextualized within the tradition of walking and composing in the British landscape, and the use of sound-based methods and literature to represent such landscapes. Following this, we will introduce research-creation as a methodology contextualized within affect studies. We argue that the resultant sonic cultures (nine in total) rather than representing the walk, in fact, more-than-representationally intensify the affective dimensions of the relations we were part of along the way.

KEYWORDS

research-creation, affect, sound, walking and composition, creative writing

Queer Sonic Cultures

Before continuing to read the Academic Liner Notes, you should first listen to our Queer Sonic Cultures (capaciousjournal.com/article/queer-sonic-cultures). They are the research-creation!

‘Academic Liner Notes’: description of project, or ‘in a curious life, take an oblique stream’

St. Cuthbert’s Way tracks the path of 7th century monk St. Cuthbert. It is a 100 km public footpath that runs from Melrose, Scotland to Lindisfarne, England. The path along the border of Scotland and England, winds across rolling mountains, through villages, and over the top end of the windswept Pennines. The final 5km can only be completed at low tide over the ocean floor causeway to Holy Island. Hundreds of seals live near the island and bark a magnificent haunting wail that carries over the landscape. St. Cuthbert’s Way is a recently designated footpath (1997), although it was created along a route that has been used, in part, as a Christian pilgrimage site for over 1000 years. It took us five days to complete the walk. As colleagues and friends, we have composed “sonic cultures” (Truman and Shannon 2015) together since 2011 and conducted walking-sound research with *WalkingLab*. Off the back of these cultures, we have founded a glitch-folk band, *Oblique Curiosities*, where we continue to grow and use our cultures as prompts for further research-creation.

We frequently improvise songs when we walk together. For this project, we wanted to investigate the relationship between long distance walking and composition practices. Given our academic research interests in affect theory, we completed the walk with a commitment to “becoming affected” (McCormack 2008, 9), registering those affects compositionally and productive-of our queer sonic cultures. We understand culture both in the socio-cultural sense and (after the microbial method) as the site of proliferation for something-new. These sonic cultures are “more-than-representational” (Truman 2016, 138) documentations of our walk, in that they both represent affective intensities we experienced on the walk and are productive-of something more.

As queer artists and academics, we draw queerly on the body of scholarship known as queer theory to queer walking, nature, and composition. After Eli Clare (2001), we use the term queer in its “general sense, as odd, quirky, not belonging; and in

its specific sense, as referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity” (361), to which we would append other non-normative sexual or gender identities. Queer research can be “any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations” (Browne and Nash 2010, 4). We activate queer as both a noun and a verb in our scholarship.

Walking, nature, creativity, research, and their inheritances

Walking in nature is a big deal in Britain. Britain’s walking heritage includes many ancient trackways, green lanes, and footpaths (e.g. the Pilgrim’s Way from Winchester and Canterbury) that walkers and pilgrims continue to use. There is a preponderance of scholastic writing and guidebooks about walking in the UK, and centuries of literature from Chaucer to Austen to Woolf feature characters strolling in the landscape or through cities. Numerous authors use walking as a narrative device, literary theme, or as a method for generating content, such as Wordsworth’s romantic strolls in the Lake District. There are also books about walking as a lost art and books on where to walk as part of the pervasive stereotyping of Britain’s ‘green and pleasant land.’ Music demonstrates a similar link between nature and nation. Euro-Western (and particularly British) ‘classical’ composers often attribute their music—or are attributed (whether they like it or not!)—to Nature, for example, Beethoven’s 6th (posthumously *Pastoral*) symphony with its Nature-themed movement descriptions; or the attribution of Elgar’s music to his wandering in the Malvern Hills; and Williams’ *The Lark Ascending* and pastoral-themed *Fantasias*.

And yet, after Alison Kafer (2013), we are led to wonder what ‘passes’ in/as Nature? The sound of footfalls or majority enunciations of English would perhaps seem more ‘natural,’ than alternative movement habits (such as automatic wheelchairs), or diverse speech patterns in the countryside. As queer subjects walking in the landscape we might be marked as ‘unnatural.’ However, during our walk our cis-genders and whiteness insisted we be read as a ‘straight’ couple, and pass in ways that others never could (“Your ... husband? Oh, I’m sorry! Boyfriend.”). Carolyn Knowles (2008) discusses how whiteness is produced and flourishes in rural Britain and is bolstered by histories (and the ongoing presence) of colonialism and slavery. For Knowles, the British countryside “stands for more than it is: it produces, embodies and sustains whiteness on behalf of the nation” (170), and maintains a position as the core of British identity.

Springgay and Truman (2018a) critique how walking, when framed through romantic poets and naturalists—and, we argue, music composers—operates as a privileged (ableist) practice, and a white cis-heteronormative time-space. The literary tradition is steeped in tales of lone (white) male walkers setting out into the wild in search of inspiration, in ways that racialized, gendered, and dis/abled bodies historically could not (and still cannot). According to John Wylie (2005), a walk in the English countryside “involves at least some attunement with the various sensibilities still distilling from sublime and romantic figurations of the self, travel, landscape and nature” (235). These romantic geographies are re-affirmed in much contemporary walking literature, and through stories and songs of the UK’s artistic tradition to such an extent that an ‘inherent’ relationship between the creative canon and landscape begins to appear as pre-given. Without an understanding of how imperial power relations pervade the English creative canon and language, its assumed social, cultural, sexual (cis-hetero), and racial attunement (whiteness) can also appear co-extensive with the landscape. The classical and literary creative canon invigorates and builds the capacity for white-cis-hetero conceptualizations of humanity, and re-centers whiteness as co-constitutive of the British landscape. Much like the wider expansion of Britain’s economic and imperial virility, such a capacitation depends upon the debilitation and disparagement of women, dis/abled, working class people, and Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (QT/BIPOC), and is maintained through white supremacy, and ongoing settler colonialism.

The link between nature, walking, and creativity has been discussed in many fields, and frequently scholars have conducted research that attends specifically to sound and sonic walks in varied landscapes (Lorimer & Wylie 2010; Gallagher 2016). What are commonly referred to as soundwalks are often used to explore the “sonic ecologies of place” (Springgay and Truman 2017, 35). Phonographic field recordings in nature typically aspire to a sonic representation of place, wherein sounds are selected either for their socio-sonic veracity or else their spectomorphological properties (Rennie 2014). In these productions, the sounds of the recordist are minimized or erased, and they often go to great lengths to avoid registering any anthropogenic sounds in order to enact a romanticized notion of the ‘natural’ (Gallagher 2015; Michael 2011). Increasingly, fields such as geomorphology are attempting an artistic representation of landscape, where Nature provides “aesthetic inspiration” to the extent that past geomorphological transformations can be discerned from historical images, literary accounts and

songs (Tooth *et al.* 2016, 1793; Griffiths *et al.* 2018). Our *Queer Sonic Cultures* project did not set out to sonically represent the places we walked but rather we proposed that we become affected by our walk, and repurpose those affects for our sonic compositions as part of an “ethical commitment to learning to become affected” (McCormack 2008, 9).

Scholars have recently begun to incorporate walking as a research subject, a method, and a methodology. Stephanie Springgay & Sarah Truman (2018a) critique how—across these threads—walking is variously instrumentalized, seen as inherently innovative, and uniquely productive—of innovation. After Springgay and Truman, rather than focus on *what* a method produces, we, as artist-researchers, focus instead on the affective (in)tensions we bring *to* a method (Springgay & Truman 2018b). This is our theoretical approach to research-creation.

Research-creation

Research-creation is the interrelated practice of art, theory, and research (Truman & Springgay 2015). It is a “thinking-with and across techniques of creative practice” (Manning & Massumi 2014, 88–89) that moves away from approaches to qualitative research that assume data can be collected, extracted, and then represented, and towards an affective, emergent, relational and more-than-representational approach to doing-research (Thrift 2007; McCormack 2008; Truman 2016). We also suggest that a research-creation event invokes a queer temporality in its disruption of regular space-time delineations.

Affect has been theorized from within a variety of academic lineages (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). We understand affect within our research-creation practice as “the becoming sensation, a force or intensity manifested at the surface of the body” (Springgay and Zaliwska 2017, 276–277), “found in those intensities that pass body to body ... in those resonances that circulate about, between” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1), felt-or-not, capacitating and debilitating further affectivity (Massumi 2015; Puar 2017).

Similar to our critiques of the whiteness of walking and creative inspiration in the landscape, we critique affect studies for sometimes erasing patterns of marginalization, and reinscribing compulsory white, hetero, *Europhallic* (Moten 2003) ablebodiedness (see Ahmed 2004, 2010; Weheliye 2014; McRuer 2016; Palmer 2017; Puar, 2017). When affect is depoliticized and assumes a neutral circulation, as well as (state-sanctioned) capacity for affectation, it masks its conflation of neutral *as white*. This re-centers whiteness and ‘Man’ as a universal category

(Wynter 2003). Universal Man affects but is never affected. He circulates, builds capacity, and sticks to everything, but nothing sticks to him. And, as evidenced in the recent and short-lived furore surrounding use of the term ‘gammon’ in the UK as an epithet for enraged red-faced white men (Lang 2018), anything that does stick is quickly silenced.

An ethics and politics of becoming affected must attend to how affects stick to or smear-past QT/BIPOC and dis/abled bodies, onto whom cis-heteronormative, racialized and dis/capacity and debility is always-already inscribed (Ahmed 2004; Lara et al 2017; Weheliye 2014). Drawing from these “frictional” (Puar 2012) understandings of affect, we position our walking-composing as registering the affective dimensions of ordinary encounters (Stewart 2007), where “things hanging in the air are worth describing” (Stewart 2011, 447). However, our ‘descriptions’ are not linguistic representations, but rather, in keeping with our adoption of research-creation, reach for a more-than-representational engagement of affective intensities.

Both affect studies and research-creation prioritize material and corporeal practices that converge around a “shared concern for nonconscious, non-cognitive, transcorporeal, and non-representational processes” (Springgay and Truman 2017, 11). According to Vannini (2015), the “non-representational answer to the crisis of representation lies in a variety of research styles and techniques that do not concern themselves so much with representing life-worlds as with issuing forth novel reverberations” (12). In this regard we understand our songwriting and queer sonic cultures as re-circulating the mined affective intensities of our journey; walking-composing-sounding intervenes into the material intensities of the present-future through “improvising with the already-felts” (Manning 2009, 30).

We composed with affective intensities, already-felts and phonographic artefacts mined from the environment to create our affectively-productive melody-lyrics-harmony-tempo-key-arrangement-production-synthesis-phonography-performance-vibration-codec-mp3-speakers. Each affect does not “just prompt thought, but also generate[s] sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain—frissons of excitement, energy, laughter, silliness” (MacLure 2010: 282). Every feature of each song is co-compositional in its rendering of and reaching for a more-than-representational account of the evocative ordinariness and piercing bizarrry of everything.

Following Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie (2010), the affective unfolding of our sonic cultures is:

cross-temporal, implying a participation of ‘temporal contours’ in each other, singly or in the looping of refrains. This cross-temporality constitutes the movement of experience into the future (and into the past, as memory) (italics original, 146).

More-than-representational practices perform a queer temporality. Each sonic culture is a pressing together of ever-multiplying spatial, temporal, and affective emplacements that could never have touched, but are here relived and re-represented in a queering of chronological time (this is similar to our critiques of affect and walking studies above, as queer studies has been critiqued for re-centering whiteness and class privilege: Puar 2007; Muñoz 2010).

Conditions of possibility

We were both prepared and unprepared for the walk. We had sneakers, hats for the sun, cameras, a tablet (equipped with a microphone, and digital audio workstation and MIDI sequencing software), notebooks, postcards, and a bowtie and a dress in case we wanted to dress-up. We had a van transporting our bags from guesthouse to guesthouse, so we could walk lightly. But we had no map, no compass, no rain gear, and no warm clothes. We hoped the weather was clement, and that there were lots of towns to stop in and good signage. The first day of the walk we met a group of well-prepared British walkers replete with walking poles, boots, and all manner of hiking gear. They were markedly unimpressed by our unpreparedness (and reminded us of this several times throughout the walk when they invariably passed us after we got distracted by heather, or had to loop through a wood/thicket/bull’s pen after getting lost).

In preparing for the research-creation event of walking-composing, we used Barad’s (2007) “conditions of possibility” as an umbrella term for the discursive-material arrangements that initiate particular material (re)configurations. These are theorized across the sometimes-overlapping yet un-conflatable concepts of enabling constraints, propositions and activation devices. *Enabling constraints* (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler 2008) articulate how constraining features of a project can be both limiting and productive. Erin Manning (2013) discusses how *propositions* are immanent to events and co-constitutive. Following Whitehead (1978), propositions can also be seen as both actual and speculative – they draw from actuality as well as propose what could be (Truman & Springgay 2016). An *activation device* (Springgay & Truman 2018) “forces something new to occur” not to “extract or

collect information, but to insert itself within the walking-writing-practice as a thinking-making-doing” (135). As part of the material-discursive arrangement of our research-creation process, we will offer some exemplifications of these intersecting concepts as they relate to the tablet we brought with us every day of our walk.

- Trumey (Sarah) was against pushing a Steinway up Wide-Open Hill, because she knew she’d end up doing all the pushing when Shanny (David) was in a grumble-funk. As such, we were constrained as to what instruments and digital music equipment we could bring. The lack of a Steinway might be an enabling constraint, but the addition of a tablet is also an enabling constraint. We were forced (enablingly constrained) to compose using a touch screen (rather than a piano keyboard or mouse). This found us drawing sliding melodies with our waggle fingers as our sole means of notation, which in turn may have influenced our reliance on theremin-esque virtual instruments in our songs (that and our mutual obsession with Doctor Who).
- Our initial proposition was to become affected as we walked and to create our sonic cultures using whatever affected us along the way. Propositions probe what could be. Openness to phono-affects and their graphemic registering renders them (en)durable (Weheliye 2005). In this way, the tablet as a phono-graphic device was also propositional. Not only could we play music on it, it wrote sounds (as audio) and melodic intention (as MIDI data) digitally, which Steinways just can’t do. Ironically, with digital media and archival procedures changing at alarmingly fast rates, the digital files might seem like they’ll out last us, but they may become unreadable within our lifetimes.
- The tablet was also an activation device. It inserted the beginnings of the music production process into the lyric-writing, and melody-humming, and frog-marching, and nettle-stinging, and... and... and... Being able to accompany our marching with 8-bit snare sounds, or our melody-humming with chords probed the process in particular directions.

Some of our conditions of possibility were determined before the walk:

Walk St. Cuthbert’s way in five days; 24km on the first, 28km on the second, 19km on the third, 19km on the fourth, and 10km on the fifth. Remember Brian Eno and his *Oblique Strategies*. Time signature. Queer the landscape. Write songs as we walk (lyrics, rhythm, melody, affect, space, repeat).

Some of our conditions of possibility prompted us in different ways on different days during the walk:

Tablet. Note pad. Pinhole camera. Dress up in dresses and bowties.

Other conditions of possibility emerged in the middle of the walk and were not pre-planned:

Forget food. Realize we forgot food. Forget water. Realize we forgot water. Meet racist Brexiteer in quaint village. Bring baggage of Shanny's recent ex-boyfriend. Get into a big fight with each other (x3). Get lost (x5). Trample through stinging nettles (x ∞). Chew-up and apply (not)dock leaf. Read Maggie MacLure (2013) next to an open sewer. Hornet's nest. Bull in field. Karen Barad. Quantum Physics. Human-Time Lord Meta-Crisis.

Doctor Who.

Pilapalapotipings.

Run.

Longing.

Heather.

Wind.

Pain.

Delirium.

&

Each of these conditions of possibility determined the material-discursive arrangement that formed our songs. Our phono-graphical practices registered sounds. Our 'song-o-graphical' writing practices registered affect.

As we marched, we chanted, scribbled, and played with our lyrics; sometimes, a running joke became a song, and others a running lyric became a joke. "Oh ... [insert noun] ... Wouldn't that be sexy?!" Many of the lyrics were written in response to specific encounters during the walk (e.g. "In the night silence lilting fragrance and neglect"), while others drifted in during conversations; hinted at lyrical inheritances that were circulating as a result of our being together, walking, talking (e.g. "不爱就是不爱; if there's no love there's no love"). Thematically,

the lyrics defined the tone of each song. The meter and rhythm co-determined each other, but also necessitated re-writing of the lyrics. We used the tablet's microphone to record footfalls and splashes and seal-songs for later reworking as drum lines and goodness-knows what, and whistled snatches of melodies. We also drew harmonies and tapped out virtual drum lines into the tablet and noted the instruments we would use to develop the compositions (e.g. bagpipes). We exported these performances as MIDI and AIFF files into *Digital Performer* when we reached our guesthouse for the night and channeled them through software-synthesizers and sample libraries such as MOTU'S *MX4* and *Proton*, East West's *Symphonic Orchestra, Pianos* and *SD 2*, YMCK's *Magical 8-bit*, Michael Bietenholz's *Resonance*, and Adam Monroe's *Honky-tonk Piano*. The next days, we would chant the lyrics and tap rhythms over and over as we walked.

After we finished the walk, we continued to work on the production and arrangements of the queer sonic cultures, but only when we were in the same geographic place (we lived on different continents until recently). We finalized the structures of each queer sonic culture in Hamilton and Muskoka in Ontario, Canada, and Reykjavik, Iceland; the final voice parts were recorded in Manchester and London, UK, and Santiago de Compostela, Spain; mixing was done in Liverpool, UK. Each of these components continued to be a negotiation between our different tastes and expectations.

I could not then but now I can say (my queery, feary, deary)

Affects swirled around us and through us during the walking and composition process. They were prickly and sticky and atmospheric and moody and spacious and luminous and resonant and tight and claustrophobic. Yet, three years after our walk, we are not the same. The cultures are still laced with the sadness of a recent break-up and the aching tension of each foot-fall, but we have moved on (hamstrings and all). However, as part of an ethical commitment to becoming affected (McCormack 2008), and assuming response-ability for the worlding in which we participate (Barad 2007), while writing this accompanying article and re-working the sonic cultures in Brexit-era Britain, the whiteness still sticks.

In order to make clearer the relationship between a stroll in the British countryside, walking and whiteness, we elucidate some of the features of one sonic

culture: *Three Black Military Helicopters* documents our being left-out-of-joint by unexpected and affective disturbances on the walk.

- Three armed military helicopters buzzed us on Wide-Open-Hill; the insertion of the military into the seemingly serene landscape reminded us of Britain's heritage.
- The continuing theme of whiteness that never left us on the walk: from the increasing creepiness of English 'heritage' dining rooms, to the Bangladeshi restaurant owner's recounts of racism. One particular incident involved a white woman drawing Shanny into a discussion on who 'belongs' in the countryside (where his political leanings were assumed to be in-keeping with a particular identity as a white cis-male British walker). After the conversation, the smell of dog shite was overpowering as we left the village; it bled into the affective hangover of the discussion and lingered all about us for miles.
- A further disturbance occurred during an encounter with an overwrought walker while Shanny was dressed-up in a polka dot dress for a photo opportunity. The man repeatedly yelled at us across the hillside for the location of an "orienteeing (something)." Our queerness, our incompetence as walkers, and our ill-preparedness were obvious; we failed to pass on so many levels. We got scared, yelling back "We don't understand that question; we're not walkers!" and fled down the hill-side. We fled the wrong way, completely off the track, got lost amongst the ferns and heather, stepped on a bee's nest, tried to escape through a bullpen, and then tried to escape from the bull by jumping over an electrified fence.

A *post hoc* listening of the song today seems to suggest multiple ways in which these multiple 'out-of-joints' appear to inspire the song (although we remain unclear as to how conscious we were of each inspiration at the time):

- The meter jarringly switches from four beats in each bar to three for the 'chorus' section (from a regular 4/4 to a waltz-time 3/4); this section is also not diatonic (i.e. not in the harmonic key that has been established throughout the rest of the song), while the voices are auto-tuned to achieve a melody that would normally be impossibly out of their range.
- Instruments traditionally associated with the 'classical' canon (violins, cello and piano) perform an increasingly disharmonious, yet resolutely 'major' (i.e. 'cheerful'), accompaniment to lyrics such as "Racial slurs in Woolerville, dog shit smells and bees nests; Whiteness ascends, whiteness ascends, imperialism!"

- A juddering, endless arpeggiator hovers throughout the song.
- The melodic phrase heard during the verse lasts eight bars; the chord sequence across the eight bars is: C, Ab, Bb, F#, C, Ab, Bb, F#. Each of these chords is ‘major’ (i.e. ‘cheerful’) because the middle note of each chord (its 3rd) is in its highest position. However, the vocal melody flattens that note in the fifth bar. This means that, throughout the verse’s fifth bar, the accompaniment is ‘cheerfully’ playing in C major while the vocalist is singing ‘unhappily’ in C minor and creating quite a disorientation in the process! When heard with the lyrics, this creates a sinister accentuation; for instance, in the case of the first line of lyrics, it falls on the underlined words: “Three black military helicopters puncture the solitude.”

Coda: Ice-pick in my eye

In reference to one of the original prompts of the project: in what ways would walking a long distance help our composition process; our practice of walking-composing appears to support claims that walking can lead to inspiration, under the right circumstances. We could have written queer sonic cultures elsewhere, but they wouldn’t be these ones. These sonic cultures are very much inspired by our walk and entangled with our walk. Yet the already-felts (“Meeting the Universe Halfway”; “Shanny’s Break-Up”; “Wouldn’t that be Sexy?!”) that we brought with us on the walk were as generative as the magnificent vistas and sloppy mud-toes we encountered.

The sensibility of research-creation demands that art be taken as seriously as the research and theoretical components. We recognize that between us we have a substantial skill-set, decades of experience in our art-practices, and a close personal relationship, as well as overlapping research and theoretical interests; we acknowledge the privilege and scarcity inherent in the development of that skill-set. The walking was inspirational, but hundreds of hours of ‘working’ the inspiration was necessary to produce the sonic cultures we created. Our co-writing led to many cuts that our sensibilities couldn’t purpose. For example, there are three distinct versions of “All”, two of which are erased, and many lyrics remained unused. We spent many hours on the various vocal lines, both during recording and in post-production, cutting across multiple takes, compressing and de-essing—not to mention auto-tuning! We decided that we could not between us manage the

type of performances needed to make “Cruel Bliss (sweet pain)” work, so the final version features Luke Jennings on voice and guitar.

In listening-to and re-working the sonic cultures, we were inspired by Steve Goodman’s use of Augoyard and Torgue’s effects unit (2012), wherein an effects unit is described as modulating or distorting sound as it passes through (rather than just being a neutral component). Further to this, we note that the soundings of each component of an effects unit—diodes and oscillators in traditional hardware or digital algorithms in their contemporaries—are heard in the signal output. For instance, our overused Cyberman voice is achieved using a virtual ring modulator. The carrier wave of the ring modulator’s (virtual) oscillator is joined with the input signal to create a new sound. In this way, both we as composer-listeners, and our sonic cultures modulate and distort affect, as well as making something new!

Rather than understanding our sonic cultures as a repository that documents and represents our walking-composing project, we understand them as a kind of “anarchive” (Murphie 2016, np). Andrew Murphie (2016) discusses how anarchives, unlike official archives, resist interpretation and allow us to instead focus on the affective and material process of production—in this case, sonic-affective. The sonic cultures don’t capture the walk, but more-than-represent it in each anarchival listening.

Our final (bonus) culture, “Ice-pick in my eye” is an affective response to the process of completing this article. It is a playful critique of our own academic writing process and sometimes overwrought use of theoretical terms. We hope you will direct it towards your own scholarship to encourage the academy to laugh.

(Liner) liner notes

We refer to ourselves as Trumey and Shanny.

1.0 Buttermoon

1.1 120 bpm, 4/4, D minor

1.2 “The sonic culture includes Theremin, an electronic instrument developed during the 1920s that was popularized by its use in low-budget 1950s sci-fi and horror films.”

2.0 It's Okay to Say "No" (to What Isn't Working Out)

2.1 120 bpm, 4/4, Ab

2.2 "The main lyric was advice passed on to Trumey about leaving a previous job, and was repurposed for Shanny on the occasion of him having a bad breakup and turning gloomy. The song includes time-stretched and reversed glass shattering samples."

3.0 Wouldn't That (Be Sexy)?

3.1 120 bpm, 4/4, F

3.2 "The lyrics, melody, and production remain mostly unchanged from the afternoon when we first constructed them. The singing was done in one take. Inspired by our mutual obsession with "Doctor Who," broad, late-70s/early-80s inspired software-synthesizers are used throughout. This culture concludes with a bassoon and bass clarinet playing quartal phrases, treated with iZotope's free vinyl plug-in to mimic the sound of an old record. The scream was heavily contested—Trumey felt it should only happen once, Shanny thought it should happen for four or five minutes; we settled on repeated iterations that grew steadily more distorted through a ring-modulator and, thus, less scream-like. The lyrics are a diffractive walking-with philosophers Donna Haraway and Karen Barad (who Trumey was reading) and Missy from Doctor Who (who Shanny kept quoting)."

4.0 Cruel Bliss (Sweet Pain)

4.1 70 bpm, 4/4, C

4.2 "This is the first culture that we wrote, and the last to be finished. We took an impression of the song with us on the walk, including a melody and chord sequence that we had earlier explored on guitar and piano. We later added a sizeable sampled string section, digital static, chinking glass sounds from our walk, and fourteen separate software-synthesizers. Our original vocal takes (sung into the tablet mic) are still incorporated into the song as backing lines, and after the first chorus; the lead vocals were re-performed by our old friend Luke Jennings, who also added electric guitars. As a proposition for further thinking, the guitars enabled the song to carry additional instrumentation, including taiko drums and field toms, a drum kit, and a bass guitar line. Finally, we added a Cyberman voice to the start of the song saying "I waited for you" through a ring-modulator in reference to the ill-fated Ms. Bill Potts. Some of the synthesizers operate on algorithms that continue to run regardless of whether or not the play-button is held. Derrida and other post-structuralists, as well as sonic methodologists,

have attended to how meaning is always deferred in a text, and the purity of a sounding is always changed by the vibrational media (e.g. Gershon 2017). Even accounting for this, “Cruel Bliss (Sweet Pain)” is materially different every time it is played, with the performance bounced for distribution, only one of innumerable possibilities. Due to this, we haven’t been able to recreate our favorite bounce of the song.”

5.0 Hurry Up Lover, and Love, The Days Grow Short

5.1 127 bpm, 4/4, NA

5.2 “Uses the original voice recording (hence its relative poor quality). We cut up a single recording of the voice and deployed it to accentuate the natural rhythms in the recording. The lyrics are a proposition.”

6.0 Three Black Military Helicopters

6.1 138 bpm, 4/4 & 3/4, C

6.2 “The name of the song comes from the unexpected presence of three black military helicopters on the widest vista of the walk, Wide-Open Hill. It uses an arpeggiator and disorienting lyrical and time signature changes.”

7.0 All

7.1 86 bpm, 4/4, C

7.2 “The major pentatonic scale, from which we construct our melody, uses the first five tones heard when sounding consecutive intervals of a fifth (five tones apart) from the first note of a key (C, G, D, A, E). These tones are then rearranged within one octave; in our song this produces the tones C, D, E, G, A. George Russell (1953/2001) argues that the fifth is the second most open-sounding interval (after the octave) due to its placement in the overtone series—where the doubling of the frequency of a tone produces an ever-darkening series of intervals. We “riff” on this, by flattening the third during the English translation. This changes the sequentially fifth interval from a fifth (A, E) into a tritone (A, Eb); an interval historically banned by the Church for its satanic qualities. We also include seal-songs sampled during the Pilgrim’s Path mud walk during the culture’s concluding *A Capella* section. The lyric hook is from a sad phrase Trumey overhead in Nanjing, China many years ago that has always haunted her.”

8.0 Friend

8.1 180 bpm, 4/4, Bb minor

8.2 “The culture begins only using 8-bit parts, recreated using the free *YMCK Magical 8-bit* digital synthesizer.”

9.0 Deary, Feary, Queery

9.1 120 bpm. 4/4, Bb

9.2 “Includes samples of footfalls recorded during the walk. The coda lyric is performed falsetto, digitally tuned down to create an impossible voice. The lyrics are inspired by marching along St. Cuthbert’s Way and trying to sound like a fisherman’s song.”

Bonus: Ice-pick In My Eye

120 bpm. 4/4, F

“Written during the process of writing this article in Coimbra and Lisboa, Portugal in March 2018, the culture playfully teases some of our favorite theoretical concepts, including, inevitably, our own concept of the icepick. We hope you will take it with you.”

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Because of the success of this research-creation project, we have continued making music together and plan to release an album under the band name *Oblique Curiosities* later in 2018. Some of these sonic cultures will be on the album.

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