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**Involving Experiences: Audiencing and Co-reception in *Pleasure Garden***

**Joseph Browning**

**Abstract**

This article takes a site-specific, interactive sound installation called *Pleasure Garden* as a space for thinking about contemporary forms of musical experience. I develop a relational account of the ‘co-reception’ of *Pleasure Garden*, centred not on listening subjects, but distributed across audience members, artists, researchers and the more-than-human assemblage of the installation itself. I also discuss the effects of several overlapping cultures of ‘audiencing’ associated with Western art music, sound art, and other forms of cultural experience – variously individualistic, distracted and participatory – characteristic of late capitalism. Tracing how *Pleasure Garden* both responded to, and was interrupted by, these wider forces, I take this case as suggestive of a deep ambivalence: that musical experience is at once powerfully conditioned and generatively uncertain. Throughout the article, problems of method, interpretation and representation intertwine, raising questions about how to study forms of musical experience that evade conventional ethnographic inquiry.

**Keywords:** Audiences, Ethnography, Musical Experience, Reception, Sound Art, Western Art Music

## Involving Experiences: Audiencing and Co-reception in *Pleasure Garden*

JOSEPH BROWNING

### A Listening Garden

*Imagine a garden alive with plants, birds, people and music. Approaching, you first hear sounds singing out from high in the trees. Inside, melodies float in mid-air and noises chatter from the undergrowth. The foliage is tall and lush, mid-summer growth filled with recent rain. The path branches. Now you have a choice: stop or keep moving, turn left or right.*

<i>Left and the sounds seem to</i>	<i>You wait on a bench, listening</i>	<i>Or perhaps you don't think</i>
<i>respond to your movement:</i>	<i>and watching. Minutes go by</i>	<i>about where to go, only soon</i>
<i>starting, stopping and swirling</i>	<i>as the world moves around</i>	<i>you're elsewhere. New sounds</i>
<i>around. An elderly couple sit in</i>	<i>you. A noisy family passes;</i>	<i>call out from the trees and</i>
<i>silence as you pass by. You</i>	<i>then a festival volunteer,</i>	<i>fence line, drawing you onto</i>
<i>notice a bird box suspended in</i>	<i>clicking a tally counter.</i>	<i>an open lawn above the</i>
<i>a low tree – except there's a</i>	<i>Breathy solo lines emerge</i>	<i>central garden. Here the</i>
<i>camera lens inside, returning</i>	<i>from the hum of music and</i>	<i>sound is more open and</i>
<i>your gaze. Cicadas buzz from</i>	<i>garden, catching your ear.</i>	<i>expansive; people wander in</i>
<i>the flowerbeds; shoes scrape</i>	<i>Bird calls – real or recorded?</i>	<i>conversation, currawongs flap</i>
<i>on gravel.</i>	<i>– whirr high above.</i>	<i>and call out, kids cartwheel.</i>

*You move on, turn again, listening, looking, in and out of your thoughts. Someone approaches, asking if you have a few minutes to talk about 'the installation'...*

In January 2016, visitors to Vacluse House, a colonial-era estate in an affluent eastern suburb of Sydney, found the historic pleasure garden full of sounds (Figure 1). Many paused at the

entrance to read an explanatory sign about the artwork, itself called *Pleasure Garden* (Figure 2).

Some studied the notice carefully, while others only scanned it, catching glimpses:

In *Pleasure Garden*, music and environmental sounds weave through the landscape.... It is a listening garden – a gently interactive instrument.... Inspired by the story and music of the 17<sup>th</sup> century musician...Jacob van Eyck.... *Pleasure Garden* sets van Eyck's exquisite blooms in a new environment. ...explore it, or sit a while and listen. .... We're inviting you to complete the composition.... We hope that...this magical place, wreathed in soft, delicate music, encourages you to be quiet, move slowly, to look deeply, and then to leave with a little glow of contemplative beauty.

Just as audience members only gradually came to understand the installation, this article presents information about *Pleasure Garden* piecemeal: attempting to summarize the project up front would work against the uncertain play of meaning that I want to evoke and analyse here. Audience members could quickly learn that *Pleasure Garden* was conceived and co-composed by recorder player Genevieve Lacey and that her collaborators were Norwegian producer Jan Bang (co-composer), Jim Atkins (recording engineer and sound designer) and Robin Fox (interactive system design); as well as several others.<sup>1</sup> But experiencing the sounds of the installation, learning how they were diffused into the garden, and how the interactive system responded to their movements was a much slower, often incomplete, process.

*Pleasure Garden* switched on automatically for the first time in the morning of 7 January 2016. It would run from 8am to 8pm for 20 days. This article emerges at the intersection between

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.pleasuregarden.com.au](http://www.pleasuregarden.com.au).

my extended fieldwork with the creative team behind *Pleasure Garden*<sup>2</sup> and a more focussed period of research, in which I spent five days talking to and observing audience members in the Vaucluse garden, recording short interviews with 35 people.<sup>3</sup> Joining other calls for greater empirical attention to audiences and musical experience,<sup>4</sup> the article develops a relational account of the reception of *Pleasure Garden*, exploring how multiple parties co-constituted experiences of the artwork. Elsewhere, I describe the creation of *Pleasure Garden* as a process of co-production, involving varied actors.<sup>5</sup> Here, I describe experiences of *Pleasure Garden* in terms of what I call ‘co-reception’, a relational process involving its human creators, the installation, the garden, the people who came to listen, and myself as researcher. My contention is that, while ‘distributed creativity’ and allied terms have recently gathered conceptual momentum in music studies, the theorisation of reception as ‘distributed’ has been largely neglected, despite its potential for

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, I deliberately use first names to refer to members of the creative team in order to signal my relatively long-term relationship with them and gesture towards this wider ethnographic context. My research into the creation of *Pleasure Garden* – from its conception and development to various installation, concert and album versions – is discussed in Joseph Browning, ‘Remaking Classical Music: Cultures of Creativity in *Pleasure Garden*’, under review at *Twentieth-Century Music*, and Joseph Browning, ‘Meeting the Garden Halfway: Ethnographic Encounters with a Sound Installation Microculture’, accepted at *Ethnomusicology*.

<sup>3</sup> I conducted 27 interviews in total, with 35 people (20 individuals, 6 pairs, one group of three). Our recorded conversations range between 1’52” and 16’27”, lasting 7’03” on average, although our interactions often lasted somewhat longer.

<sup>4</sup> Georgina Born, ‘Listening, Mediation, Event: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135 (2010), 79–89; Stephanie E. Pitts, ‘What Makes an Audience? Investigating the Roles and Experiences of Listeners at a Chamber Music Festival’, *Music and Letters*, 86 (2005), 257–69.

<sup>5</sup> Browning, ‘Meeting the Garden Halfway’.

investigating musical experience.<sup>6</sup> My approach builds on recent work on the interactions and relationships between musicians, audiences and others,<sup>7</sup> but also considers the role of more-than-human entities in experiences of the installation. Together, these entities comprised what I call the installation-in-the-garden, a techno-natural assemblage formed through the co-articulation of the installation (its sound design, infrastructure, interactivity, discursive framing and spatial arrangement) and the Vaucluse garden (its plant, animal and human inhabitants; its acoustics,

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<sup>6</sup> Important exceptions include Born, 'Listening, Mediation, Event'; and Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). On distributed creativity, see Georgina Born, 'On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2 (2005), 7–36; Pamela Burnard, *Musical Creativities in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music*, ed. Eric F. Clarke and Mark Doffman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Eric F. Clarke, Mark Doffman and Liza Lim, 'Distributed Creativity and Ecological Dynamics: A Case Study of Liza Lim's "Tongue of the Invisible"', *Music and Letters*, 94 (2013), 628–63; R. Keith Sawyer, *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration* (Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum, 2003). Several journal special issues on networked performance further evidence the trend, see Pedro Rebelo, 'Editorial', *Contemporary Music Review*, 28 (2009), 349–50; Margaret Schedel and John P. Young, 'Editorial', *Organised Sound*, 10 (2005), 181–83; Ian Whalley and Ken Fields, 'Editorial', *Organised Sound*, 17 (2012), 1–3. Beyond music studies, the preoccupation with questions of *agency* in Actor-Network Theory and new materialism has perhaps obscured the complementary issue of *receptivity* that concerns me here. One exception is Annemarie Mol, 'Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 50 (2010), 253–69 (p. 256–7).

<sup>7</sup> See *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, ed. Karen Burland and Stephanie E. Pitts (London: Routledge, 2016); Stephanie E. Pitts, "'Everybody wants to be Pavarotti': The Experience of Music for Performers and Audience at a Gilbert and Sullivan Festival", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129 (2004), 143–60; Ioannis Tsioulakis and Elina Hytönen-Ng, 'Introduction to Musicians and their Audiences', *Musicians and their Audiences: Performance, Speech and Mediation*, ed. Ioannis Tsioulakis and Elina Hytönen-Ng (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–12.

pathways, physical contours, and so on).

In proposing a more-than-human account of the reception of *Pleasure Garden*, my aim is not to speculate about the experiences of birds, plants or computers, but rather to move beyond treating musical experience as exclusively centred on individual human subjects. Musical experience is cultivated through varied relations between subjects and objects – with results that are variously subjectifying, fragmenting, dialogic and collectivizing<sup>8</sup> – and non-human contributors participate, alongside humans, in the circulation, interruption and modulation of musical affect. Indeed, recent scholarly attention to affect in the environmental humanities and science and technology studies can productively expand our theorisation of musical experience. Here, I draw on Hustak and Myers’ rethinking of plant-insect ecologies in order to analyse the affective significance of *Pleasure Garden* as an arena for more-than-human encounters. Reading ‘against the grain’ of dominant logics in recent ecological science and neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory, Hustak and Myers ask, ‘What if the topology of insect/orchid encounters were conditioned not just by a calculating economy that aims to maximize fitness but also by an *affective ecology* shaped by pleasure, play, and experimental propositions?’<sup>9</sup> Rereading a range of research into these complex, multisensory encounters, Hustak and Myers propose ‘involution’ as a supplement to ‘evolution’, in order to account for ‘the creative, improvisational, and fleeting practices through which...[organisms] *involve* themselves in one another’s lives’<sup>10</sup> In this article, I draw out some of the implications of this involutory perspective for our understanding of musical and artistic

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<sup>8</sup> Born, ‘Listening, Mediation, Event’; Georgina Born, ‘Imagining New Musical Democracies – Renewing Audiencing’, *Finding Democracy in Music* conference (Huddersfield, September 2017); Georgina Born, ‘On Nonhuman Sound: Sound as Relation’, *Sound Objects*, ed. James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 185–210; Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*.

<sup>9</sup> Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, ‘Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters’, *differences*, 23 (2012), 74–118 (p. 77–8)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 77.



experience, including tentatively extending the concept to include human-technology intimacies. The distributions of subjectivity that attend co-reception are not, in my account, about oceanic communion with sound, community or nature, but rather about the often subtle perturbations of subjectivity which texture musical experience. Not all such distributions are welcome (I discuss, for example, the distracting effects of audience members' efforts to become visible to *Pleasure Garden's* interactive system), but they are, following Hustak and Myers, subjectively and intersubjectively *involving* – they entangle us with multiple others, sonic and social.<sup>11</sup> Such entanglements can blur conventional divisions of musical labour, so I also consider how *Pleasure Garden* implicated audiences in a process of simultaneous co-creation *and* co-reception, such that to experience the installation-in-the-garden was also to collectively remake it.

Another major strand in my argument examines how experiences of *Pleasure Garden* were conditioned and animated by cultures of 'audiencing'.<sup>12</sup> The habits and expectations that audiences and artists brought to the installation were shaped, on the one hand, by established, broadly contemplative, reception practices associated with Western art music and, on the other hand, by less well-established, broadly exploratory, forms of reception linked to sound art, environmental art and public art. These modes of reception of course overlap, and their differences are relative, but they usefully highlight the distinctive cultures of audiencing that attend different genres and settings. Beyond this, *Pleasure Garden* participated in wider shifts in contemporary musical experience, including what Born identifies as the increasing ubiquity of music across diverse settings, allied

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<sup>11</sup> Hustak and Myers, 'Involuntary Momentum', *passim.*; also Born, 'Listening, Mediation, Event', 88. For a theorisation of musical subjectivity via the metaphysics of A. N. Whitehead, closely aligned to my argument here, see Born, 'On Nonhuman Sound'.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Born, 'Imagining New Musical Democracies'. For a parallel argument about the cultures of creativity that shaped *Pleasure Garden's* production, see Browning, 'Remaking Classical Music'.

with a move towards less attentive, more fragmented types of listening.<sup>13</sup> More broadly still, audience experiences were formed in relation to features of everyday experience associated with late capitalism and neoliberalism, including the ‘distracted’ character of urban life; the ubiquity of technological mediation, especially interactive systems; notions of culture as expedient; and the widespread aestheticisation and somatic appreciation of nature and landscape.<sup>14</sup> These features variously intensified, re-inflected and undercut each other in shaping the reception of *Pleasure Garden*, collectively signalling wider trends in contemporary forms of musical experience.<sup>15</sup> One

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<sup>13</sup> Born, ‘Listening, Mediation, Event’, 86–7; also Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*.

<sup>14</sup> See, respectively, Michael Taussig, ‘Tactility and Distraction’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 6 (1991), 147–53; Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne and Tamar Tembeck, ‘The Participatory Condition: An Introduction’, *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, ed. Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne and Tamar Tembeck (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), vii–xxxix; George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Morgan James Luker, *The Tango Machine: Musical Culture in the Age of Expediency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London: Sage, 1998), 104–133; John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London, 2002); Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Bodies of Nature* (London, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> In referring to ‘contemporary forms of musical experience’ my intention is not to posit a radical break between the historical and the contemporary, nor to generalize about all musical experience everywhere, but rather to suggest characteristics that are pertinent to multiple genres and cultural settings. The features I discuss have distinct histories, and are differently felt in different places today, but they are also widespread and, in several cases (e.g. late capitalism), distinguished by their propensity for expansion and adaptation to new settings. The collision, overlay and mutual articulation of these characteristics (alongside, no doubt, others not identified here) represent, I suggest, a distinctive phase in historically shifting patterns of musical experience across the globe (alluded to in Born’s notion of ‘late liberal listening’; see Born, ‘Listening, Mediation, Event’, 87). My references to diverse musics (from tango to kwaito to Western art music) are intended to highlight some of these interconnections. The challenge is to talk about such widely-circulating features without universalizing certain forms of musical experience (often those of the West or the Global

key trend, I suggest, is towards *transient immersion*, a form of absorbed yet ephemeral experience often oriented towards participatory or environmental art. Immersion (and allied terms such as participatory or interactivity) pervade much current artistic discourse and have been subject to considerable exploration and critique.<sup>16</sup> Responding in particular to Helmreich's call for 'discernments of material and semiotic relationships often washed out of attention by the all-encompassing idiom of immersion',<sup>17</sup> my account credits audience members' narrations of *Pleasure Garden* as immersive, while also recognising the ephemeral, bounded status of their involvement, the construction of 'immersion' via specific discourses and techniques, and its predication on non-immersive experiences.

The distinctive reception culture that arose from the superposition of such features refracted both the intentions of *Pleasure Garden*'s creators and the expectations of its audiences such that experiences of the installation, although strongly conditioned, remained far from assured or predictable. Together, the situated co-reception of *Pleasure Garden* and its imbrication in wider cultures of audiencing powerfully shaped its reception while also – through their tensions and complexity – leaving space for uncertain and generative responses. I suggest that this ambivalence – at once powerfully conditioned and generatively uncertain – might be a valuable focus for the study of musical experience in other settings.

These issues of musical experience are bound up with questions of method and representation. Reflecting on the methodological challenges of studying *Pleasure Garden*, I suggest

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North). Rather than seeing 'contemporary musical experience' as a uniform, generalizable field, we might imagine instead a heterogeneous tumult of positions and possibilities that are nonetheless interconnected and so necessitate more than 'local' theorisation.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Matthew Reason, 'Participations on Participation: Researching the "Active" Theatre Audience', *Participations, Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12 (2015), 271–80.

<sup>17</sup> Stefan Helmreich, 'An Anthropologist Underwater: Immersive Soundscapes, Submarine Cyborgs, and Transductive Ethnography', *American Ethnologist*, 34 (2007), 621–41 (p. 622).

that the affective responses and meaning-making impulses not only of artists and listeners, but also of researchers, both academic and corporate, partake in and constitute musical experiences and wider cultures of audiencing. This is not just because my interview questions shaped audience responses, but because of a more far-reaching dialogism at stake in the relationship between audiences, artists and researchers.<sup>18</sup> *Pleasure Garden*'s creators had particular hopes and expectations as to what the installation would offer audiences.<sup>19</sup> Audience members brought assumptions about what kinds of musical experience it afforded or were worth investigating. And I discussed, in turn, both my own and audience members' responses to the installation with *Pleasure Garden*'s creators. Artists' and audiences' informal theories of musical experience variously reinscribed and resisted a widespread culture of interpretation and evaluation associated with both scholarly and market research, which, rather than simply reporting the effects of artistic projects, now powerfully shapes their commissioning, production, promotion and reception.<sup>20</sup> In these ways,

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<sup>18</sup> My interview questions were flexible and conversations sometimes began informally, but I usually began by asking 'What brought you here today?' and 'How have you found the installation?' My follow-up questions explored topics raised in audience members' answers to these opening questions, often touching upon what they had been doing in the garden, how it made them feel, their experience of the interactivity, and any other features of the experience that they found striking.

<sup>19</sup> Related to what Born calls 'addressivity', see 'Imagining New Musical Democracies', 3–4; after Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis', *Speech Genres and other late essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 103–31.

<sup>20</sup> Critical discussions include Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, 'Rethinking the Social Impacts of the Arts', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13 (2007), 135–51; Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, 'Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 14 (2010), 121–42; Susan Galloway, 'Theory-based Evaluation and the Social Impact of the Arts', *Cultural Trends*, 18 (2009), 125–48; Katya Johanson and Hilary Glow, 'A Virtuous Circle: The Positive Evaluation Phenomenon in Arts Audience Research', *Participations, Journal*

this article – far from a straightforward report of audience experiences – emerges from the interaction between multiple engagements with *Pleasure Garden*. Crucial here is the tension between divergent impulses – politicising, instrumentalising and autonomising – in the interpretation of *Pleasure Garden*. Also central is the challenge of studying particular types of audiencing characteristic of much public art – from sound installations to street performance – that combine (often in tension) different modes of experience, variously transient and immersive, solitary and sociable, contemplative and distracted. Such audiences have been neglected within ethnomusicology,<sup>21</sup> partly because they permit little in the way of long-term fieldwork, and the literature on audiences within sound art studies remains largely speculative, abstracted or implicitly auto-ethnographic:<sup>22</sup> scholars have rarely talked to such audiences about their experiences or

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*of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12 (2015), 254–270. With this context in mind, it is important to note that both my research and *Pleasure Garden* itself were funded, in part, by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, the latter as part of the centre’s education, outreach and public performance initiatives. Here, too, the increasingly widespread and institutionalized association between arts commissioning and arts research was a crucial factor, although the artistic production process was not guided by a research agenda and the research was conceived, as this article hopefully attests, as emergent and critical, in no way intended to evidence the ‘impact’ of, or otherwise valorise, the installation.

<sup>21</sup> One exception is Martin Stokes, ‘The Citizen in the Crowd’, Institute for Musical Research Distinguished Lecture Series, 25 May 2017. Available at <http://www.the-imr.uk/media>.

<sup>22</sup> One prominent example is Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015). Despite its sophisticated attention to listening, LaBelle’s book is nonetheless replete with abstract references to ‘the/a listener’ and ‘the/an audience’, and statements of the form ‘I/we/one hear(s)’, all of which risk universalizing listening and listeners. On the implied listener assumed by much musicology and the essentializing focus on sound and individual subjectivity in some sound art literature, see Born, ‘Imagining New Musical Democracies’, 3, 6.

observed what they do.<sup>23</sup> This article both advocates for this kind of empirical work and considers some of the many challenging questions it raises regarding the kinds of knowledge – variously ethnographic and demographic, scholarly and market-oriented, critical and evaluative, reflexive and positivist – it is possible to generate about (and with) audiences.

Where experiences and audiences are so various and elusive, representation also becomes fraught. Throughout the article, I present excerpts from my anonymous interviews with *Pleasure Garden* audience members, like fragments of conversations overheard by the reader. Through this and other textual devices (including occasional columns allowing the reader multiple routes through the text), I want to suggest the approximate relationship between two figures of reception – the reader and the audience member – and so foreground the mimetic relationship between this text and the installation it describes. A text, like a garden or an artwork, can direct attention, accommodate varied experiences, and encourage participation. It can provoke, enchant and annoy. If the trick of an ethnographic sketch is to transport the reader elsewhere, then playing with the relationship between text and place might re-sensitize us to both. Rather than presenting a closed, linear argument, a text might tread several paths simultaneously, remaining spacious to alternative readings.<sup>24</sup> The setting evoked might be understood as a place where meaning is made, lost and debated, long before its representation in writing.

One subtle, yet particularly thorny, methodological and representational issue is worth highlighting at the outset: the tension between demographic and ethnographic impulses in the presentation of fragments of my conversations with audience members. To say that *Pleasure Garden* audiences looked largely (although far from exclusively) white and middle class, and mixed

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<sup>23</sup> Exceptions include Lorraine Plourde, ‘Disciplined Listening in Tokyo: Onkyō and Non-Intentional Sounds’, *Ethnomusicology*, 52 (2008), 270–95; and Christabel Stirling, ‘Sound Art/Street Life: Tracing the Social and Political Effects of Sound Installations in London’, *Journal of Sonic Studies*, (2016).

<sup>24</sup> For a more insistently nonlinear musicological text, see Anahid Kassabian, ‘For New Musicology: A Farewell’, *Radical Musicology*, 5 (2011).

in age and gender, may seem a fairly straightforward observation – and such information is important in recognising the relative privilege of the installation’s audiences. But it also risks various assumptions, especially about the visual legibility of gender, race and ethnicity, which are untenable in light of the complexities of gender identity and indigenous status in contemporary Australia.<sup>25</sup> This risk could not have been neutralised by simply collecting demographic data. Direct questioning about demographic information would have sat extremely awkwardly in my attempts at relatively naturalistic, open-ended conversations with audience members. More than this, it would have reproduced both the demographic modelling of instrumentalised market research and long-standing colonial strategies of surveillance directed at indigenous populations.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, I did not ask about, and do not offer here, demographic information regarding audience members’ ethnicity, race, age, gender, occupation, class and so on, unless it was directly raised by an audience member in our conversation. In the vast majority of cases, this means such information is entirely absent, except for the occasional mention of a person’s occupation and the important case of a woman who self-identified as Aboriginal (discussed towards the end of the article). Undoubtedly, this lack of contextual information is a limitation, but it can at least highlight a troublesome and under-recognised methodological dilemma. In omitting such information, my aim is not to posit an idealised or somehow neutral audience member, but rather to suggest that both the collection of demographic information and audience members’ practices of self-identification (or lack thereof)

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the latter, see Nicholas Biddle, Siew-Ean Khoo and John Taylor, ‘Indigenous Australia, White Australia, Multicultural Australia: The Demography of Race and Ethnicity in Australia’, *The International Handbook of the Demography of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Rogelio Sáenz, David Embrick, and Néstor Rodríguez (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> On the latter, see, for example, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, ‘Demographic Colonialism: EU–African Migration Management and the Legacy of Eurafrica’, *Globalizations*, 8 (2011), 261–276. On the need for a more culturally-sensitive demography of Australian indigenous peoples, see John Taylor, ‘Indigenous Demography and Public Policy in Australia: Population or Peoples?’, *Journal of Population Research*, 26 (2009), 115–30.

are part of the culture of audiencing surrounding *Pleasure Garden*, one in which the subject position of the White audience member is perhaps especially important for its unmarked, yet dominant, status. Further, as a textual device, I hope that these disembodied fragments of conversation might draw attention to the kinds of audience member imagined by readers and so to the wider challenges of knowing and representing who participates in different kinds of audiencing.

### Aesthetic ‘alternatives’ and making ‘space’

*Pleasure Garden* grew out of a richly biographical, collaborative process – drawing on features of Genevieve’s personal and professional life, as well as other team members’ skills and interests<sup>27</sup> – making it impossible to distil Genevieve’s hopes about what audiences would get from the installation. Nonetheless, the words that gathered around the installation – the explanatory signs, information online and in the Sydney Festival brochure – shape our sense of her intentions, just as they guided listeners in Vacluse:

My aim was to create a contemporary *Pleasure Garden*, allowing an alternative experience to a manically busy, noisy, contemporary life, affording instead an opportunity for repose and delight, for wonder and the contemplation of beauty.<sup>28</sup>

With its implicit critique of modernity and advocacy for an ‘alternative’, Genevieve’s aim treads a delicate line between direction and accommodation, making an almost political point by moving into the autonomous realm of the aesthetic, ‘a modality of perception in which objects and forms

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<sup>27</sup> See Browning, ‘Remaking Classical Music’.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://genevivelacey.com/words/pleasure-garden/>



are withdrawn from normal hierarchies and causality'.<sup>29</sup> *Pleasure Garden's* contemplative bent places emphasis on historical pleasure gardens as places of leisure, meditative retreat and respectable sociability, rather than spectacle and hedonism.<sup>30</sup> It also participates in a wider cultural preoccupation with qualities, eliding the ethical and the aesthetic, such as slowness, stillness, attentiveness, and naturalness – often seen as antithetical to those that dominate contemporary life: speed, mobility, distraction, technology.<sup>31</sup> For Genevieve, music and nature can rehabilitate our experiences of contemporary life. As Thrift argues, 'nature has become a, perhaps even the, key site of contemplation and mysticism in the modern world.'<sup>32</sup>

Many audience members described their experiences in ways that resonated strongly with Genevieve's intentions. Words such as 'relaxing', 'pleasant', 'peaceful', 'soothing', 'calm', 'natural', and 'meditative' came up repeatedly in my conversations and most people seemed to value their experience, making positive, sometimes effusive, comments about the installation.<sup>33</sup> Yet

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<sup>29</sup> Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 206.

<sup>30</sup> For a variety of scholarly perspectives, see *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island*, ed. Jonathan Conlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> The literature on this topic is patchy, perhaps because such concerns are easily portrayed as apolitical. See, however, *Stillness in a Mobile World*, ed. David Bissell and Gillian Fuller (London: Routledge, 2011); Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey and Ursula Münster, 'Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness', *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (2016), 1–23; Andrew Murphie, 'Be Still, Be Good, Be Cool: The Ambivalent Powers of Stillness in an Overactive World', *M/C Journal*, 12 (2009); Deborah Bird Rose, 'Slowly, Writing into the Anthropocene', *TEXT* (2013), 1–14; Michael Taussig, *The Corn Wolf* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 138–152.

<sup>32</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2007), 56.

<sup>33</sup> Such comments chime with other research suggesting that audiences today experience classical music 'as powerfully somatic, speaking of it repeatedly as a means of relaxation'; see Born, 'Listening, Mediation, Event', 85; after Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Elizabeth B. Silva, Alan Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal and David

each response was distinctive: *Pleasure Garden* made listeners variously attentive, evaluative, introspective and more.

It makes you more aware of all the different noises around, doesn't it? You know the car and the bird and the coffee shop and the people. It does kind of suddenly awaken...that inner aural sense.

It's really beautiful balanced...with the birds, like it doesn't overpower it, ...it's present enough to be heard, but really in beautiful harmony...with the surrounding organic sound.

You can sit and listen and kind of still drift off into your own thoughts without it being a distraction.

It will take this whole article to credit the diversity of audience reactions, whether resonant with Genevieve's aims or not. From early on though, we should note Genevieve's emphasis on accommodating such diversity. She describes:

trying to do things that *have enough space in them* that I'm not telling someone what to think or how to feel, I'm just hopefully trying to induce a state of mind or being that then allows them to experience, feel, think, whatever it is that they need to.<sup>34</sup>

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Wright, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Emphasis added. Unless otherwise attributed, all quotes come from my interviews with Genevieve Lacey in Melbourne on 18 December 2015, 15 April 2016 and 20 September 2017.

Making ‘space’ was, I suggest, a powerful yet informal idea through which *Pleasure Garden*’s creators conceptualized the relationship between the installation and its audiences. As I describe elsewhere, the musical textures and frequencies of *Pleasure Garden* were designed with a view to creating something that, as Jan put it, ‘leaves space for the garden’.<sup>35</sup> Such ideas offer an instructive parallel between ‘space’ as the actual site of the installation and ‘space’ as a metaphor for the work’s openness to diverse contributions and experiences. Where the site gathered a public who followed winding paths and wandered on open lawns, the space of the work was intended to accommodate multiple individual experiences and hold open the possibility of diverse experiences in general. Genevieve’s explanation figures this openness as reparative (‘whatever...they need to’), chiming with the idea of aesthetic experience as an ‘alternative’ to the rush of modernity. Her attitude is, like my wider argument here, double edged: the artwork at once conditions musical experience, by affording contemplation, and leaves it generatively uncertain, by making ‘space’.

### ‘A meaning above what it actually is’: Interpretation and Quasi-autonomy

The installation of *Pleasure Garden* took place over five, extremely rainy days in early January 2016. During the mixing phase, Jim, the project sound engineer, would start some music playing and we would all walk from the tech workspace, housed in a small marquee, into and around the garden. We would listen, talk, return to the marquee, make changes, then listen again. One such walk took us onto the lawn above the central pleasure garden, our attention focused on a percussive passage in a track called ‘Granite’, made from the processed, layered sounds of struck stones and low-pitched key-hits on a contrabass recorder. A previous mix spatialized this texture more diffusely, but Jan suggested locating it on one side of the garden, where it thrummed from a row of tall trees. As we listened, Jan commented: ‘It’s the migrants knocking at the door.’ I have an image of Jan holding his palms vertically as if feeling the wall of sound, and I think he subsequently

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<sup>35</sup> See Browning, ‘Meeting the Garden Halfway’.

worked with Jim to make the texture louder and more unsettled. But I'm not sure: my ethnographic notes are sketchy since I only half took in this seemingly off-hand comment. The flow of conversation moved on, but talking with Jan later, it became clear that this issue was important to him. He was critical of current attitudes towards migration and of the low numbers of Syrian refugees taken in by Australia and his home country, Norway. But, significantly, his focus lay elsewhere:

For me...it's not important to emphasize the political aspect of it, but there definitely could have been [that emphasis], which if you...are a presenter or a curator you would be very interested in presenting it like that, because it would...put it into a [bigger] context.... Then again for me that comes from...[the] commercial aspect of it.... And I think that, in general, is quite boring actually....and I find it also limiting, ...because it projects certain images to the listener and I want the listener to have...as wide and different possibilities...as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Jan and Genevieve were similarly hesitant about my interest in any environmentalist sentiment behind *Pleasure Garden* – hesitant despite both valuing nature as an important dimension of the installation and, indeed, their lives. Some audience members shared my interpretation: one person with a conservation background, visiting with their child, wondered whether hearing 'recorded' rather than 'actual natural sounds' would be increasingly common for 'future generations when there aren't such natural places anymore. Perhaps that is the nature they will know as opposed to actual nature, which is a worry.' Asked about such environmentalist readings, Genevieve did acknowledge the affective potential of the installation: '[I]t's harder to hurt something if you love it,

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<sup>36</sup> Unless otherwise attributed, all quotes come from my interviews with Jan Bang in Sydney on 6 and 10 January 2016.

....[so] trying to open the channels for that encounter [with nature] to happen for someone, then might make them think – in practical ways – differently about a whole lot of things.’ Nonetheless, prompting such experiences was not her focus, and Jan took a firmer stance:

For me...I don't really have any, what do you [call it]? In Norwegian we call it 'overbygning' [literally 'superstructure'], which is like a meaning above what it actually is. For me...it's purely sound, structures, pitches, rhythmical events.... [B]ut I know that if I am precise...I can create something else for an audience, or even for myself you know. ...That's what I do. I create...these kind of possible worlds...to live in, but I don't really have any of those [overbygning], and I find them also a bit sort of limiting.

Another ambivalence then: Jan and Genevieve want *Pleasure Garden* to be experientially open, but downplay strongly 'political' interpretations; they have hopes for what the installation can offer to listeners, yet figure both music and nature as domains of more-or-less autonomous experience. Their stance highlights the scholarly impulse to 'uncover' interpretations, as demonstrated by my interest in subtexts of migration and environmentalism. I'm struck especially by Jan's comment about the 'commercial' appeal of 'the political aspect' for 'curators'. By avoiding 'political' readings, artists do not simply affirm art's transcendence or autonomy, they also sidestep reductive interpretations and their close relationship with marketing strategies. Nonetheless, understanding *Pleasure Garden* means engaging with discourses of autonomy that – in separating music from the social and cultural – seem antithetical to the ethnomusicological project. David Clarke's work offers a valuable guide here. He re-evaluates musical autonomy, recognizing its considerable ideological problems, tracing its history within Western art music, attending to its socio-cultural mediation, its dispersal across other genres, and arguing for its continuing potential to do 'valuable cultural work', which he glosses most succinctly as 'an inwardly oriented resistance to outer political

circumstances’.<sup>37</sup> Following Clarke, rather than simply dismissing autonomy *a priori*, we might instead study what could be called ‘cultures of autonomy’ – a ‘helpfully jarring oxymoron’<sup>38</sup> – and their continuing significance as a topic for ethnographic enquiry.<sup>39</sup> Genevieve’s desire for a contemplative ‘alternative’ to chaotic contemporary life, her idea of ‘leaving space’ and Jan’s description, again using a spatial metaphor, of creating ‘possible worlds...to live in’ add up to a distinctive version of musical autonomy.<sup>40</sup> Combined with the installation’s participatory dimension – the entrance signs inviting audiences to ‘complete the composition’, its interactive elements – as well as a concern for audiences’ situated, multisensory experiences of the installation, they make *Pleasure Garden* at most quasi-autonomist, invested at once the openness, irreducibility and reparative potential of aesthetic experience and in its social and embodied mediation.

### ‘Not pinpointable’: An Undecidable Aesthetic

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<sup>37</sup> David Clarke, ‘Musical Autonomy Revisited’, *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 172–83 (p. 173, 178); after Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1992]); also David Clarke, ‘Speaking for Itself’, *The Musical Times*, 137/1836 (1996), 14–18.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Tsing, ‘Sorting out Commodities: How Capitalist Value is made through Gifts’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3 (2013), 21–43 (p. 24).

<sup>39</sup> As yet rarely pursued, although see Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*; also Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 126–55; Eric Lewis, ‘What is “Great Black Music”? The Social Aesthetics of the AACM in Paris’, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, ed. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis and Will Straw (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 135–59.

<sup>40</sup> On autonomous music as a place or ‘virtual world’, see Clarke, *Ways of Listening*, 148, 154.

Talking with *Pleasure Garden*'s creators and audiences sometimes turned into a strange game of collaborative musical analysis as my questions about how the installation was conceived and experienced prompted discussions of how it sounded.<sup>41</sup> Audience comments ranged across issues of texture, tempo, volume, structure, spatialisation and timbre, but circled around a few central ideas: *Pleasure Garden* was spacious, slow, varied, 'balanced' or 'integrated' with the sounds of the garden, and 'encompassing', surrounding the listener with 'soothing' and 'natural' sounds.

I guess it's made us feel very relaxed and calm for the most part. It feels a very natural sound, very spontaneous, lots of silence...

[I]t's slow, it's soothing sorts of noises, but it's [got] enough variation that you can be interested in listening to what noises are coming next.

Other features, not commented on by audiences, likely contributed to an appreciation of *Pleasure Garden* as relaxing and 'fitting' with the garden: the predominance of free rhythm – especially in slow, single-breath recorder lines – matched its spacious, organic textures; and the installation's melodic and harmonic characteristics, influenced by van Eyck, were broadly in keeping with the tonal conventions likely familiar to most audience members. But, as some listeners acknowledged, the music also took unexpected turns.

<i>Imagine virtuosic Baroque-like</i>	<i>Imagine a single bass</i>	<i>Imagine textures where</i>
<i>melodies layered and</i>	<i>recorder voice – low,</i>	<i>instrumental, natural and</i>
<i>juxtaposed, creating</i>	<i>husky, unpulsed – singing</i>	<i>electronic sounds blur together;</i>
<i>ambiguous, dissonant,</i>	<i>from one spot, with</i>	<i>where live and pre-recorded</i>

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<sup>41</sup> See Chloe Alaghband-Zadeh, 'Experiments in Collaborative Analysis: Making Sense of Thumri with Expert Listeners', Society for Ethnomusicology conference (Austin, 3 December 2015).

*sometimes polytonal textures, harmonies drifting in and sounds are hard to tell apart. A  
 neither clearly pulsed nor out. A disembodied whistling recorder that mimics a  
 rhythmically free. Imagine melody, the human bird. A sliding bird call that seems  
 static harmonies unsettled by performer clearly audible, computer-generated. A low  
 internal variations in voicing yet absent. Or a dense electronic drone that sounds like a  
 and intensity. Recorder trills at mass of voices, tumbling bass recorder. Or moments of  
 different pitches and speeds, and spinning around the surreal juxtaposition: a  
 off-set and layered to make space, harsh and strident. mechanical, ratcheting noise that  
 tall, undulating chords. Long- Or a diffuse wash of releases a flock of birdsong, the  
 held notes pulsing with varied sound with no clear sudden appearance of a manual  
 kinds of vibrato. source. carillon, chiming in mid-air.*

Out of a limited palette focussed on Genevieve's recorder playing, electronic sounds, and field recordings of birds and bells, *Pleasure Garden's* creators crafted diverse musical textures, which undercut any simple characterisation of the installation as 'relaxing' or reliant on 'natural' sounds, and matched their insistence on openness and varied listening possibilities. This was reflected in audience members' divergent ad hoc descriptions of the installation, which ranged across genres, time periods, and what counted as 'music'.

...period music, early, middle ages English I suppose...

...it's fairly radical music, ...you could even call it atonal in part...

...to me it's not music, to me it's more life, it's just comfort, life, rather than just 'music' music.



...just noises, rather than musical tunes...

...it's not classical music, ...obviously it's not any kind of you know like popular music or anything, so it's music that's not music.

Ambiguity pervaded audience members' comments. They just as often talked of 'sounds' and 'noises' as 'music'. The refrain that *Pleasure Garden* was 'relaxing' was sometimes qualified by comments that invoked more ambivalent affects: it was also 'eerie', 'haunting', 'lonely', 'spooky', and 'mysterious'. And although audience members largely celebrated the combination of installation and garden sounds, they were also preoccupied by the boundary between the two, especially regarding birds.

I'm not sure whether that bird sound is part of the system or not.

[I'm] [t]rying to work out if all the bird sounds were actually part of the performance or whether they're also the birds that are here.

I like the idea...that you're hearing birds here or different sounds here and you're not quite sure which is...natural...and which is part of this experience.

Rather than describing bird sounds as 'live' or 'recorded', they turned to stranger syntax and terminology, as if 'natural' or present ('here') birds were somehow excluded from the 'performance' of the installation or their 'experience' of it. In this way, they registered an uncertainty about the experiential limits of *Pleasure Garden*, about where birds stood in relation to the creation-reception boundary, and, perhaps, about the limits of musical experience in general.

Although engagements with birdsong are a long-standing feature of Western art music, the

installation reinvigorated audience members' attentiveness to this familiar topic, perhaps due to the relatively unfamiliar convergence of two broad cultures of listening, which we might gloss as 'musical' and 'environmental'. Adapting Sedgwick's notion of 'performativity', we might see birds' sounding practices as happening *alongside* the creation and reception of *Pleasure Garden*, neither fully inside or outside, at once evading and dramatizing the normative conditions of music as (what Blacking called) 'humanly organized sound'.<sup>42</sup>

Writing about South African kwaito, Steingo develops the idea of 'aesthetic undecidability' as a means for understanding this popular form of electronic music, including its extremely eclectic sonic reference points, which 'agitate...the traditional criteria for establishing distinctions between music, sound, and noise', and its incorporation into the soundtrack of the controversial TV show *Yizo Yizo*, which blurred the boundaries between township life and its representation in ways that made it 'impossible to determine the precise relationship between an aesthetic product and social reality'.<sup>43</sup> Although far removed from the social and political world of kwaito, *Pleasure Garden* cultivated its own version of 'aesthetic undecidability', centred on ambiguities surrounding liveness and mediation, the relationship between instrumental, natural and technological sounds, and rhythmic, harmonic, spatial and structural conventions.

Discussing his compositional approach, Jan described how combining several different musical textures can create 'something that is not pinpointable', encouraging the listener's attention to 'turn inwards'. Acknowledging the difficulty of describing this effect, he commented that, 'Unusual combinations [of sounds] can create a feeling that I can sense more than I can explain.' Echoing Jan's sentiment, one listener reflected:

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<sup>42</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 67–92; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Jonathan Goldberg, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 55–7; John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

<sup>43</sup> Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 59, 88.

It's good, it works, I'm not sure...what I mean by that, but it works, ...having the sounds and being in the spot, it just sits right so...there's a lot of thought that's gone into it and, although we try to analyse what that is...from a technical point [of view], other than from a technical point [of view] ...it just works.

In linking aesthetic ambiguity or analytical indeterminacy, on the one hand, and expressivity or effectivity ('it works'), on the other, such comments flesh out our sense of *Pleasure Garden's* quasi-autonomy. Familiar tropes of musical experience as mysterious and beyond words are reframed in terms of the deliberate subversion of conventions in order to provoke valued yet elusive affective responses. Talking with listeners provided only partial insight into these responses, however, inevitably foregrounding the reflective and discursive. Some people said very little in interviews, but stayed for long periods, listening intently. My evening conversation with one elderly couple dried up particularly quickly, but afterwards they sat together in companionable silence for many minutes while the shadows lengthened. Paying attention to hesitations and ambiguities in audience comments,<sup>44</sup> and placing them in dialogue with observations of the embodied and performative dimensions of audiencing, helps to expand our sense of the experiences afforded by *Pleasure Garden*.

## Garden Sociality and 'Interspecies Intimacies'

Most people approached the installation from the carpark or bus stop, crossing a bridge over a narrow creek into the central pleasure garden (see Figure 3). Some hurried directly to the house, passing through the garden as if nothing unusual was happening. Others wandered, taking photos,

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<sup>44</sup> Kirsty Sedgman, 'Audience Experience in an Anti-Expert Age: A Survey of Theatre Audience Research', *Theatre Research International*, 42 (2017), 307–22 (p. 315).

touching foliage, chatting, pausing to listen (Figure 4). In places, the installation simply shifted the tempo of engagement: visitors had to follow the central paths of the pleasure garden, but now might walk more slowly or pause to listen. Elsewhere the installation changed audience behaviour more substantially, tempting them into areas they might not normally reach. The most intent listeners made several passes through the central garden, sat on the benches for extended periods of silent and solitary listening, then walked up onto the lawn, drawn by the sounds coming from the perimeter fence.

It sort of...carries you almost...around the paths and...makes you ready to sort of move on and walk and it keeps you going.... And then every now and again you might stop and listen to a particular one or you might hear something from further away and go 'Oh I'll go and find that one.' Yeah. So it's a lovely concept.

The installation-in-the-garden had its own distinctive sociality, formed through the articulation between cultures of audiencing associated with different musical genres and settings. On the one hand, audiences responded to the installation as an artwork through the disciplined, still, silent and solitary listening associated with Western art music and concert performances.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, they responded to it as a setting or experience affording exploration, experimentation, participation and conversation, as with various forms of sound, installation and environmental art.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Georgina Born, 'Introduction', *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–69 (p. 28–9); after Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin, 2002 [1977]), and James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); see also Jonathan Gross, 'Concert going in Everyday Life: An Ethnography of Still and Silent Listening at the BBC Proms', (Ph.D. dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> The literature is scant, but empirical research into audiencing in such contexts includes Nina J. Morris, 'Night Walking: Darkness and Sensory Perception in a Night-time Landscape Installation', *Cultural*

When the central pleasure garden became more crowded, usually in the middle of the day, the etiquette and atmosphere leant towards that of an art gallery: people moved slowly, avoided or overtook each other, formed brief informal queues, conversed quietly. Outside these times, especially in the early evening, people could move more freely – though often this meant more slowly and deliberately – or settle on a bench and listen undisturbed while the light faded. The spacious lawns outside the central garden afforded space for more animated conversation, playful behaviour, and a chance to sit, picnic, lie down, or observe others. Despite numerous individual differences, these shifts in the tempo and style of audience behaviours, and the patterns of their movement through the space, were remarkably consistent, hinting at emergent, collective practices of audiencing. The installation could divide family or friendship groups, temporarily pulling them in different directions, yet it also provoked conversations between strangers. These shifting socialities produced different kinds of musical experience, registering the layering of, and tensions between and within, different cultures of audiencing:<sup>47</sup> some people welcomed the presence of other

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*Cultural Geographies*, 18 (2011), 315–42; Stirling, ‘Sound Art/Street Life’; and Saskia Warren, ‘Audiencing James Turrell’s Skyspace: Encounters between Art and Audience at Yorkshire Sculpture Park’, *Cultural Geographies*, 20 (2013), 83–102. For auto-ethnographic accounts, see Harriet Hawkins, “‘The Argument of the Eye’? The Cultural Geographies of Installation Art’, *Cultural Geographies*, 17 (2010), 321–40; Harriet Hawkins and Elizabeth R. Straughan, ‘Nano-art, Dynamic Matter and the Sight/Sound of Touch’, *Geoforum*, 51 (2014), 130–39. For background on site-specific art (sonic and otherwise), see Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate, 2005); Nicolas De Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry, *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004); Gascia Ouzounian, ‘Sound Installation Art: From Spatial Poetics to Politics, Aesthetics to Ethics’, *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 73–89; John E. Thornes, ‘A Rough Guide to Environmental Art’, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 33 (2008), 391–411.

<sup>47</sup> See Stirling, ‘Sound Art/Street Life’.

audience members, others described how their contemplation was disturbed by their fellow listeners. Various modes of experience – solitary, sociable, introspective, conversational, disturbed and so on – shifted in and out of focus, signalling different distributions of subjectivity across self, other and crowd, as well as ‘fluid and nested zones of publicness and privacy’.<sup>48</sup> As a collective, the *Pleasure Garden* audience was, to paraphrase Stokes, neither unitary nor atomized, but civilly, temporarily and unevenly knotted together.<sup>49</sup>

The varied socialities of the garden extended beyond humans to the garden at large, resulting in ‘partial affinities’, ‘interspecies intimacies and subtle propositions’ between organisms.<sup>50</sup> By changing the pace and scope of movement, the music altered audience engagements with the plants in the garden. People peered into neglected corners of the planting or stood for long periods facing the tall trees on the upper lawn. Some described ‘almost...stopping at every plant’ or touching and smelling them. One person mentioned hearing ‘the bells, they chime and then it drops away and then you’re just left watching the stillness of the plant...listening to the tail of the bell.’ Others, by contrast, found the music shifted their attention to distant parts of the garden. As one put it, ‘you’re more lifted up’ because ‘the sounds are coming more from...the trees’. The installation likewise subtly shifted audiences’ physical, visual and sonic relations with the Vaucluse birdlife, especially larger, vocal birds with distinctive calls, such as laughing kookaburra, Australian magpies and pied currawongs. People not only listened more carefully, they also looked at and ventured into less-frequented parts of the garden, encountering birds in different ways. Currawongs, large crow-like

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.; also Born, ‘Introduction’; Born, ‘Imagining New Musical Democracies’; Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*.

<sup>49</sup> Stokes, ‘The Citizen in the Crowd’.

<sup>50</sup> See, respectively, Vinciane Despret, ‘Responding Bodies and Partial Affinities in Human–Animal Worlds’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 30 (2013), 51–76; and Hustak and Myers, ‘Involutionary Momentum’, 106; also Russell Hitchings, ‘People, Plants and Performance: On Actor Network Theory and the Material Pleasures of the Private Garden’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4 (2003), 99–114; Emma R. Power, ‘Human–Nature Relations in Suburban Gardens’, *Australian Geographer*, 36 (2005), 39–53.

birds, were particularly conspicuous, not only for their loud calls, but also because – as tree-dwelling birds, relatively accustomed to humans – they occupied the higher reaches of the garden, flying between trees and navigating branches to look for food, as we looked on from below. Where the plant life of Vacluse has been actively cultivated, currawongs thrive there as an indirect result of human action: birds that were, historically, visitors to the Sydney region, have taken advantage of urban habitats and food supplies to become permanent residents, causing declines in smaller bird species.<sup>51</sup> Vacluse visitors encountered certain birds and plants (and not others), because of these histories of human-garden-animal interaction.

Within these longer, mutually significant environmental histories, experiences of *Pleasure Garden* were textured moment-to-moment by species' co-presence, attention and mutual apprehension, through distinct sensoria,<sup>52</sup> of one another and of a shared environment. Co-listening was, however, far from assured. Despite the potential double meaning in the project's occasional subtitle ('A Listening Garden'), *Pleasure Garden* was figured by artists and audience as a space for human listening, not a garden which itself listened. Accordingly, there was very little speculation about the experiences of other organisms – with one exception: a person who described 'appreciate[ing the] ...non-humanness' of animals, insects and birds and the privilege of witnessing 'a different way of being in the world, I guess, they experience the world differently.' Rather than listening *with* the garden, *Pleasure Garden's* audience members listened *in* the garden, attentive to

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<sup>51</sup> See Harry F. Recher, 'A Not So Natural History: The Vertebrate Fauna of Sydney', *The Natural History of Sydney*, ed. Daniel Lunney, Pat Hutchings, and Dieter Hochuli (Mosman, NSW: Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, 2009), 125–42 (p. 132); Thom van Dooren, 'Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds: An Ethical Taxonomy of Killing for Conservation', *Conservation and Society*, 9 (2011), 286–298 (p. 293, 296); and, for an account of the increasing presence of pied currawongs in Vacluse in the 1940s, M. S. R. Sharland, 'A Naturalist's Notebook', *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 August 1940), 9, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/27951448>.

<sup>52</sup> See Eva Hayward, 'FINGERYEYES: Impressions of Cup Corals', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25 (2010), 577–99.

other species, their experiences shaped by practices that highlighted ‘the affinities, ruptures, enmeshments, and repulsions among organisms constantly inventing new ways to live with and alongside one another’.<sup>53</sup> Birds and humans watched and listened to each other, and got in and out of one another’s way; plants afforded multi-sensory experiences for visitors, with often hidden reciprocal effects for the plants themselves. These encounters were at once relatively conventionalized, sharing much with gardens elsewhere, and necessarily improvisational, responsive to specific details of each encounter that are hard to capture (and easy to romanticize) in writing: a swerve of a flightline; a moment of surprise; a shared glance; foliage crushed underfoot, carefully avoided, or caressed. In such settings, signals usually understood as functional – territorial bird calls, plant scents that attract pollinators – can also go wayward. Many of the natural sounds, smells, textures and sights of Vaucluse offered potent opportunities for such (mis)communication between nonhumans and humans. (And human practices of, for example, breeding scented plants, muddy the water of intentionality, confusing who communicates what to whom.) Nor should we discount the possibility that the installation – its sounds and infrastructure, and the audience behaviours it engendered – were not also experienced by nonhumans as shifts in the material and affective contours of their environment (even if these were of little interest to audience members). Discussing plant-insect signalling in chemical ecology, Hustak and Myers argue that ‘An involutory reading would require us to begin with the assertion that *we don’t yet know what a signal is or what it can do*, let alone what constitutes cross-species communication’.<sup>54</sup> Such uncertainty profoundly unsettles our anthropocentric understanding of cultural experience, even as it generatively enriched audience responses to *Pleasure Garden*.

## Immersion and Transience

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<sup>53</sup> Hustak and Myers, ‘Involuntary Momentum’, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Hustak and Myers, ‘Involuntary Momentum’, 104.



Walking in and with *Pleasure Garden's* audiences heightened my appreciation of the ways in which they were guided by the sonic-spatial features of the installation, their pre-existing and emergent social relations, and the multi-species, multi-sensory ecology of the garden itself. When I wanted to interview people, my preferred spot was on a bench underneath a lone pine tree in the middle of the open lawn that overlooked the central garden. I could watch unobtrusively as people moved around, observing how they used the space and weighing up when to go over and ask for a short interview. I was keen to talk to careful listeners, but also tried to catch more fleeting visitors. It was a hard balance to strike: before interviewing someone, I wanted to make sure they had been there long enough to have experienced the installation, but wait too long and they might leave. Nor did I want to disturb people by following them through the narrow paths of the central garden, presenting them with consent forms and questions, intruding on what was intended to be a contemplative and relaxing experience. Although reassured by Cooley and Barz's description of fieldwork as 'chasing the shadows' of ephemeral musical and social phenomena, and by their assertion that 'No musical genre, tradition, or related activity is off limits for contemporary ethnomusicologists',<sup>55</sup> I knew that my interactions with *Pleasure Garden* audiences would push these characterisations quite far. Most visitors would have a one-off encounter, both with me and with the installation. The brevity of these interactions put a host of limitations on the tenets of long-term immersion, trust-building, and gradual enculturation so valued in much fieldwork. And although more time and resources might have bought me more days or weeks in the garden, this would have meant more interviewees, but no deeper relationship with any individual. Talking with audience members made it clear, however, that their experiences often had a depth or intensity that belied their brevity. One described being 'totally immersed in it', many expressed delight with the installation, some found it 'magical' or alluded to rich and distinctive experiences, and others simply stayed and listened intently for some

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<sup>55</sup> Timothy J. Cooley and Gregory F. Barz, 'Casting Shadows in the Field: Introduction', *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–24 (p. 3, 15).

time. So my concerns gave way to the idea that what I will call *transient immersion* was a key feature of *Pleasure Garden*, both for listeners and for me as ethnographer. Audience members clearly valued the chance to be briefly absorbed in this unusual artwork. And, given that relatively ephemeral social formations and transient listening practices are characteristic of the audiences for much public art, accepting both the limitations and possibilities of doing fieldwork in such settings is a necessity in opening this form of contemporary musical experience to scholarly inquiry. Finally, drawing attention to the limits of ‘immersion’ as ethnography’s guiding methodological principle reveals, as the following sections show, complexities in the production of ethnographic knowledge and in the relationships between researcher and researched.<sup>56</sup>

## The City and the Garden

On my first day, I decided to introduce myself to the Sydney Festival volunteers patrolling the garden, so they would understand what I was doing. One turned out to be a market researcher, there, like me, to talk to visitors to the installation. We chatted for a while and I decided to avoid speaking to the same people as her and so avoid imposing too much on their time. We were asking different questions and had different interview styles, but her presence, and my conversations with listeners, added to my methodological anxieties. Although I introduced myself as an academic (and had an identity badge), several audience members assumed or implied that I too was conducting market research, asking if their comments would affect whether the installation happened again next year or offering suggestions as if I would feed these back to the creative team in order to ‘improve’ the installation. This blurring between academic and market research raises important questions,<sup>57</sup> not

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<sup>56</sup> After Helmreich, ‘An Anthropologist Underwater’, 630–33.

<sup>57</sup> See Janelle Reinelt, ‘What UK Spectators Know: Understanding How We Come to Value Theatre’, *Theatre Journal*, 66 (2014), 337–61 (p. 338).

only about how to do ethnography among audiences ‘sociologized’ in qualitative methods,<sup>58</sup> but about what happens when people expect their experiences to be incorporated within economies of attention and consumption. In prohibiting ‘immersive’ ethnography, such methodological difficulties reveal the cultural logics shaping field interactions. Unsure how to respond, I clarified my agenda and made my interviews even more open and conversational, and hopefully more attentive to the diversity of listeners’ experiences – unintentionally echoing Jan and Genevieve’s anti-reductionist stance.

It matters that *Pleasure Garden* was launched in Sydney, installed not only in a garden, but in an affluent part of a large, global city. Because *Pleasure Garden* was free to attend, its location in the exclusive Vaucluse suburb arguably shaped experiences of the installation – often bringing a sense of a touristic excursion to an unusual place – rather than strongly limiting who was able to attend (again, in the absence of demographic information, this is hard to assess, but attendance clearly extended well beyond local, affluent Vaucluse residents). Because cities are key sites for public sound art due to their greater density of potential visitors, high profile arts scenes, institutional support, infrastructure, and so on, the Sydney location also situated *Pleasure Garden* within a particular cultural economy. In particular, the use of market research to evaluate *Pleasure Garden* points to its participation in what Luker, writing about Argentinian tango, calls ‘the age of expediency—where music and the arts are called upon and often compelled to address social, political, and economic problems that were previously located, by theorists and practitioners alike, outside the cultural domain.’<sup>59</sup> As one of many events in the Sydney Festival, *Pleasure Garden* played a small part in the leveraging of the city’s art scene for economic ends.<sup>60</sup> Because *Pleasure*

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<sup>58</sup> Pitts, ‘What Makes an Audience?’, 259; after Antoine Hennion, ‘Music Lovers: Taste as Performance’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18/5 (2001), 1–22.

<sup>59</sup> Luker, *The Tango Machine*, 1; after Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*.

<sup>60</sup> The Sydney Festival itself has been valued (although it is not obvious what this means) at 57 million AUD; see Jo Banks, Luke H. Hedge, Caroline Hoisington, Elizabeth M. Strain, Peter D. Steinberg, and

*Garden* was free (unlike other events in the festival), the attendant economic benefits were second order, most obviously through some audience members' paid entry to Vacluse House and café, and their use of public transport. Nonetheless, cultural expediency and the marketization of musical experience stand in tension with the quasi-autonomy of *Pleasure Garden*, a topic I return to below. Yúdice's assertion that 'culture is no longer experienced, valued, or understood as transcendent' pushes the point too far.<sup>61</sup> Rather, multiple – sometimes competing, sometimes synergistic frameworks – condition our experiences. *Pleasure Garden* audiences recognized the potential expediency of their comments (implications for improvement or recommissioning), while also evaluating the installation in aesthetic or subjective terms.

The location of *Pleasure Garden* in Sydney also registered more directly in audience members' reflections. Many contrasted their experiences in the garden with the hectic buzz of the city experienced minutes or hours earlier.

You get on a bus in traffic, you get off here and walk in, you're hyper.... I'm a real tree-hugger basically, a nature lover.... [I]t's the effect it has on me, ...seeing nature, being away from the built environment, ...I feel better and that's all it is. ...just [a] feeling of relief, because the city stress...there's an intensity to it. That intensity is gone here, and the contrast is welcome.

[S]ometimes I think the peacefulness of a garden isn't quite enough or it can be a hard thing to settle into if you've come out of something very busy and so having

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Emma L. Johnston, 'Sydney Harbour: Beautiful, Diverse, Valuable and Pressured', *Regional Studies in Marine Science*, 8 (2016), 353–61; also <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/sydney-festival-celebrates-its-40th-anniversary--should-the-party-continue-20151223-gltsik.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 12.

the music or the different noises to listen to, it just...gives you one extra thing to do to sort of settle you down.

I think [it's] yeah just peaceful and I'm just trying to let it wash through me....

It's been a very stressful time at work..., so this'd be great, if you could just transport here, teleport here, this would be nice.... But yeah it's nice and it's not too busy.

Tourism is killing a lot of contemplation and reflection ...[in] public space[s]....  
[Y]ou can still reflect and contemplate here without being inundated with hordes.

Such contemplative framings of *Pleasure Garden* offer a provocation to understand contemplation through its relationship with distracted capitalist perception.<sup>62</sup> Audiences welcomed the peacefulness of *Pleasure Garden* in part because it offered respite from a particular imagined version of the city, iconic, for Taussig, of 'the shock-rhythm of modernity', provoking a 'flitting and barely conscious peripheral-vision perception'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, their experiences of immersion were predicated on the apparently 'non-immersive' nature of much everyday experience. Although this particular dimension of audience experiences was not anticipated by the *Pleasure Garden* team, the city-garden juxtaposition does fit with Genevieve's broader idea of the installation as an aesthetic 'alternative' to modernity. The choice of Vacluse House, a once-rural historic estate surrounded by scenic grounds and situated in an exclusive suburb, was important in staging this relationship. And as audience comments show, visiting *Pleasure Garden* was not just about escaping from the city into the garden, but other related movements: from work to leisure, from everyday to heightened experience, and from the tourist horde to solitary or sociable introspection. No doubt my

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<sup>62</sup> After Taussig, 'Tactility and Distraction'.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 149.

methodological anxieties, and the confusion over whether I was conducting market research, speak to these shifts: I felt and looked like an intruder, a market researcher from the city who had infiltrated the garden. The contrast between the city and the garden also relied on a sense of the city and garden as making divergent claims on human agency. The city is often imagined as an unpredictable and out-of-control place, continually redirecting our perceptions through advertising, channelling our movements with crowd and traffic control. Audience members chose the tranquillity of the garden in part because they had no choice but to experience the fragmentary intensity of the city.

### The Work of Art in the Age of Interactivity<sup>64</sup>

*Pleasure Garden*'s interactivity represents a particularly ambivalent element in the interplay between contemplation and distraction. Conceived by Genevieve in terms of 'agency' and 'discovery', the interactivity was intended to crystallize or augment audience members' contemplative engagements with the installation by responding to their presence (cameras linked to motion sensor software triggered pre-recorded tracks in response to their movement<sup>65</sup>). Yet, by adapting urban surveillance technology to the garden setting, the interactive system borrowed from the city and redeployed its techno-social resources with surprising results. Although no audience members expressed any concern to me about these 'surveillance cameras' (as I overheard one Sydney Festival volunteer describe them to some interested audience members), their presence nonetheless helped to reinstall a culture of distraction in *Pleasure Garden* (Figure 5).

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<sup>64</sup> My play on the title of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', is meant to signal the question of whether a culture of interactivity, like mechanical reproduction, may be substantially reconfiguring our relationship with music and art more generally. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: The Bodley Head, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> See Browning, 'Remaking Classical Music'; Browning, 'Meeting the Garden Halfway'.

During interviews, many people asked me how the installation, especially the interactive system, worked. I was happy to explain, yet aware that too much detail would undo the sense of discovery that Genevieve intended. So I tried to direct people's attention in ways that invited exploration, rather than making it redundant. My ethnographer-tour guide role signalled another strange methodological position: not only did I know quite a lot about the installation where the audience often knew little, my familiarity with *Pleasure Garden's* creators and with the experiences of previous audience members made me a relative insider to wider cultural practices surrounding this artwork's creation and reception. This reversal of the standard 'immersive' ethnographic model (researcher learns about a cultural setting from insiders) nonetheless meant that audience members were, implicitly, conveying a great deal about the culture of audiencing surrounding the installation: widespread lack of expertise; the pleasures of transient immersion and learning about an unusual artwork; and fascination with interactivity. I had already seen people searching for and looking at cameras and speakers (hidden in bird boxes and upturned plant pots;<sup>66</sup> see Figure 5) and soon noticed how the speakers on the perimeter fence and larger trees (among the most visible and acoustically distinct) attracted the most attentive listeners, pulling them in to stand and listen up close (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

It makes me want to follow the sound, you know like 'Where is it coming from?'

Ok it's being triggered by something, not necessarily to get to the actual speaker, but just to follow it through the garden.

Actually one thing that's really interesting is it's made me walk very slowly through the gardens, *very* slowly. ...Because I've known that there are things there I might be interacting with, I've almost been stopping at every plant.

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<sup>66</sup> For background, see Browning, 'Remaking Classical Music'.

Others were unsure how the interactivity worked. Some people waved their hands in front of cameras and speakers, trying to test the interactivity. One person searched for pressure sensors by pressing down with their feet on the lawn directly in front of a speaker. This despite the fact that the *Pleasure Garden* team had gone to considerable lengths to limit the visual impact of the installation by burying cables, choosing naturalistic bird boxes and upturned plant pots as housing for speakers and cameras, and covering plastic and foam fixings with palm fronds.<sup>67</sup> This attempted naturalisation of the infrastructure in fact had multiple effects: some audience members were largely unaware of the hidden technology, others found its ambiguity distracting or intriguing. Some described a tension or progression between an intellectual or ‘left brain’ impulse to ‘figure out’ the technological system versus an emotional or experiential mode that was more immersive. Such comments suggest moments of fragmentary subjectivity, patterns of attention that oscillated between contemplation and distraction, or between artwork and technological system.

Audience members’ widespread interest in, uncertainty over and occasional apparent physical compulsion to test the interactivity was all the more striking, because much of what they experienced and reported was imagined, not part of the interactive system at all. This strange, productively miscommunicative, capacity of *Pleasure Garden* gathered impetus from its sonic features and discursive mediation, wider expectations about interactivity in contemporary culture, and local conceptions of the relationship between this artwork and its audiences. Because the sound design of the installation included many mobile and varied elements, listeners could easily feel that sounds were moving and changing in response to their presence: again *Pleasure Garden*’s ‘not pinpointable’ aesthetic provoked uncertain and imaginative engagements. In the less active pieces, the substantial silences allowed listeners to imagine that a sound had started or stopped because of them. Of the 14 discrete pieces in *Pleasure Garden*’s hour-long cycle, only the four tracks comprising recordings of Genevieve’s performances of van Eyck recorder solos (roughly a quarter of the whole cycle), incorporated any interactivity, although visitors were unaware of any such

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<sup>67</sup> For details, see Browning, ‘Meeting the Garden Halfway’.



structure. Of the sounds triggered by the interactive system as accompaniment to the van Eyck solos, some, such as the buzzing of cicadas or the flapping of birds' wings, were relatively subtle and could easily be taken to be part of the garden soundscape (although others, such as bell sounds, were relatively loud and clearly pre-recorded). The interactivity was only triggered by movement in the central area of the garden, not on the lawns, so if the garden was less busy, interactive sounds were relatively intermittent. This relative subtlety and scarcity of interactive sounds combined with the suggestive aesthetic of the wider sound design to encourage experiences of imagined interactivity.

Interactivity also featured prominently in the discourse surrounding the installation, including in reviews and newspaper coverage, the signs at the entrance to the garden, and the Sydney Festival brochure.<sup>68</sup> This no doubt primed audience members' expectations:

Probably just knowing at some level that [it was interactive], and...maybe previous experience of sound installation pieces.... made me attend very specifically to the relationship between movement and sound.

But listeners and the installation alike also channelled what Barney et al. call the 'participatory condition', in which the 'promise and expectation' of being involved in the co-constitution of social, political and cultural life – including art – has become 'both environmental...and normative' in the contemporary West.<sup>69</sup> As one mode of participatory culture, digitally-mediated interactivity not only characterizes much sound art and public art, but also everyday technologies, often

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<sup>68</sup> See <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/sydney/entertainment/article/garden-earthly-delights>;  
<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/sydney-festival-2016-review-genevieve-lacey-reveals-sounds-of-pleasure-garden-20160111-gm34u2.html>;  
[https://issuu.com/sydneyfestival/docs/sydney\\_festival\\_2016\\_program](https://issuu.com/sydneyfestival/docs/sydney_festival_2016_program), n.a. 2015: 33.

<sup>69</sup> Barney et al., 'The Participatory Condition', viii, vii.

associated with urban life, such as automated doors and hands-free devices, the user interfaces associated with smartphones and computers, as well as retail, public information and transport systems, to name only a few. Arguably, this wider participatory culture, combined with the local discourse of interactivity, the semi-naturalized visible physical infrastructure of the installation and the non-interactive elements in its sound design had a more powerful role in rendering audience experiences ‘interactive’ than the interactivity technically at work in the *Pleasure Garden* system.

Scholarship on participation and participatory art is deeply ambivalent, as a few examples show. Barney et al. note that participation can be allied with democracy and neoliberalism alike, and deployed in divergent ways, from surveillance systems and social media to open source software development and politicized art practices.<sup>70</sup> Alston considers the sense of risk, agency and responsibility afforded to audiences for immersive theatre as demanding a form of ‘entrepreneurial participation’, indebted to neoliberalism.<sup>71</sup> Scott et al. describe audience shyness and resistance around interactive exhibitions that ‘presume a level of technological and performative competence’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Sedgman discusses how some audience members can feel excluded from immersive theatre if they lack certain kinds of knowledge, cultural capital or motility.<sup>73</sup> Born recognizes the preoccupation with ‘participation, interactivity, collaboration or community’ among sound artists and others, and highlights the art form’s potential for forging novel experiences and social relations, while also arguing that entrenched social differences and individuated listening

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<sup>70</sup> Barney et al., ‘The Participatory Condition’.

<sup>71</sup> Adam Alston, ‘Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, Agency and Responsibility in Immersive Theatre’, *Performance Research*, 18 (2013), 128–38.

<sup>72</sup> Susie Scott, Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Vuokko Härmä and Karl Broome, ‘Goffman in the Gallery: Interactive Art and Visitor Shyness’, *Symbolic Interaction*, 36 (2013), 417–38 (p. 417).

<sup>73</sup> Kirsty Sedgman, ‘Ladies and Gentlemen Follow Me, Please Put on Your Beards: Risk, Rules, and Audience Reception in National Theatre Wales’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 27 (2017), 158–176 (p. 175).

practices (most obviously via headphones) can nonetheless produce participation without affiliation.<sup>74</sup> Where the debate is so fraught, singular interpretations become untenable.

<i>Imagine a listener entranced by music that seems to come from nowhere, magically alive to their presence or animated by unknown forces.</i>	<i>Imagine a listener distracted and confused by a technological system, which they're aware of, yet can't figure out.</i>	<i>Imagine a listener as a citizen-in-training, experiencing motion capture cameras aesthetically, learning to be tracked.</i>
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[A]s soon as I sat down...the less melodic kind of loop that was playing kind of stopped and this much more melodic thing started, so that was really beautiful and mesmerising.

And what is that interactivity? I know that there is supposedly some interaction and I tried to make it do something, but I couldn't.

I'd rather ignore that [the interactivity] and sort of see it as...a sound that's...kind of created from out of nowhere.... Sort of makes it a bit more fun to imagine that there's just little creatures playing in the trees, you know, playing a panpipe or something.

<i>Imagine a listener empowered by the possibilities of playing an intangible instrument with their</i>	<i>Imagine a listener who must take the initiative in order to get the most out of an</i>	<i>Imagine a listener fatigued with interactivity, desiring</i>
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<sup>74</sup> Born, 'Introduction', 18, 19, 38; also Born, 'Listening, Mediation, Event', 86–7; related concerns preoccupy LaBelle, *Background Noise*, 257–63, 287.

*body. Everyone can join in. Agency is assured, the experience unique for every visitor.*      *interactive artwork centred, narcissistically, on their individual experience.*      *escape and spectatorship rather than the obligation to join in.*

I'm the type of person that likes to figure things out, ...when you have to figure it out you actually engage with it more because...you have to work a little bit to get it, versus its just passively being given to you.

I thought if there weren't other people around then I'd have to walk around and make it do its thing, but if there are other people walking then I can just listen.

The analogue ambivalence over participation within both academic thought and audience responses is surely suggestive. First, it highlights the necessity of crediting interpretative and experiential multiplicity, rather than singularity. Talking to *Pleasure Garden's* audiences, it is clear that the interactivity had multiple effects: it engaged, distracted, afforded agency, and interpellated listeners as entrepreneurial and surveilled. These effects were extremely uneven and the ephemeral nature of my fieldwork made it hard to explore their relationship with individual biographies and dispositions. While there is a substantial literature on audience experiences of participatory art, especially theatre,<sup>75</sup> further empirical work is needed to ground scholarly theorisations of technologically mediated interactivity on the complexities of lived experience. Second, this joint ambivalence points to uncertainty about the nature and limits of participation. Just as audience members' imagined much of the interactivity, so, for Genevieve, it was important that:

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<sup>75</sup> For a recent discussion of key issues and literature, see Sedgman, 'Ladies and Gentlemen Follow Me'; also Reason, '*Participations on Participation*'.

somehow people feel like they're walking into something that's live and that's breathing around them. ....the fact that in pure technical terms that element [the interactivity] is small doesn't at all to me matter, what matters is the permission that that gives people and the sense that I think it really elicits...a different experience and a different way of listening.

By framing interactivity as imaginative, rather than technological, Genevieve figures all listening, regardless of its technological mediation, as participatory, unsettling conventional hierarchies between artist, artwork and audience: 'I always have a really strong sense as a player that listeners have much more power and agency than they ever realise.' Jan, by contrast, had reservations about the interactivity, concerned that it might distract from the carefully crafted textures of the compositions (an attitude in keeping with his quasi-autonomist stance) and seem tokenistic – as he put it, a way of saying, 'look, we are modern'.<sup>76</sup> The relatively limited interactivity in the finished installation partially assuaged these worries, but nonetheless they find some resonance in audience members' distracted responses to the interactivity. Finally, where Genevieve figured the interactivity in terms of agency, audience members' comments and practical tests of the interactivity point also to a concern with their own intelligibility: they wanted not simply to act upon the installation, but to be recognized by it. To experience *Pleasure Garden* was to be (at least imaginatively) detected by the interactive system, thus changing how it sounded, and so entering into an ongoing chain of registration by and re-experiencing of the installation. Whether such sensing constitutes a kind of machinic 'experience' is an open question, but the co-receptivity between human audience and technological infrastructure was a powerful factor in experiences of *Pleasure Garden*. Participation became a more-than-human undertaking, unsettling expectations of who or what could join in or be recognized. Where audience engagements with plants and animals were ambiguously positioned at the boundary of their experience of the installation, their co-

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<sup>76</sup> See also Browning, 'Remaking Classical Music'.

receptive relationship with the technological system (at least for those aware of the interactivity) was more decisive, involving both in ‘a reciprocal capture from which neither... can be disentangled’.<sup>77</sup> Paradoxically then, although the installation’s technical interactivity was – for *Pleasure Garden*’s creators and listeners alike – oddly redundant and at worst distracting, a wider sense of reception as both participatory and more-than-human prompted forms of audiencing that could not help but be inventive.

## Discrepant Listenings

Through these inventive engagements, the meanings and experiences associated with *Pleasure Garden* proliferated beyond those imagined by its creators. Two types of reaction deserve further discussion here: negative responses to the installation and responses that made reference to Aboriginal music and Vacluse’s colonial history. We might see these as discrepant listenings, at variance with the creators’ hopes and intentions. Negative experiences were not, of course, desired by the creative team, and readings in terms of aboriginality were not actively cultivated (although nor were they discouraged). As such, they raise further important questions of method and meaning that reach beyond this particular case.

Negative reactions to *Pleasure Garden* were a sharp, if rare, contrast with the prevailing positive view. I interviewed only three people, and spoke to three others off the record, who did not enjoy the installation.

I find the music irritating and it works against...the peaceful atmosphere. ....Now I know you’ll say that there are plenty of – in nature – irritating sounds, like...cicadas and magpies..., but I can cope with them. But then to have...an

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<sup>77</sup> Hustak and Myers, ‘Involutionary Momentum’, 97; after Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

added unnatural noise I find quite irritating and...it disturbs that...tranquil feeling I had [from the garden].

[W]e've come here for a tranquil experience and the garden gives us that.... [but] I find the...noises disturbing, they interfere with that feeling, they're a bit too piercing for me and...the pitch is too high for my hearing. I prefer a more mellow sound, and I also think there's a lack of tune to it. At first I thought it was an attempt to mimic birds or aboriginal er noises and then I found that it didn't do any of those it just, to me they're just noises, rather than musical tunes. I would have preferred closer to bird sounds, in a garden where there's a lot of natural beauty here.

Typically, these people had come only for the garden (not the installation) and were repeat visitors, often elderly. Although uncommon, these negative views highlight several further methodological issues. Audience members who did not like the installation were less willing to participate in the research,<sup>78</sup> a few commenting that they would not be suitable because they did not especially enjoy the experience. Some measured themselves against an imagined normative or expert listener.<sup>79</sup> one person commented that they should not participate due to a hearing problem; several others said they felt unable to comment because they had no musical training. It was only by encouraging people to express their feelings freely, partly by explaining this problem of self-selection, that I persuaded a few people to register negative opinions. Methodology aside, it is

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<sup>78</sup> For detailed discussion of issues of confirmation bias, self-selection, and audience members' varied levels of cultural confidence, see Kirsty Sedgman, *Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2016), especially Chapter Four, and Johanson and Glow, 'The Virtuous Circle'.

<sup>79</sup> Sedgman, 'Audience Experience in an Anti-Expert Age', 316.

striking to note that the same music was experienced in such divergent ways by different listeners: it enhanced the tranquillity for some and disturbed it for others; some heard many real and imitated bird sounds in the installation, while others lamented the lack of them.

The disturbed listener, quoted above, who thought ‘at first’ that *Pleasure Garden* might ‘mimic...aboriginal er noises’ was one of several. One person commented that: ‘To me, at first I got the idea it was like an aboriginal “Aaah”...’, shifting from speech into a high-pitched sung note. These crude characterisations – one turning to the category of ‘noise’, the other attempting to imitate aboriginal song – give voice to racialized understandings of musical alterity. But their shared hesitancy and use of the qualification ‘at first’ also suggest an uncertainty or second-guessing of their own interpretation, as if half-aware of their lack of cultural understanding. Others were more articulate. One enjoyed the installation, but was prompted to reflect on the lack of mention of Aboriginal history in Vacluse House itself.<sup>80</sup> Another thought that, ‘at one point it almost sounded like *gamelan*, ...Indonesian music, and I know that there’s a kind of colonial tie to...the Netherlands, ...maybe I was erm projecting, but it sounded that way.’ This hesitancy over ‘projecting’ suggests that Genevieve’s desire to give audiences ‘permission’ to experience the installation in varied ways matches a genuine uncertainty among some listeners about the kinds of meaning that could be drawn from *Pleasure Garden*.<sup>81</sup> Much more self-assured in their interpretation, another listener enthusiastically described the installation as a scathing critique of colonialism: they saw the use of van Eyck as a reference to colonial history, seeing ‘Vacluse House as a sort of centre of imperialism’ and the installation as ‘mapping the history...of...Western aggression’. They contrasted this violence with the luxury of the garden setting, commenting that

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<sup>80</sup> Aboriginal culture and collaboration with Aboriginal communities are increasingly emphasized in the programmes of Sydney Living Museum properties, including Vacluse House. See <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/ancient-traditions-new-insights>; <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/events/whale-festival-2017>.

<sup>81</sup> Sedgman, ‘Audience Experience in an Anti-Expert Age’, 316–7.



‘at the very...richest moment in humanity’s history and in one of the richest cities, with the gluttonous appetite of the Sydney Festival audience’ it was right that *Pleasure Garden* was a free event; and they praised the subtlety of the installation in contrast to the more bombastic character of some Sydney events. Such responses were all the more striking because of their scarcity. Aboriginal culture has an ambiguous status in *Pleasure Garden*: it was not a prominent concern for the creative team, although Genevieve cares strongly about issues of Aboriginal rights and they have an important place in some of her other musical collaborations.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, these audience responses demonstrate music’s ‘hyper-connotative...propensities’<sup>83</sup> and the importance of distinctive national concerns about land and culture that pervade much Australian sound art,<sup>84</sup> regardless of artists’ intentions.

Issues of Aboriginal representation came to the fore in my conversation with one woman visiting *Pleasure Garden* with her family, the only audience member I interviewed who identified themselves as Australian Aboriginal.<sup>85</sup> Asked about her experience of the installation, she replied: ‘You know what I would say? To me it would be appropriate if you had something about...the didgeridoo, and people talking in language, aboriginal people talking in language.... Not to go political about the traditional owners and all the rest of it, but it’s conducive to country to do this.’ She also found the installation ‘beautiful’, commenting: ‘I suppose you could play this in...any place in the bush and it would be conducive...to make you think and listen.’ On one level, these

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<sup>82</sup> See also Browning, ‘Remaking Classical Music’; Browning, ‘Meeting the Garden Halfway’.

<sup>83</sup> Georgina Born, ‘Music and the Materialization of Identities’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 16/4 (2011), 376–88 (p. 384).

<sup>84</sup> See Linda Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Postmodern Sensibilities in Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> As noted above, the fact that this woman’s self-identification as Aboriginal was felt to be somehow necessary, while no audience members self-identified as White Australian, suggests that whiteness was an important part of the unmarked, yet dominant, subject position occupied by most *Pleasure Garden* audience members.

comments reaffirm that, unsurprisingly, even a quasi-autonomist project can provoke socio-political interpretation. But I'm intrigued by that 'Not to go political'. It can be taken many ways: as a softening qualifier when the speaker intends precisely to speak of politics; as a suggestion that political language is tainted or ineffective when it comes to talking about 'traditional ownership' in contemporary Australia; as an acknowledgement of the ways in which indigenous viewpoints (especially criticism and protest) have historically been stigmatised and silenced by colonial institutions, including the academy; as an affirmation that this issue transcends mere politics.<sup>86</sup> However we take it, the gesture of simultaneously invoking politics and forestalling its operation shares something with Jan's comments (discussed above) about politics as 'limiting'. The two mirror each other, not only in their shared concern for the rights of marginalised groups (aboriginal people and migrants), but also in their nesting of the political inside the autonomous, or vice versa. Jan's political comment (about migrants) was subsumed by his statement about taking the music on its own terms. This woman's comment about autonomy (not to go political) was contained in a statement about Aboriginal representation. By highlighting this ambiguity, my intention is not to blunt the critical edge of her comment, but to note how it situates itself *alongside* rather than *within* politics, perhaps resisting the terms of, or at least dramatizing its own imbrication in, wider debate.<sup>87</sup> Certainly *Pleasure Garden* is caught up in a culture of expediency – concerning for example the use of culture in Aboriginal representation or the role of the Sydney Festival in

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<sup>86</sup> Povinelli's work on 'the politics of conversational frames of uncertainty and hedges' among Belyuen Australian Aboriginal women provides a valuable comparison here. See Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "'Might Be Something": The Language of Indeterminacy in Australian Aboriginal Land Use', *Man*, 28 (1993), 679–704 (p. 696). On complaint as 'sick speech', see Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), especially 39 and 203. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the relevance of Ahmed's work here.

<sup>87</sup> Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching Feeling*, 67–92; Sedgwick and Goldberg, *The Weather in Proust*, 55–7; see also Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

bolstering the city's economy – but like the quasi-autonomist stance of *Pleasure Garden's* creators, this woman's response perhaps registers a reluctance regarding the instrumentalisation of culture for political or other ends.

Drawing on Berlant's notion of the 'juxtapolitical' – used to describe forms of sentimentality, proximate to the political, that aspire towards justice, yet refuse or seek relief from politics as usual – Dueck considers whether such refusals might also resist the ongoing, colonial 'determination to draw aboriginal people into deeper and deeper engagement with the nation-state'.<sup>88</sup> They perhaps also enact a form of self-policing, which internalises the actual policing of marginalised people for whom (to paraphrase Sara Ahmed) to describe a problem is to become a problem.<sup>89</sup> However it is figured, the desire 'not to go political' certainly makes sense given the troubled, complex relationship between Aboriginal culture and Australian national politics. As well as gesturing to a more-than-political debate, the woman's suggestion that the inclusion of Aboriginal music and language might be 'conducive to country' also invokes a more-than-human frame of reference: at stake here is not simply the representation of Aboriginal people, but the cosmological implications of the word 'country' within Australian Aboriginal English, which Rose glosses as 'the matrix of all the living beings and all the life-systems that interactively share that time and place'.<sup>90</sup> The gesture is thoroughly ambivalent, however: as well as praising the beauty of the installation, she mentioned the didgeridoo – a non-local musical instrument that has become an iconic, if contested, symbol of Aboriginal identity – and generalized 'aboriginal language' as 'appropriate' additions to the installation, recruiting them as expedient symbols in a broad project of Aboriginal representation. Although caught up in the interaction at the time, in retrospect I'm struck

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<sup>88</sup> Byron Dueck, *Musical Intimacies and Indigenous Imaginaries: Aboriginal Music and Dance in Public Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 221; after Berlant, *The Female Complaint*.

<sup>89</sup> Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 91.

by the way this woman wove land and politics through our entire conversation and by her gentle insistence on turning the interview back onto me, asking about my ‘background’ and what I made of her comments. We touched on her involvement in Aboriginal affairs, the palm trees and magpies in the Vaucluse garden, and the ironies, given the colonial setting, of my English background (shared, she laughingly pointed out, with former Prime Minister Tony Abbott). *Pleasure Garden* became, by implication as much as argument, part of a much larger cultural and political canvas. So, in highlighting the strange status of politics within such moments of reception and creation, my intention is not to advocate for autonomist thinking or depoliticized analysis. Rather I want to highlight the ongoing cultural constitution of, and ambivalence over, what counts as politics and whether politics is desirable. Instead of following the truism that ‘everything is political’,<sup>91</sup> we might trace varied and specific patterns of the political – wrapped inside and around the apolitical and autonomous, differentially valued and styled – within musical experience.

### Involving Experiences: Condition and Uncertainties

The paths I have traced through the reception of *Pleasure Garden* have been diverse, sometimes winding, sometimes straightforward. They attest, I have suggested, to a deep ambivalence within musical experience: that it is both powerfully conditioned and generatively uncertain. *Pleasure Garden*’s creators responded to this ambivalence, even as the reception of the installation was patterned by it. They combined a recuperation of contemplative, quasi-autonomous musical experience with an ethos of ‘leaving space’, which aimed to cultivate diversity and accommodate responses that rubbed against the grain. As such, it was a fraught project: the idea of offering a contemplative refuge at once separated it off from, and responded to, distracted modernity, its constitutive outside, and, despite the attempted separation, distraction reasserted itself. In many ways, artists and audience shared a sense of the installation as promoting contemplation,

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<sup>91</sup> Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 25.

attentiveness, and relaxation. In this they offer a subtle provocation, perhaps even a gentle politics: where cultural forms value stillness rather than mobilisation, quietism rather than protest, we might see them not simply as disengaged, but as reparative ethical projects. They will still demand critique, not least around the issue of *who* is able to participate, contemplate and take pleasure, but at a time when politicisation feels increasingly urgent, they cultivate alternative sensibilities that do something other than reproduce late capitalism's logic of intensification with a similarly intensified resistance.

Amid this contemplative project, the installation also took on meanings and prompted experiences that were at odds, unexpected, fleeting, and that fell out of circulation. The reception of *Pleasure Garden* was strongly conditioned by specific cultures of audiencing, especially those associated with Western art music and sound art, as well as by wider forces shaping everyday experience within late capitalism. Yet the complexity of these cultures, their intra- and interactions, generated uncertainty and plurality. Just as it provoked both contemplation and distraction, so the reception of *Pleasure Garden* was animated by combinations, tensions or oscillations between immersion and transience; individual subjectivity and collective sociability; meaning and autonomy; creation and reception; agency and intelligibility. These tensions were felt across the trajectory of the installation's reception, from its creators' anticipations of audience responses, through the work's undecidable aesthetic, to the ambivalent transformations of subjectivity it engendered. It afforded powerful somatic escape from hectic modernity. It brought uncertainties, especially regarding bird sounds and the interactivity, which were both fascinating and unsettling. It dispersed subjectivity across wider ecologies – with other audience members, sounds, plants and animals, the technological system – that were differentially valued or unwelcome, chosen or compulsive. All these effects, and more, resulted from collaborative acts of co-reception, involving audiences, artists, researchers, and the installation-in-the-garden.

Coda: Times of co-reception

<i>Early morning,</i>	<i>Weeks later: imagine the</i>	<i>Months later:</i>	<i>Years later: imagine</i>
<i>nobody's around:</i>	<i>artist returning to the</i>	<i>imagine an audience</i>	<i>the ethnographer</i>
<i>imagine a garden, alive</i>	<i>garden to experience the</i>	<i>member returning,</i>	<i>writing, others reading,</i>
<i>with plants, birds, and</i>	<i>experience they made</i>	<i>remembering the</i>	<i>all imagining a garden,</i>
<i>music, singing to itself,</i>	<i>for others, with those</i>	<i>installation, hearing</i>	<i>alive with plants, birds,</i>
<i>doing its own thing.</i>	<i>others.</i>	<i>only the garden.</i>	<i>people and music.</i>

Around 10 days after the launch of *Pleasure Garden*, Genevieve returned to Vaucluse, as she put it, ‘as a visitor’. She went at different times of day, lay on the grass, listened and watched others experiencing the installation. She enjoyed, she said, going back without a sense of responsibility, because the installation was ‘doing its own thing’. Around two years later, as I exchange drafts of my writing with Jan and Genevieve, *Pleasure Garden* lives on in various ways. There is a project CD and website, Genevieve has performed a live concert version, and the installation has travelled to other locations. Yet the creative team has also moved on and my writing is a strange reminder of a now old project. Many of *Pleasure Garden*’s Vaucluse audience members would, it seems likely, remember their visit; few would remember their conversation with me. The technological infrastructure is periodically dismantled and remade for new locations; the Vaucluse garden moves through the seasons, regrown and remade. This contrast between the project’s interpretive afterlife in my writing and its uncertain long-term significance for others present at its reception revives questions about the limits and character of musical experience that have pervaded this article.

Hustak and Myers argue that neo-Darwinian accounts of evolution ‘overdetermine the temporalities that are deemed relevant to the study of life’, overlooking ‘particular bodies and...local and ephemeral differences’.<sup>92</sup> They aim, instead, to ‘track...the very momentum through

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<sup>92</sup> Hustak and Myers, ‘Involutionary Momentum’, 95.

which organisms reach toward one another and involve themselves in one another's lives'.<sup>93</sup>

Transposing these ideas to the theorisation of the temporality of musical cultures, we might ask how to develop accounts of musical experience that recognize broad historical forms of audiencing and co-reception, while simultaneously crediting the distinctive characteristics of particular scenes of musical experience. More than this, we might ask how the two relate, tracing how ephemeral yet involving musical experiences feed into and out of the emergence of new, historically significant forms of musical reception. Does the experience of *Pleasure Garden* live on, for example, in fractionally shifted or consolidated patterns of attention, tiny material changes to sites and bodies, small attenuations or extensions of agency? Might such small differences cumulatively matter across longer historical spans or do they vanish under the weight of more powerful forces? As *Pleasure Garden* shows, artists and audiences are already navigating such historical questions on their own terms, using and making music to seek 'time out' from modernity and recuperate older forms of musical experience; improvising new reception practices as music enters new spaces (or returns to old spaces, as with the Vaucluse garden) and new forms of technological mediation. To engage these issues within music studies would recognize how conditioned, uncertain and fertile musical experience is, for all of us.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.