

Exploring the Male Ear

A brief discussion with Laura Mulvey

that was continued via email through the female:pressure mailing list

In the spring of 2016, I met with film-maker and theorist Laura Mulvey, who at that time curated a screening of feminist films in Vienna. In 1975, Mulvey's definition of the male gaze has inaugurated a critical debate of the influence of gender roles in film-making.¹ Among the films Mulvey presented in Vienna was Chantal Akerman's *Saute ma ville* (1968), a work staged entirely inside a kitchen space with Akerman herself acting. I found it interesting how Akerman uses her voice in this film. She breathes, hums, and softly sings –unpretentiously, as if to herself, and without fabricating a role. To me as a viewer/listener, Akerman's voice exposes the artist herself as a human being, woman and person. An otherwise invisible dimension of vulnerability and intimacy relevantly transforms the kitchen setting: through her voice the kitchen space becomes personalised and political.

In a conversation with Mulvey and Austrian film-maker Constanze Ruhm I put forward an exchange about gender mechanisms in the composition of sound tracks for films, raising the question: Is there a male ear at work, a mechanism that might be an aural/compositional equivalent to the male gaze? Unanimously, Mulvey and Ruhm stated that, to their knowledge, this had not been discussed yet; feminist film-makers apparently had not included a debate of sound and music into their critique of male cinema. I suggested that Akerman's precise usage of personal vocality in *Saute ma ville* contributed towards a feminist shift in film music.

Parallel to this debate, I posted an informal question to the mailing list of female:pressure², an international network of approximately 1900 female composers and artists active in the electronic scene:

Pia Palme / Initial Mail 18. May 2016

Dear Ladies,

if you find time to reflect, think or maybe have suggestions for further reading, here is a question I've been researching into: Do you think, is there something like a "Male Ear" in modern and

¹ Available under: <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/566978/>>

² Founded by the artist Electric Indigo, female:pressure is an international network of female, transgender and non-binary artists in the fields of electronic music and digital arts, from musicians, composers and DJs to visual artists, cultural workers and researchers. More available under: <<http://www.femalepressure.net/fempres.html>>

electronic music, in parallel to the "Male Gaze" discovered in film by theorist Laura Mulvey? What could that be?

I expect it, from the historic development of music, which was dominated by men in the 20th century - although, we do know of some women, but the massive output came from men.

Currently, I try to identify it more precisely. I'm interested in the AURAL dimension, not so much the visual, which is more obvious.

I'm currently writing my thesis in composition, and research into this question. The outcome of this discussion, if there is any, will be included.

For discussion, feedback, thoughts, ideas, I would be happy.

Best, Pia

i am convinced there is such a "habit"
prejudgement... male attitude

like Bill Gates just published all fav books and they are
all written by men, he does not read books by women
he sadly is no exception

if women comply to the 'male ear'
like if they make music or tracks like THEM
a certain same language,,, if they
fit themselves in there
then they are easier excepted
at least i have this experience / observation personally

which also means women are less accepted to pioneer a sound
they are silenced or not recognized, also when they are small women teams
just nobody features supports them so they stay unsuccessful

always exceptions, but widely...

that has consequence on all levels, bookings, sales, shows, fame, income
women don't draw a crowd enough... so bookers dont headline them again
it is possible to win, but ... longevity... or support etc

again, check twitter feeds of music magazines... incredible

or any other media for that matter

i think that goes for everything... other professions too
unless it is hyper nerdy academic, like if a women discovers radioactivity
like Marie Curie... but ...

in art this can never be proven...

but being around for 20 years ... i concur: male ear
but it is probably rather an attitude to all, things

well...

lets just change it

Antje Greie Ripatti

not exactly on point:
but i did just come across this
<http://prx.sagepub.com/content/108/1/14.abstract>

emotional resonance
varies for men in women, when doing spatial rotation tasks

but then there is the gender gradient... how does testing apply to this?
Maria Mouk

Absolutely-Pia!

Ja, ich denk mal darüber nach, um das präziser zu formulieren. Aber ja-ich merke es auf jeden Fall in der Clubkultur. :) Interessante Fragestellung!

Stefanie Honeder

Ich glaube tatsächlich, dass es Unterschiede im 'Hören' und im weitesten Sinne auch in der Sinneswahrnehmung, zwischen Männern und Frauen, geben könnte, da der Cortex, im Gehirn, laut Neurowissenschaften nicht unbedingt gleich ist.

Was aber eine Tatsache ist und schon weitgehend erforscht: Musiker/innen /Forscher/innen, Künstler /innen haben eine extreme dichte Vernetzung zwischen linker und rechter Hirnhälfte.... Oliver Sacks hat sich.B. damit beschäftigt..

Vielleicht recherchierst Du da mal im Netz...? Zu diesem Thema.... könnte weiterhelfen.

Neda Ploskow

well, a known urban legend is that women are better at multitasking, but maybe some evidence here that this goes specially for auditory tasks:

[http://www.usc.edu/dept/ise/caie/Checked%20Papers%20\[ruhi%2012th%20sept\]/word%20format%20papers/REGISTRATION%20PAID%20PAPERS%20FOR%20PROCEEDINGS/pdf/85%2015%20GENDER%20DIFFERENCES%20IN%20AUDITORY%20PERCEPTION%20AND%20COMPUTATIONAL%20DIVIDED.pdf](http://www.usc.edu/dept/ise/caie/Checked%20Papers%20[ruhi%2012th%20sept]/word%20format%20papers/REGISTRATION%20PAID%20PAPERS%20FOR%20PROCEEDINGS/pdf/85%2015%20GENDER%20DIFFERENCES%20IN%20AUDITORY%20PERCEPTION%20AND%20COMPUTATIONAL%20DIVIDED.pdf)

mmmh - possible consequences for composing? anyone? :)

...liebe, da hast du meinen spürhund aber geweckt mit deiner frage auf der mailingliste :) ich hab auch schon länger nach dem thema gesucht, ist aber schwer, etwas zu geschlechterunterschieden bezüglich hören herauszufinden. man kann davon ausgehen, daß ältere papers nimmer aktuell sind, weil sich in der psychologie extrem viel tut. ich hätte ier etwas halbwegs aktuelles, von 2009:

http://www.academia.edu/1046565/Listening_and_Gender_Stereotypes_and_Explanations

ansonsten würde ich das mit dem "female ear" nicht allein auf hörverhalten festmachen, sondern unterschiede eher mit anderen fähigkeiten, die verschieden sein können, untersuchen, wie z.b. räumlich orientierung, multitasking, emotionale faktoren,... also alles, was sonst außer hören das komponieren beeinflussen könnte... ich bin der ansicht, daß komponieren/musizieren viel auf alltagserfahrungen und psychische prägung aus der kindheit zurückgreift, und daß sich da unterschiede ausbilden.

trotzdem, schwieriges thema aber spannend!

Margarethe Mayerhofer-Lischka

spannende frage - bin grad erst am drüberlesen - wie sich das mulveysche male gaze konzept in die musik übertragen ließe - im sinne von inszenierung? komposition? darbietung aufführung - oder generell eine art "männliches" hören und definieren von was ist wert, gehört zu werden?

Christina Nemec

I absolutely think there is a male ear, and is as sexist or non-binary on the sexuality spectrum. I spend a lot of time within the male gay party scene in Berlin and hear such a difference between what a gay/lgbtq DJ will put out vs going to a more hetero orientated party and hearing what is played there - for example. I notice the 'straight' parties has music that creates an energy in the party that is serving men over women. Maybe this is just my perspective, but I do move around a lot from the party scenes to see what's up.

I notice a cliché of more industrial, heavy bass, 'macho' sounds from certain male producers, lacking delicacy. Meanwhile, I've heard some incredibly powerful booming tracks from women too. That being said, I think it's a process for us all to break through our gender role conditioning, and super cool when both sexes produce music that is beyond their gender.

I think there is a male ear, and is with or without an agenda. I recall as my Opa lost his hearing, he couldn't hear voices of a higher register (female voices in particular) very well, but he could hear lower voices easily. Luckily, his hearing loss was not purposely sexist, as I've learned this is common in aging men who are losing their hearing.

I have had plenty of experience with music producers, sound engineers, and male musicians that enjoy the deepness to my voice, but the male gender may also have an attraction to high-pitched female voices, or the colours of our moans, laughter, what ever excites them and turns them on, and this is naturally reflected in the music they produce and play.

Miss Natasha Enquist

www.natashaenquist.com

Not sure this is what you mean but sampels of women in electronic/dance music done by men are usually either hyper sexual (French kiss is one very famous example of many) or really underestimating sampling women talk or rather blurb about selfies, shopping, gossip etc'. It seems as usual according to this selection of women presentation that all women care about is men and the life with/without them or really stupid things. Also they are usually presented as objects and not

individuals with an independent will of their own. This repeats it self in the video clips for these tracks/songs.

Rona Geffen

To flesh out:

Probably, there should be a clear differentiation into live-performed music (whatever genre, doesn't matter here) or music composed for non-live situations (media, film etc.).

Filmmaker Laura Mulvey's 'Male Gaze' was a statement she made to define the (artistic) perspective of her male colleagues. She found that male directors and filmers propagate their masculine view of the world in their films. This includes the physical, visual arrangements such as putting women on the right side of the screen (as objects), how women are depicted and positioned, the other side of course, how men are positioned - up to more subtle characteristics of films, such as social renderings, content and stories told in films. She was among the first to point that out and name that. Only after that was pointed out, the mechanisms used by men became obvious in film-making, and more precise counter-perspectives opened up.

A number of (experimental) female film-makers have worked on finding female perspectives, many of whom worked along the strategy to turn the "private into the public".

When I met Laura in Vienna recently, at a screening of feminist films, I asked that very question. She said she had never thought about that, but finds it interesting, asked me back what I thought. Immediately a discussion came up, including filmmaker Constanze Ruhm from Vienna, too. I noted that the women-filmmakers used their own voices a lot, in rather raw ways. Creates an intimate atmosphere. Very physical, too. Fragile. But on the other side, very intense and strong. Or no sound at all.

The question for the 'Male Ear' came to my mind because, looking at the history of music in the last century, most developments have been brought about by men. With a few women, as we all know, but marginally. So I deduct that there must be something in parallel to what Laura found in film - simply because of the men involved in music-making.

I'm not so sure about Pop-culture: it is very visual. Women have been active as singers + composers for some time in that genre, more often. Madonna, Björk, etc...

Whatever Genre, in vocal music the situation is different, too. A voice is a physical presence.

It should be noted that Susan McClary in her book *Feminine Endings : Music, Gender, and Sexuality* mentions the Male Gaze a couple times (p. 89, for example). She comes close to defining a Male Ear, as she looks into compositional techniques of male composers.

Altogether, I find she writes a lot about/close to the topic.

There is a study led by Julia Eckhardt:

Survey on : sound | music & gender | sex

Research conducted and summarized by Julia Eckhardt and Leen De Graeve / Q-O2 workspace
Brussels June 2016

which is just being published now, a great, comprehensive questionnaire and compilation about music and gender, that I answered, too. The study has a section Gendered music and sound art, by all kinds of genders. I send it to you as soon as I have it. Very interesting altogether!

Pia Palme
