Abstract

This article considers the spatial politics of contemporary performance spaces constructed through DIY, improvised noise scenes. Noise (as something performed) is often categorized as "experimental," "free," or "avant garde." It carries associations of emancipation, eschewing as it does conventional musical training, and the constraints of formal compositional and linguistic expression. Unfolding as a debate between the two authors, this article reflects on the contributions post-structural feminist theory brings to an understanding of where and how women practitioners negotiate noise-performance spaces. By considering noise as a conceptual object as well as noise as sonic performance, and by reflecting on debates around radical democracy, the authors debate the issue of female-only performance spaces and their implications on what we can express and how we might be understood. This contribution seeks to initiate further debate on the inherent complexities of how women create and negotiate spaces of noise performance in the face of normative assumptions and associations that have simplified the debate – for example, that the loud, discordant, and arrhythmic is obnoxious, dangerous, and historically a masculine domain.

Susan: The following exchange considers the gender and spatial politics at work in the performance of experimental free improvised noise at DIY events in the UK and Europe. It takes the form of a conversation which took place over email from March to April 2013.

I asked Marie if she would be prepared to write collaboratively with me because I thought it would help me clarify what I am doing as an improviser in sound and music. My practice of vocalizing noises and sounds started in a friend's living room as a kind of experimental group meditative practice, not intended for anyone else's ears. But spurred on by a visit by the police one night after the meditations had got quite loud, we formed the group Neon Laser Comelight Mirror, and played one gig at the Warrington Festival of Improvised Music in the North West of England. I have since worked with a number of other improvising musicians and now play in performance venues on a semi-regular basis with my partner Stuart Arnot in the band Acrid Lactations (see totalvermin.blogspot.co.uk). For a long time I saw my practice as a noise- and sound-maker as a welcome opportunity to exist within a realm of non-verbal, but voice-based expression. At the same time as starting to perform on stage as a vocal improviser, in another part of my life I was involved in post-graduate study, which eventually led to becoming University Lecturer. The opportunity for improvised vocalizing became something of a release valve for the demands of my job. For both students and colleagues there is an expectation of clarity, eloquence, accessibility, and rationality in spoken and written communication of ideas. As is common to many workplaces, a shared, tacit awareness of saying the "wrong" or "inappropriate" thing can become claustrophobic and oppressive. Yet, I discovered in my experiences onstage, the freedom or license to do/say or play absolutely anything that enters the mind is not guaranteed by any means; rather, the performance space becomes an arena of still more nuanced sets of expectations, emanating from the histories from which improvising in this milieu emerges, also more directly from other players and the audience.

Marie: I have experienced similar tensions between work and play; writing and performing; freedom and expectation. I began to be involved in noise-making and free improvisation in Liverpool, though really began to develop this when I started at Newcastle University. Starting my PhD at Newcastle introduced me to people both "inside" and "outside" academia interested in free improvisation and noise. In 2009–10, I regularly played with PIG (the Postgraduate Improvising Group). The group very rarely played publicly (i.e., in front of an audience) – if you were in the room with PIG, you were playing. For me, playing with PIG was both formative and troubling – it raised difficult questions concerning gender relations, boundaries, limitations, and inclusion/exclusion in performance. The "freedom" of "free" improvisation was often governed by a fairly rigid set of idiomatic rules. Freedom, it sometimes seemed, was not something felt or experienced as an audience member or performer, but something associated with a particular set of sonic signifiers (e.g., noise, dissonance, lack of rhythmic repetition, absence of melody).

In the following exchange, we take up the emancipatory discourses which tend to accompany this particular mode of sonic exploration – a mode which purportedly permits the performer to eschew formal musical training, the constraints both of formal compositional and linguistic expression. These themes have been previously explored in contemporary art, in exhibitions such as "Her Noise" at the South London Gallery, UK, in 2005, in the book Noise and Capitalism (Iles and Mattin 2009), and in the recent work of cultural theorists, geographers, and practitioners (Thompson 2012; Downes 2012; Atton 2012, 427–41; Bell 2012; Hegarty 2008, 2012). We are both currently engaged in writing and research. For Susan, this involves examining how art, creativity, and notions of community politics are constructed and/or contested in "public" or "civic" space, particularly in neoliberalizing or post-industrial urban contexts. For Marie, research currently involves looking at the relationships between sound, noise, music, and affect. As practitioners of free improvised noise, part of the reason we have sought to engage in this discussion is to restate some of the productive crossovers to be found in being both theorist and practitioner. A shared interest in the meeting point between practice and the debates around feminism, identity, noise, and space initiated the following dialog, which begins with a reference to Marie's research on the connections between noise and constructions of femininity.

This piece comes out of an earlier joint attempt to write something for a fanzine, but the person who was putting it together suggested the tone was not appropriate to that form. This highlights an issue we talk about in the exchange – that the space the fanzine creates, one which is set up to challenge the limitations of existing spaces of exchange and articulation, are generative of their own sets of limitations and rules. We have used the form of letter writing to present our debate for a number of reasons – firstly, because our perspectives differ enough to merit this form of presentation. The letter-writing process offers a degree of transparency into the process of working through an argument so that the reader is able to appreciate the noisiness of this form of communicating. The texture of the exchange is laid, if not completely bare (this has gone through a number of drafts), then at least open to the interpretations of the reader as to the evident false starts, conflicts, and agreements we have hewn. We do not claim that this exchange exists as a fully worked-out set of propositions. It has been difficult to establish an end point to the exchange (we keep adding responses in); also, we are acknowledging a contest of meaning. In these ways the exchange itself becomes akin to the DIY spaces argued for later on in the piece. We hope it encourages wider involvement in this debate: one more cacophonous than a strictly "academic tone" might allow.

Hi Marie,

I'm Su Fitzpatrick. We met briefly at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow CCA in February 2012, when you gave a talk about Women and Silence. We didn't really talk very much on the night, but your talk resonated rather a lot with me. Particularly at the points where I think you were advocating women-only performance spaces.

Like yourself and most of the other women in the audience for your talk, I am involved in bands which have been categorized variously using the terms "experimental," "free" "improvisation," "noise," and other more florid or poetic descriptions, usually for the purpose of promoting a show or release.1 My interest comes out of personal experience of performing improvised and experimental noise in the typical DIY spaces such as rooms above pubs, social clubs, and people's houses. I have considered the gender balance in a lot of these spaces, and I am often confronted with the situation where it is mainly men in the audience, mainly men putting the shows on, mainly men doing the sound. I have discussed this with female friends, but your talk was an arresting moment for me. It forced me to consider the complexities of this issue, and my own position as a performer. Acknowledging the male-dominance issue, I wonder about strategies to counter this and one that has emerged is obviously spaces which specify women-only or a deliberately women-dominated bill. But for me, having a women-only performance space carries with it a connotation that it could be a space of greater freedom of expression, of understanding, and perhaps safety. What I think this does not acknowledge or reflect is conflict as a foundational premise of a meaningful public political space, and women's ongoing role in this space.

I think it is important to state that I am not interested in pursuing this argument because I think that in terms of fairness and equality, men should be included! Neither am I arguing that there shouldn't be any women-only performance spaces. Far too often in popular debates about gender and music performance, the terms of the debate turn on simplified dichotomies which essentialize difference.2 I am therefore more interested in what claims are being made around the possibilities for emancipation by organizers of women-only spaces, to understand the actual points of conflict in these spaces, and what we can take from them and use in other spaces in society at this point in the development in capitalism where the spaces for political articulation in terms of civic space are routinely ignored, or worse, shut down completely.

In Gossips, Sirens, HI-FI Wives: Feminising the Threat of Noise (2012), you account for the position of women in relation to noise and silence in Western culture and focus on their treatment in various patriarchal modes such as civic governance, storytelling, and the imperatives of a post-war consumer capitalism. There is also a clear and strongly stated desire to explore the political power of noise-making now. You ask, "for whom is noise productive? Who has the power to turn noise into art? Into resistance? Into change?" (ibid). I wanted to explore an idea you cite early on in the paper when you refer to Aristotle's position of woman as virtuous in her silence (Aristotle 2008) in relation to the question of locating (or reviving) the political in noise-making, and perhaps other forms of cultural production. Reflecting on Aristotle's position, you write that: "Woman's chaotic existence, her inconsistent, uncertain opinions, means that she is to be excluded from the polis and is unpermitted to speak publicly in courts" (my emphasis). For me the question of inclusion and exclusion is central. What are we demanding entry into? A civic and rational polis? A scene initiated out of a DIY culture which has come to be dominated by men?

For me creating Women-only spaces is a solution which seems more applicable to some contexts in society than others. In respect to the context of cultural production, in our case, improvised noise, the observance of women-only spaces (and the sometimes attendant discourses of safety, mutual respect, and understanding) suspends the opportunity to engage in direct and unruly debate with each other and with men, some of whom are engaging in the oppressive practices, both institutionally and in the everyday, which we are seeking to challenge. It seems that both the champions and detractors of women-only spaces succumb to the same logic of man/woman, self/other as knowable and stable quantities: a logic which developments in feminist theory are demanding we take to task.

The fact that all these spaces are ordered along imperatives of inclusion and exclusion can be understood as a reflection of wider attempts in capitalist society, particularly in the realm of the regeneration of post-industrial cities, to discursively construct a stage in which public space is seen to be ordered along the lines of equality of opportunity and diversity of background and experience. I have argued elsewhere (Fitzpatrick 2009) that the process of "neoliberalizing" public space (in the form of large-scale urban-regeneration initiatives such as the hosting of cultural or sporting events, or the rebranding of a section of the inner city), are rationalized through a discourse of inclusion. This involves citing certain sections of society as the hitherto excluded members of society. This is a paradigm which suggests that a sovereign civic sphere is extant; further it suggests that subjective identity is stable and knowable enough that we can proceed according to the principle of identifying those who do not belong and invite them in.

The reflection on Aristotle's notion of woman's conduct in the polis both highlights the marginalization of woman and suggests a way forward: that we redefine the basis of how we understand public space and categories of identity. Post-structuralist feminism offers us a rejoinder to Aristotle's "uncertain" woman, in the idea of the "becoming" woman. To contextualize this I have included this quote from Braidotti in which Luce Irigaray's writing on "becoming woman" is introduced:

The "feminine" […] is neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one: it is rather a virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional ("molar") subject position of Woman as Other of the Same, so as to express the other of the Other. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, into embodied locations and not in a flight away from them. (Braidotti 2003, 44)

Braidotti proceeds to argue that debating identity and difference purely within the frames of reference we inherit from the European history of philosophy ensures the continuation of certain oppressive connotations: difference as pejorative, self and other as sovereign categories. Following the argument for the feminine as a political and conceptual project, I would add that public space, what some might currently term the "civic sphere" be subject to the same re-imagining. It is not just the noise we make that produces the disruptive effect; it must also be a consideration of where we are making the noise. To move beyond the dichotomous self and other is to move beyond the logic of inclusion and exclusion in the spaces we create and dwell within: towards a public space which is given its political form and force through the way it is defined by the dynamic and myriad political movements who inhabit it. Difference here becomes productive, open, becoming.

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on this,

Su

Hi Su,

It is really nice to hear from you – sorry it has taken me a little while to respond. I'm really glad you took something from the talk – I was really nervous, since some of these things feel very difficult for me to talk about. I don't know if you've had similar experiences trying to talk about gender in the noise scene to other practitioners/promoters but it can lead to some pretty … intense … responses … ! I think I said in the talk how I felt that I had reverted to a theoretical discussion of noise (which I think is really important too) because I found it very difficult to voice and discuss my concerns relating to practice and to articulate what the problem is – how it feels as a performer to be one of the few women (when you're not the only woman) in a room and why I think that's a problem, without placing unfair expectations on what tend to be very small and highly localized scenes. Anyhow, I'd really like to talk further about some of these ideas – the points/questions you raise are really interesting ones. It's exciting to work through some of this in this format too – being in the final stages of my PhD means that I'm currently working on my own a lot at the moment, so it's really nice to have the opportunity to do something collaborative!

To begin to respond to some of the questions raised, I figure it is probably useful to outline the particular definition of noise I'm using. I think the way in which I use noise as a conceptual object (or methodology, even?) has a number of productive resonances with your call for a re-imagination of the public space that moves beyond the rigid (and often not very helpful) dualisms of self/other, inclusion/exclusion, inside/outside.

For me (as both a theorist and practitioner!), noise is not just unwanted sound. Instead, drawing from information theory, I take noise to be a perturbing and transformative force. According to Claude Shannon's general model of communication (Shannon and Weaver 1998), noise is understood to be anything that interferes with and thus modifies the signal. So noise is not a thing, a stable entity, nor a subjective judgment of sound. Rather noise is a verb; it does something.

Signal and noise are often understood as a binary pairing, with noise being the subordinate category – noise is that which is defined in relation to signal. However, as I understand it, the relationship between noise and signal is much more complicated. While noise is positioned outside the channel in Shannon's model, it is nevertheless included as a general feature. Noise, in other words, is a necessary component in the communication process. This is because the material apparatus of communication will always modify the signal in some way – and so there can be no transmission of signal without some degree of noise – some degree of transformation.

This idea of noise as a necessary, transformative force within systems of communication is also picked up by Michel Serres in The Parasite (2007). Serres shows that the term "parasite" in French has three interrelated connotations: it refers to a biological entity that feeds from a host but gives nothing in return; a social "scrounger" that "feeds off" the state but contributes nothing; and, finally, interfering noise. The parasite is not an identity, a stable entity; it is not defined by species or genus. Rather, the parasite refers to a particular position within a series of relations; it is defined as taking up a relation to relations. Noise is that which takes up a relation to the relation between sender and receiver. For Serres the parasite is thus the third term or, returning to Aristotle, "the excluded

middle." And this third term changes things; it guarantees that things cannot and will not stay the same.

For Serres, there are two responses to the parasite; things move around to accommodate the parasite's presence, or things change so that the parasite is chased out. Even so, the parasitic third term can never be fully removed: "What is repressed but remains anyway, still parasites communication." From this parasitic perspective, the dualistic logic of inclusion and exclusion doesn't really work. Noise is the necessary third term. It has to be included (insofar as it is what allows communication or mediation to occur in the first place) and its inclusion always changes things. I think this is perhaps what is important to emphasize. Any "inclusion" has to be transformative; it has to involve a modification of the relations that constitute a space.

Put differently, inclusion of the noisy third term (which I have associated with women, or more accurately particular constructs of femininity) has to involve the creation of an alternative space. Is this perhaps a more productive way of thinking about issues of "inclusion/exclusion" – as a power or capacity to transform, create, or shape space rather than an issue of visibility within a fixed and static location?

I've been thinking a little about this in relation to some of the historical retrospectives about women "in" [sic.] electronic music. What is the point in having these celebrations of canonical "pioneers" – the great individuals – if nothing else changes? If the historical narrative and structure remains the same, with a few additional names included? Sort of on that topic, I remember once reading a piece on a certain music website – something about misogyny in music and how women have been written out of music-making histories. The article linked to another feature – the top 20 albums of the year I think. The vast majority of the artists (if not all – I can't remember precisely) were cis-men (and mostly white). I remember just thinking how contradictory and disappointing it seemed – that the piece had no obvious impact on the rest of the site, there was no evidence of trying to address some of the issues the piece raised in their own discourse. All talk, no action!

I'll now try to address some of the questions concerning space a little more concretely. Firstly, the issue of inclusion and exclusion and women-only spaces: pragmatically, I can see the use of women-only spaces within, for example, a pedagogical context – circuit bending/hacking workshops and things like that. Since it is not just women who experience gendered forms of oppression in these spaces (and more generally) it might be more useful to organize spaces around those who experience gender oppression rather than the category of "women." However, I think such spaces should be utilized with a view to interact with and participate within other spaces. Do you think inclusion/exclusion can be used in a way that is temporary and strategic?

With regard to what spaces are "we" looking to be included in: I would suggest that it is not so much a question of demanding entry into pre-existing and pre-ordered spaces but of creating spaces that are no longer ordered around the molar categorizations picked up on by Braidotti, as I think you are suggesting. Such spaces could be described as pre-figurative, and would constitute a challenge aimed at the micro-political level. These spaces should not look to be "perfect," or to get everything right all at once, but should keep changing and adapting with the inclusion of and in response to new and emergent forces. That said, addressing the problem of power and participation at the micropolitical level should not mean that we lose sight of the continuing problems and hierarchies of

power that occur at the "molar" level; the molar can only be abandoned with absolute minoritarianism.

Hi Marie,

In your reference to Serres's (2007) use of the parasite to define noise's relational position to signal, I found some powerful resonating metaphors to the broader context of capitalist democracy. Noise being the dissenting voices of the public(s), signal being the imperatives of capitalist growth and power. Public space as constructed according to the needs and desires of capitalism creates a structural "outside" occupied by dissenters. Noise can never be removed; it is part of the process of communication albeit that it is subjected to any number of strategies to reduce its interference.

Serres's parasite metaphor suggests it is impossible to impose these sovereign categorizations and separations on the social. It evokes the argument put forward by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggesting that there can be no complete element within society unifying and determining its development. I quote from Deutsche's summary of their work:

The social field is structured by relationships among elements that themselves have no essential identities. Negativity is thus part of any social identity, since identity comes into being only through a relationship with an "other" and as a consequence, cannot be internally complete: "the presence of the 'other' prevents me from being totally myself." (Deutsche 1996, 274)

I agree with your point that it is the relations that constitute a space which are key to any transformative action that might take place. I think though that in order to be able to think through some of the ideas of how to shape a radical democracy, and if we are to continue to think in terms of eluding the categorizations that seek to subordinate, we may need to abandon the idea of "inclusion" and "exclusion," which for me still assumes the possibility of joining or being excluded from a space that we accept can be fixed or closed off.

I just want to take a moment to consider some of these issues in relation to women-only spaces, and the appeal you make that these spaces should not aim to get everything right, but they should be adaptive. Firstly, I agree that getting everything right is not a realistic aspiration, and, anyway, structurally it is not possible if we are talking about a space that acknowledges conflict as some sort of foundational principle. If I take the recent Ladyfest event in Glasgow as an example, the website suggests the event is adopting a "safer spaces policy." I consider the framing of a space within a discourse of rights and responsibilities noteworthy. Not in the sense that the use of a Safer Spaces Policy is wrong in its attempt to clearly demarcate a place of safety for those who experience violence and oppression; I am more interested in what this might mean for the relationship between audience and performer, i.e., the music part. To what extent do codes and responsibilities negate the difficulties and inherent complexity of intersubjective communication, the possibility of mis-construal, misunderstanding, otherwise-heard, of dis-chord and argument, of the negotiated process of collectively making a space of expression.

Gigs occur in multiple ways to different people, and within these multiples, there is no guarantee of the kind of rational communication assumed by a "non-judgmental" position. To pre-figure the formation of the space with such guarantees describes the same effect found in Deutsche's discussion of contemporary (neoliberalized) urban space (Deutsche 1996). She observes that in their

work of re-designing public space, urban growth coalitions make the implicit claim that space needs to be configured around some absolute foundation, some eternal human need and objective moral values.

Speak Soon,

Su

Hi Su,

I am currently working on a response for you. I was wondering if you could clarify something for me about Glasgow Ladyfest's statement that refers to itself as a "non-judgmental" space. I was wondering what you think is not being judged? I read the statement as primarily referring to other people, but I'm unsure if you're reading it as relating to music-making also (e.g. don't say you hate a band, or that people's music sucks!).

Thanks,

Marie

Hi Marie

To clarify that last point, naming a space "non-judgmental" is full of ambiguity to me. It could be interpreted as remaining respectful of other people's music. It does clearly imply that people should be respectful of one another in that space, so yes, this could very much extend to musical expression. So I wonder if this means that there is an expectation that both performer and the audience are "respectful." Also, to suggest that the space of Ladyfest is non-judgmental, is there an implication there that other spaces are judgmental? What are those spaces? Where are they? While I accept that it is not realistic for these questions to be addressed by Ladyfest organizers on a poster or website which is there primarily to promote the event, I still think it is valid to raise these questions outside of that forum. What does it mean to put those expectations around a space prior to it becoming active or occupied, I suppose is the essence of my query.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Su

Hi Su,

Ok, so re-reading the Glasgow Ladyfest safe-spaces policy, there does seem to be some ambiguity with regard to what the practical implementation of anti-discrimination, respect, non-judgment, and so on entails, and how far this reaches – does this inhibit certain types of performance and certain responses to performance? Am I allowed to judge the band, am I allowed to express this judgment and in what ways? Are we trying to establish the (impossible) "noise free" channel – where everything is entirely predictable and there is no risk of difference and disruption?

There has been a lot of backlash about safer-spaces policies recently, seemingly coming from those who have the least to gain (and most to lose) from them. In my experience safer-spaces policies can be very effective in enabling those who have faced certain forms of oppression and violence to

participate in political organizing and in that sense I consider them to be incredibly valuable contributions to anti-oppressive praxis. That said, it is often very difficult and fraught process to implement these policies in practice – there can be many fuzzy edges, grey areas, and noise in between an agreed (theoretical) policy and the action required in order to implement that policy. I think the values of anti-discrimination, respect, and so on when taken pragmatically can be very useful "starting points," so to inhibit the harassment, bullying, and abuse of others, but should always be viewed as partial rather than givens. Again, what these terms mean in practice – how they concretely manifest themselves – can sometimes be ambiguous.

Moreover, categorizing a space as always already non-discriminatory/non-judgmental/non-hierarchical can be dangerous, in that it can work to disguise other emergent hierarchies and inequalities that may occur within those "safe" spaces (so, for example, the longstanding hierarchies that privilege cis over trans women, or white women over women of color). I think what we are both articulating (or at least trying to!) is that the work of pre-figurative social spaces is never done, choosing instead to emphasize the noise of indeterminacy, transformation, and adaptation.

If we are going to have politically/socially engaged spaces/communities within the context of art, noise, and improve – spaces that attempt (and it will always be an attempt) to not follow the normative modes and patterns of oppression – then perhaps the best we can hope for is a persistent and acute attention to the problem; that is, the inequalities, divisions and hierarchies created by a Capitalist system that is inherently racist, sexist, classist, and ableist. I'm not trying to encourage a meek apologism: the laissez-faire dismissal of the lack of heterogeneous voices and actors as "yeah, it's a problem." Rather, what I'm trying to get at is the idea of problems as productive, insofar as they require a creative approach. Perhaps what is needed from creative, experimental spaces and communities is the engagement of creative, experimental, and adaptive strategies for dealing with these problems and ever-complex manifestations of inequality and oppression. And I think these strategies should be led by those experiencing gendered (as well as racialised, classed, ablest, etc.) forms of oppression in those spaces and beyond.

The relation you identify between parasitic noise and the space occupied by dissenters within neoliberal, Capitalist democracy can be (pessimistically) extended when noise is considered in the context of cybernetics. As with Shannon's informational model of noise, for cyberneticists such as Norbert Wiener (1961) there was no possibility of getting rid of the effects of noise, since a degree of noise was an inevitable presence within systems. Subsequently, instead of working by a logic of exclusion, cybernetics worked according to a logic of control; noise could not be eradicated but its erroneous effects could be pre-empted, constrained, and minimized as to preserve the (meta) stability of a system.

The notion of pre-emptively tackling transformative, parasitic encounters contributes to what Lyotard refers to as "the logic of maximum performance" (Lyotard 1984; Nunes 2011) the cyberneticist's dream of a 100% efficient, accurate, and predictable world. This cybernetic logic means that the transformations that noisy dissenters induce to the signal become all too predictable; difference is reduced to deviation, captured in familiar error-message identities. This idea of battles with would-be forces of transformation in the name of metastability seems pertinent in an era where wars are fought against an unwanted and not-yet-manifest future. Perhaps more relevant for the current discussion, this cybernetic logic also points to the predatory nature of

neoliberalism, whereby dissenting "others" are disarmed through incorporation and pre-emption. I am aware that the spaces and values I am placing my faith in have uncomfortable resonances in the rhetoric of "creative" Capitalism; indeterminacy, fluidity, and decentralization could easily be used as descriptors for our neoliberal era of pop-up shops, arts hubs, culture-led regeneration, and precarious labor. From this perspective, notions of process, becoming, and indeterminacy are just as "neoliberal" as the language of exclusion and inclusion. How do we, can we, or do we need to overcome this tension?

My own suggestion would be that there is a need to consider the difference here between rhetoric and (context-specific) practice (or perhaps talk and action!); while similar terms may be used, an anarchist social center is not the same as the post-Fordist workplace. Whereas the latter is a means to an end (surplus value) with the former, the end might not be so predetermined, instead maintaining a commitment to process and change. I also wonder if a similar distinction needs to be made with regard to Glasgow Ladyfest. Despite the similarities in rhetoric and premises between the Glasgow Ladyfest safe-spaces policy and neoliberalised urban space, aren't the (material) ends to which these premises are put fundamentally different?

Post-script

Su: I don't wish my part of this exchange to be considered part of the backlash against the use of safe-space policies. I do think it is possible, and important to continue to consider, their meaning and their implications without denigrating values like non-violence and non-discrimination, as well as the general efforts of communities who are creating spaces of expression that don't exist anywhere else. Part of this is a consideration of how the language of rights and responsibilities works out in spaces where music, dance, and theatre or other non-verbal forms of expression are being performed. Part of this is a consideration of how we can get to a point where we can acknowledge that once we create the spaces, we then feel free enough to argue with each other about how they are discursively constructed, their meaning and possibility, and that this work is never completed.

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Notes

1. Critic and noise-maker Joe Posset, based in Newcastle and who does stuff with tapes and voice, recently described the sound Acrid Lactations make as "the groans of a rust encrusted seal."

2. A discussion event Susan attended about Women in Improvised Music chaired by Gail Brand at Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra Festival 2013, 30 November, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow.

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