

**Juliana España Keller**

*Alhaurín el Grande, Málaga, Andalucía, Spain*

## **GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM: An Integrated Approach to the Vibrant Matter of Voice, Deep Listening, and Somatic Movement in Sonic Performance Art as Plastic Activism**

**Abstract:** Through an analysis of the sonic performance artwork *GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM* (2020), this paper analyzes why and when participatory art practices can intra-sect and converge with ecologies to imagine posthuman futures and challenge pre-existing structures of thought. From an activist position that considers art and the environment as a participatory collective model, this article argues for a reappraisal of human influence in complex human–non-human interactional systems. More specifically, this text, as a component of *GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM*, approaches oceanic and sea pollution (notably the dumping of plastics) as a form of environmental degradation that has generated a space inhabited by varied and vibrant forms of matter. In this way, the sea and the sonic space show strikingly similar potentials. In turn, Plastic Activism, which advocates for a world free of plastic pollution and its toxic impacts, is adopted as an underlying ethos and aesthetic response, with single-use plastics being incorporated into the performance artwork itself. Relational to this enquiry is sensing how we use our bodies to explore the potential thousands of distinct material ecologies embodying a sonic performative practice, especially combining the materiality of artistic and political action in public space and focal practices. In this way, the sonic space becomes comparable to a sea of sound, where complex assemblages of matter exist and intra-act to challenge the discordant systems and dynamics in which we are currently entangled.

**Keywords:** sound and noise art; feminist new materialism; deep listening; vibrant matter; social engagement; participatory practices; art and climate action; acoustic ecology.

### **1. Preface: Intra-actions in a Public Kitchen**

This paper offers a written analysis of *GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM* (2020) (referred to herein as GRETA) – a sound performance art work created by Melbourne-based performance art collective Sonic Electric,<sup>1</sup> performed at the experimental sound art event, The Make-It-Up Club, at the live music venue, Bar Open, in

<sup>1</sup> Sonic Electric is a global sound performance art collective with various interchangeable members.

\*Author contact information: [info@julianaespanakeller.com](mailto:info@julianaespanakeller.com); [juliana.espanakeller@concordia.ca](mailto:juliana.espanakeller@concordia.ca)

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia on October 17, 2020. *GRETA* came to life through the collaboration of five Sonic Electric performers – including myself – dressed in custom-made apron dresses sewn from silver fibre construction and insulation material, the type usually found within the walls of a home. Colourful custom-made knitted masks were worn as a collective form of protest and solidarity. The room itself was dark. One performer played electric guitar, the three other performers and myself created sound material using single-use plastic kitchen tools in contact with an amplified worktable; in addition, I performed the poem component of *GRETA* – its ambling yet autocratic words woven into the collaborative sensory assemblage. The atmosphere generated by the performance could be described as that of the endless echo chamber of deep-sea or cosmic-space travel. Its affect: uterine, ancient, futuristic, oceanic. To further this experience, the reader is encouraged to leave the page and access the work online (<https://soundcloud.com/user-73236766/greta>) for a more complete understanding of the performance and the content of this paper. This sound recording laid the groundwork for this article prepared for the Special Issue of *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* titled “Acoustic and Visual Ecology of a Damaged Planet”, as a text which converges with the eco-performance comprised of sounds, images, and collective voice to, in combination, form an assemblage.

It must be noted here that *GRETA* adopts an ongoing artistic framework defined as a “Public Kitchen”, which I conceived of and began working within 2018 and has seen various live iterations in different locations and with varying performers. A Public Kitchen is a sound performance and space in which everyday kitchen appliances, such as pots, pans, metal spoons, and colanders, electric blenders, and coffee grinders are used by (and with) performers to create sound material through the process of collaboration. The Public Kitchen was devised to recreate the private and domestic space of a kitchen, shifting it into public space through a sonic performance artwork as a series of creative propositions. The kitchen table – which forms a fundamental structure of a Public Kitchen sound performance – is a physical and sonic platform for exploring, repositioning, and amplifying kitchen tools through electronic and manual manipulation; specifically, the table, which is named “the motherboard”, is connected to various guitar amplifiers and contact microphones or “piezo microphones” that conduct and extend the sound made by the performers. This platform becomes a collaborative social space for participant members, where somatic movement and the sensory, sonic power of the repositioned kitchen tools is enacted. A more in-depth unpacking of Public Kitchens can be found in “Sonic Recipes from a Public Kitchen: Participatory Feminist Performance Art” <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/228899>. In summary, Sonic Electric performed *GRETA* in a public site for art and social practice (Make-It-Up Club) in a Public Kitchen format.

### 1.1. A Sonic Kitchen Poem in Posthuman Times

*GRETA* emerges from an immersive sculptural Public Kitchen installation where kitchen objects “do things” by or through humans, with human desire and expectation as driving intensities. The sonic kitchen is formed by a cluster of members or participants who are interchangeable, autonomous, and anonymously structured by recreating the private and domestic space of a kitchen into public space through a sonic performance artwork. The kitchen table is a platform (“the motherboard”) for exploring variations in sound behavior and experimental noise from kitchen tools.<sup>2</sup> This artwork seeks to reposition the kitchen tool by exploring its displacement and functionality, by using electronic and manual manipulation to investigate the movement and sensory behavior of sonic power, and by dismantling the tools of the modernized kitchen inventory. These everyday domestic objects become noisy tools of resistance and resonance. For example, an oven rack is played by plucking the metal bars of the rack and the noise reverberates like a bass guitar. An electric hand blender stick hums on a low speed or a steel mesh scrubbing pad creates harsh noisy interference patterns like that of a radio receiver channel transmission that is clearly out of range.

This sonic performance artwork contributes to feminist participatory practices, acknowledging the importance of “agential material reality” – in which the universe comprises of phenomena which are inextricably connected and created through dynamic forces<sup>3</sup> – and “deep listening” – which encourages the cultivation of receptivity through the body via conscious deep listening.<sup>4</sup> Through a sonic performative artwork, the human and the non-human intersect in my artistic research practice and contribute to feminist new materialist discourse by making human–non-human agency graspable. In this artwork model, kitchen tools are “intra-acting” with the user; to clarify, American feminist theorist Karen Barad coined the term “intra-actions” to describe that it is a dynamism of forces, instead of the inherent property of an individual, that generates action and becoming.<sup>5</sup> In turn, this described intra-action between kitchen tools and user involves other crucial elements such as motion, sound, acoustic space, and electronic manipulation – these attributes define the intra-actions and include reactions, for instance, emotional responses. In combination with the somatic body, the crafting of sounds is signified in these user interactions. A sonic performance installation is activated and then dramatizes the material agencies and flows between kitchen objects and humans; this is done by creating previously mentioned sonic recipes, which are impromptu, (at times) cacophonous, (at times) harmonious, and (always) responsive creative acts.

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<sup>2</sup> The motherboard is a functioning portable kitchen table structure with place-matted stations for kitchen tools and appliances and electronic hardware such as contact mics and leads and guitar effect pedals.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs* 28, 3 (2003): 817.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *On Sonic Meditation*, Vol. 27 (San Diego: Center for Music Experiment and Related Research, University of California, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 817.

## 1.2. Sonic Matter That Moves Us through Intra-actions

Intra-actions ignite *GRETA* as raw, tribal, dynamic forces at work.<sup>6</sup> These forces can also be considered as resonant frequency oscillating in sound; observed as vibrational bodies performing with kitchen objects (reverberating as an extension of the self) or with other electronic musical hardware technology and, in this performance, the distorted chords of an electric guitar and plastic material. These conditions are co-composed in a sonic response and, in posthuman terms, become relational to an acoustic ecology as a testing ground for feminist politics and social policy by taking on an activist tonality on many levels. In *GRETA*, the very space of collaboration – where the “work” (artwork or other) comes into being in an unplanned way; where performers and materials (in this case, single-use plastics) generate action and existence through the collision of forces – is conducive to intra-activity.

I build a sonic recipe on how intra-actions of the labored body respond or react to the performative moment through the motherboard. Instead of relying on thought alone, I argue our bodies generate affective feedback mechanisms (in tandem with the mind) when we experience sound noise phenomena. The starting point is that the kitchen matter (moving bodies, kitchen tools and appliances, and, in *GRETA*, single-use plastics) have an agential capacity to affect sound material. In the performance itself, this capacity emerges when elements are assembled together, when they “intra-act” in the live moment. To explain further, intra-action should not be confused with “interactions”, where elements exist first and then interact. An intra-action conceptualizes that it is the action between (and not in-between) that matters; it is in the action that the elements themselves are produced interdependently. It is the action itself that (new materialism) announces as intra-action, producing an immanent enfolding of matter and meaning between science and the humanities, and a new understanding of how non-direct causality is brought forth. I argue that the specificity of intra-actions speaks to the particularities of the power imbalances in the complex field of forces that are at play in the sound performance *GRETA*.

Therefore, causality in this artwork is not interactional but rather intra-actional.<sup>7</sup> Resistance is a continuing process and acknowledges materiality, material forces, and the agency of things as events that are emergent, dynamic, and resonant. In the home kitchen, sound directly generated by human ritual activity is a fusion of the human and non-human, in that it oscillates between the socially mediated nature of noise and the non-human indifference of technology. This suggests an impartial lack of concern for how technology has taken over our mediated lives since noise material hovers over us and through us. Our intra-actions with the human–non-human are what we understand as “white noise” in the background of our every day that comes from us activating with objects and machines and the continuous “hum” all around

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<sup>6</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interview and Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

us. Propositionally, a sonic recipe can follow a rooted symbolism of sound that relationally associates chaos and rhythm with the order in certain situations within a site-specific thematic such as *GRETA*.

### 1.3. Listening to *GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM*

The production of sound in a Public Kitchen poem engages and induces the listener to feel, think, and experience the sound. While it is important not to see this relationship as determined by technology, it is valuable to get a sense of a large pattern of intra-actions, which reach into the smallest areas of everyday life to include the human–non-human as forms of sound noise, as well as disruption to cultural, social, political, or even physical excess.

I argue that an individual participant in a sonic Public Kitchen performance work such as *GRETA* becomes immersed in the dynamics of intra-corporality, whereby the artwork as an experience is aesthetic, psychological, and physical; in turn, participant experience is central to the artwork and affected by these attributes.

## 2. Introduction

It is difficult to know what a flow can do, where it can take you, without entering into it. To write the felt materiality without mastering its flow, whether of water, the world, or art for that matter, following is your chance. Following aims at being confluent with the present always on the verge of always opening into the future.<sup>8</sup>

Poetry is the human language that can try to say what a tree or a rock or a river is, that is, to speak humanly for it, in both senses of the word ‘for’. A poem can do so by relating the quality of an individual human relationship to a thing, a rock or river or tree, or simply by describing the thing as truthfully as possible.<sup>9</sup>

In a black-and-white drawing by 11-year-old Jesper Hjorth from Melbourne, Australia, we see an expanded view of plastic oceans from a child’s perspective (Figure 1). In this picture, the sea is surrounded by a plethora of single-use plastic bags and bottles, cohabitating with (other) marine life, such as sharks and fish. Despite the undeniable devastation that Earth’s water bodies have been encroached by forms of pollution, this open and honest depiction summons hope; children, with their eagerness to learn about the environment and their capacity to act and think creatively, are

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<sup>8</sup> Katve-Kaisa Kontturi, *Ways of Following: Art, Materiality, Collaboration* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2018), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Popova, “Subjectifying the Universe: Ursula K. Le Guin on Science and Poetry,” <https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/04/10/ursula-k-le-guin-late-in-the-day-science-poetry/>, acc. on March 29, 2021.

the planet's most useful activists able to envisage and fight for a collective speculative future. The sonic performance artwork *GRETA* is not only a poetic composition of free-verse “vibrant matter”<sup>10</sup> that is streaming and attuning<sup>11</sup> with flowing rhythmical sound phenomena created by kitchen tools and electric kitchen appliances. As immersive participants, we are taken on an exotic transmedial journey with the plastic matter in the sea – an endless and open space, similar to cosmic space perhaps, equally unknown, even feared, yet disrupted and at the mercy of human activity. In this way, *GRETA* invites us into an expanded environmental political sonic rubric that is attentive to how the forces of human and non-human actors, technological mediations, animals, plants, and the entire planet's eco-system is embedded, becoming with and participating in generating multiple flows of agency as a form of acoustic activism, conducted as a visual eco-performance. It does so by generating a space (sonic; environmental; ontological; experiential) that connects with the presence of plastic matter (single-use plastic in the home to kitchen tools; environmental pollution) in an act of Plastic Activism<sup>12</sup> – an activist methodology that advocates for a world free of plastic pollution and its toxic impact on humans, animals, waterways, oceans, and the environment. As the vast majority of plastics known to be in the ocean are now deemed “missing”, they have escaped empirical, scientific methods of counting. Given these problems of definition, stakeholders as diverse as scientists, industry lobbyists, regulatory agencies, and activists argue for different – and often contradictory – meanings of pollution and consequences to argue for or develop appropriate techniques to support their claims.

In addition, as much as this sound performance work is a collective model of “sounding out” as a form of new materialism at sea, or as a form Plastic Activism, the title of the artwork is also attributed to the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg – an inspirational (co)participant. Known for her prodigious work challenging world leaders, and the global community at large, to take immediate and necessary action to mitigate climate change, Thunberg's name is idolized in the title *GRETA*. This is a calling out to Thunberg, an honoring of her actions; but also, an artistic choice in keeping with the feminist eco-activism and punk-inspired ethos of Public Kitchens, that idolize those (women) prepared to challenge the capitalist status quo. What is closely pinned to the notion of a plastic poem is a conceptual message in a bottle that speculatively never reaches the shoreline, despite its agency. Drawing on Jane Bennett's theory of “thing power”<sup>13</sup> in vital materialism, this artwork is directed towards the endless afterlife of plastic material that entangles us in the current mass

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> The word *attunement* refers to the way that American sound and media artist Norie Neumark describes sound works that are intersubjective, relational, affective, and emotional. Neumark describes this as transmitting and moving through us and between us and others. Norie Neumark, *Voice Tracks: Attuning to Voice in Media and the Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Imogen E. Napper and Richard C. Thompson, *Marine Plastic Pollution: Other Than Microplastic* (California, USA: Academic Press, 2019), 425–42.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

of “plastic seas” in global bodies of water.<sup>14</sup> The threat of climate change and the over-production of plastic, ocean dumping, and human exceptionalism encourages us to think hard and creatively about our posthuman future where oceans, sea creatures, and ocean life are forced to reckon with vital matter such as plastic.<sup>15</sup>

Sound performance art on the other hand, which integrates poetry or free verse into the live act, is not solely a postmodern phenomenon seeking change by connecting its audience to matter and meaning. I argue that the artwork is indebted to a history of oral poems performed in pre-literate societies.<sup>16</sup> These poems were transmitted orally from performer to performer and were constructed using devices such as repetition, alliteration,<sup>17</sup> rhyme, and kennings<sup>18</sup> to facilitate memorization and recall.

Yet, despite raised awareness for the aesthetic, social, and political potential of contemporary performed poetry, academia should include, update, and adapt its concepts of poetry to meet these recent developments. In bridging this critical gap, this text provides a visual and sonic analysis of live poetry in motion by drawing together approaches from diverse disciplines concerned with communicating a deep awareness through oral communication, deep listening, and connecting sound and noise waves. Sonic performances, such as from the sound performance collective Sonic Electric, use the live act as a blank canvas of vital matter by layering expressive oral poetic verse materially into a textural sonic performance event.

The recent (re)surgence of contemporary performance poets such as the Feminist Black Quantum Futurist<sup>19</sup> Moor Mother,<sup>20</sup> an American poet, musician, and activist from the United States, or Kae Tempest,<sup>21</sup> the non-binary British spoken word performer, poet, novelist, and playwright, can be noted as revolutionary by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures. Reacting against mainstream,

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<sup>14</sup> Plastics are a wide range of synthetic or semi-synthetic materials that use polymers as a main ingredient. Their plasticity makes it possible for plastics to be moulded, extruded, or pressed into solid objects of various shapes.

<sup>15</sup> For Patton, this subject is discussed profusely in: Kimberley C. Patton, *The Sea Can Wash Away All Evils: Modern Marine Pollution and the Ancient Cathartic Ocean* (New York: Columbia University 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield and Charles W. Dunn, *The Role of the Poet in Early Societies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Alliteration is a literary device that reflects repetition in two or more nearby words of initial consonant sounds. LiteraryDevices Editors, “Alliteration,” *LiteraryDevices.net*, <https://literarydevices.net/alliteration/>, acc. on June 20, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> The word “kennings” is a figure of speech that etymologically corresponds to the modern verb “to ken” that survives in Scots and English dialects and in general English. It is defined by being beyond one’s ken, “beyond the scope of one’s knowledge”, and in the phonologically altered forms, uncanny, “surreal” or “supernatural”, and canny, “shrewd”, “prudent”. Lexico, “Kenning,” <https://www.lexico.com/definition/Kenning>, acc. on June 20, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Black Quantum Futurism (BQF) is a new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures and/or collapse space-time into a desired future in order to bring about that future’s reality. This vision and practice derive their facets, tenets, and qualities from quantum physics and Black/African cultural traditions of consciousness, time, and space. Black Quantum Futurism, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/about>, acc. on June 21, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Moor Mother, <https://www.moormother.net/new-page>, acc. on June 20, 2021,

<sup>21</sup> Kae Tempest, <http://www.kaetempest.co.uk/>, acc. on June 20, 2021,

print-based poetry, their feminist positions are responding to the classic role of the poet, who recited notable happenings, emotions, and perceptions to an audience.

And while traditional poems utilized standard structures, in part to serve as mnemonic devices, I argue that contemporary performance poetry calls upon experimental electronic sonic rhythms as a means to engage with an audience in the (co)listening experience. I propose that the recent growth of performance poetry on the stage can be attributed to the popularity of “slam”: a self-identified movement dedicated to creating a real-time discourse between performer and audience with the medium of sound. As a method, this inclusive material artform invites all people to participate, whether as a poet, audience member, or (co)performer in the quantum live act.

Thus, this innovative methodology is demonstrated in *GRETA* in the ways that a “plastic poem” exerts strange raucous textural agencies through words to describe textual matter that can change shape as it is verbalized in space-time relations. The message is seductively integral. Most plastic matters are polymers. On a molecular level, polymers are long chains of atoms bonded to each other, and through this invincibility, plastic matter does not biodegrade in the sea.<sup>22</sup> Over time it breaks up into tiny particles. Like sponges, plastic attracts pollutants from surrounding waters, accumulating a highly toxic chemical load before contaminating the marine food chain.<sup>23</sup> In her book *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, American ecocultural theorist Stacy Alaimo alludes to “plastic seduction” as that which dramatizes a “trans-corporeality” in which humans ultimately consume the surprisingly dangerous objects they have produced and discarded.<sup>24</sup> This indeed, I propose, has subliminal material overtones in regard to how the audience is connected to plastic matter and the understanding of material consumption on a molecular level.

The distinct vocal overlay in the sonic recipe yearns for us to listen deeply and attentively, because “it’s all about plastic.” This is done by inviting the listening public to engage in how our bodies are immediately entangled with plastic matter, which has its own “thing power.” This fluvial-like verse echoes the timbre of the artwork that compulsively apprehends the resonant idea that there is no separation between us and plastic – that being in a sea of plastic refuse, of industrial landfills, plastic bags, and embodying fabric softener containers – is an encounter with objects that are not

<sup>22</sup> In addition, chemicals added to plastics are absorbed by human bodies. Some of these compounds have been found to alter hormones or have other potential human health effects. Plastic debris, laced with chemicals and often ingested by marine animals, can injure or poison wildlife. Richard C. Thompson, Charles J. Moore, Frederick S. vom Saal, and Shanna H. Swan, “Plastics, the environment and human health: current consensus and future trends,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences* 364 (1526): 2153–66.

<sup>23</sup> Katrin Peters, “Plastic Seduction,” YouTube video, 0:0:48, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4JvMwem7m c&list=UUBplShXI\\_KHhwUdup\\_yHoVg&index=7&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4JvMwem7m c&list=UUBplShXI_KHhwUdup_yHoVg&index=7&feature=plcp), acc. on March 29, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> According to Stacy Alaimo, “the importance of transcorporeality in the Anthropocene is an alternative to human exceptionalism upon the inert, external matter of the world.” Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. Examples from both science and culture illustrate the environmental concerns of this journal paper. The theme of water as an example of transcorporeality and a burning ecological issue is taken up, touching upon creating an acoustic ecology and saving the natural world.



separate entities but are simultaneously material, discursive, economic, ecological, and biopolitical in multifarious relations. Contemporary philosopher and feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti writes, “The proper subject of the humanities is not man – the proper subject is the vital matter that constitutes the core of both subjectivity and its planetary and cosmic relations.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The Currency of Voice

In *GRETA*, this relational field resonates with a seductive winding instrumental electric guitar song line that occupies and amplifies a nominal course in the sonic recipe as becoming or awakening of the more-than-human hydra snake that is moving smoothly with a sinuous-like path in the heat of the summer.<sup>26</sup> Through the amplification of voice matter<sup>27</sup> that travels with, over, and through sonic textures, the foreign agencies of “the ordinary stuff” of our lives is captured.<sup>28</sup> Once more, Alaimo proposes that the material self cannot be disentangled from “networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantially as a new materialist and posthumanist sense of the human as perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments.”<sup>29</sup>

*GRETA* seeks to reshape the flows of material agency into a sonic, anthropomorphic, thick aquatic soup where nature calls us by stirring it with a kitchen ladle. The sonic flow is brightly resonant and then quickly reverses its course in a dynamic “decrescendo”<sup>30</sup> as ecological disconnect fails us in its sonic dissonance.<sup>31</sup> Once fully stirred and in constant motion as water is, it implicates its participants into an ebbing, fluvial flow through quantum time, space, and mattering. The kitchen tools held by the participants (as an extension of the self) swirl to amplify the timbre brightly and intra-actively.<sup>32</sup>

The “sonic recipe” of this electronic aquatic storytelling (as a live feed) rises and falls in its sonic dynamics in ebbs and flows as much as technology subverts and perverts the noisy soup. The participants sound out their kitchen tools in a sonic

<sup>25</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Hoboken, NJ: Polity; 2013), 171.

<sup>26</sup> Hydra (as in “trouble”) n.: trouble that cannot be overcome by a single effort because of its many aspects or its persistent and pervasive quality. Lexico. “Hydra,” <https://www.lexico.com/definition/hydra>, acc. on March 29, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Norie Neumark, *Voice Tracks. Attuning to Voice in Media and the Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Stacy Alaimo, “Thinking as the Stuff of the World,” *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies* 1 (2014): 13–21.

<sup>29</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 112.

<sup>30</sup> Decrescendo: getting softer and not very loud in musical notation, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decrescendo>, acc. on March 29, 2021

<sup>31</sup> Sonic dissonance (presence of beating or roughness in a sound) is associated with the inner ear’s inability to fully resolve spectral components with excitation patterns whose critical bands overlap.

<sup>32</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

field, magnifying electronic forces and disrupting the human–non-human normative world (as in Figure 2).

### 3.2 Trouble at Sea

Deep listening is also termed “somatic listening” by the late American composer and music theorist Pauline Oliveros, who observed that its practice is a commitment to cultivating receptivity through the body with an emphasis on the inclusiveness of performing music.<sup>33</sup> In the company of others, this approach prepares a participant foremost to listen in synchronicity with others in performance, relational to the whole apparatus of “doing-cooking” as an unfolding immanent process.<sup>34</sup> Music theorist Sharon Stewart writes that “These are gut reactions of the body where the body listens while performing real-time improvisations in electronic sound-processing environments.”<sup>35</sup>

In these zones of sonic movement, vibrating matter, and intra-actional dynamics, the deep listening zones of deviating, differentiating, relinquishing, assembling, and becoming punctuates how matter comes to matter. This place of transit, where all have contributed to plastic and microplastic pollution, sonic pollution, climate change, ocean acidification, marine extinction, and ecosystem collapse, submerge the participants of a work such as *GRETA* in the aqueous acousmatic mix and process of speculative storytelling. The virtual becomes the actual in the tension of the performative in-between (intra-actions). The fluid dynamics of sounding out reflect “space-timemattering” – or how intra-actions emerge in space/time/matter relations with forces within the entanglement of differential relations.<sup>36</sup> – where the body’s sensory system can be suggested as biologically connected (as in Figure 3).

The inner ear is intra-reacting, heightened in this affected state. It is as if the inner ear is channeling, forging a deep connection to the sonic matter, stimulating the listening activity through the mind-body relationship. Propositionally, the vibrating matter becomes a conceptual material encounter of becoming with or turning away of the very forces that threaten us. These prepersonal intensities can be perceived as how we understand affective matter since we are entangled in the complexity of cognitive experience and sonic entanglement, as both matter and meaning. *GRETA* becomes a spectrum of sonic patterning, forming a speculative fabulation.<sup>37</sup> A story, then, a fabulation; but also, an activation of deep listening with our bodies and a propositional blueprint for acoustic ecology.

<sup>33</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 138–57.

<sup>34</sup> “Doing-Cooking” is a term coined by Michel De Certeau. Cf. Michael De Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Sharon Stewart, “Listening to Deep Listening: Reflection on the 1988 Recording and the Lifework of Pauline Oliveros,” *Journal of Sonic Studies* 2 (2012): 2.

<sup>36</sup> Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 801–31.

<sup>37</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “Speculative fabulations for technoculture’s generations: Taking care of unexpected country,” in *The Multispecies Salon*, ed. by Eben Kirksey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 242–62.

#### 4. We Are Made of Water and Plastic Matters

Sound performance art can penetrate us as water surrounds us, and, as we are made of water, create speculative complicity for feeling out other eco-topical ways of nurturing this planet.<sup>38</sup> A sonic performance artwork can (re)configure and (re)wire the flow between us and what is significant here: to create a strategic move of noisy crescendos of output and input that modulates the message, or sonic recipe, of a damaged planet – connecting to what is plastic matter. With the help of technology, the plastic matter is subverted and perverted in its sonic articulation through sonic textures and a recorded monologue of voice, not lost in its molecular substance but moving with and through the mind-body.

Our aqueous connection to the sea nourishes, protects, letting us know of its cosmic relations through its weather variations, fluctuating air and water temperature, the varying spectrum of colors and, most significantly, its infinite realm of sonic textures lapping at our ears or by its sonic fury of weather patterns. The physicality of incoming tidal waves, frothy sea foam, are the matter of sound patterns that affect us with their tempo and enter (vibrate) our ears. In a sonic relation, these rhythmic flows influence how we are deeply connected to the sea through their sonic relations – through speed, rate, thickness, duration, mixture, contamination, and all the forces; energies of the natural environment that elevate our innate feeling, affecting our minds, moods like runners who listen to headphone music to run further, longer, and faster in these flows of “felt materiality.”<sup>39</sup>

I go to the sea often and I wonder about how the material of sound intra-acts with our aqueous understanding between humans and non-humans; the power and forces of planet Earth participating in all these seductive tidal flows. For me, a sense of becoming and attuning to the sonic relations of transformation, of becoming with is part of this participation. Just as the tide moves us, or the estuaries know to bring the salmon into the Canadian rivers to lay their eggs,<sup>40</sup> something is happening, and in these liminal spaces, I am deep listening more than ever. How water entangles our bodies is akin to how Canadian Feminist Scholar, Astrida Neimanis describes how a becoming of water “ebbing, fluvial, dripping, coursing, traversing time and space, pooling as both matter and meaning” can also be entangled in sonic relations – patterning and carving a sonic conduit as a mode of connection to a damaged planet.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Astrida Neimanis, “Hydrofeminism: Or, on becoming a body of water,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, ed. by Henriette Gunkel, Nigianni Chrysanthi, and Fanny Söderbäck (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 95–115.

<sup>39</sup> Kontturi, *Ways of Following: Art, Materiality, Collaboration*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> This approach is discussed in the audio book: Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* [United States]: Tantor Audio, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Neimanis, “Hydrofeminism: Or, on becoming a body of water,” 1.

## 4.1 Performing Technologies of an Acoustic Ecology

In this integral approach to active listening as a form of Plastic Activism, *GRETA* proposes to consider technology as vital in relation to acoustic ecologies as a processual working methodology to tell a story through the currents, waves, turbulent forces, and underlying tensions of water. This “agency” is a seascape filled with plastic material matter, moving mobile objects and voyaging subjects through intra-actions in time and space. As Swiss artist, writer, and sound studies researcher Salomé Voegelin notes, “Technologies of sound produce, compose, organize and playback invisible material.”<sup>42</sup> I argue that this possibility provides the fluidics, rhythms, timbres, cycles, mobilities, flows, and depths of aqueous matter as the matter for contemporary performances. What is possible is that sound performances can consider the sea as a sensory-motor or starting point unfolding as a co-active producer of sonic intra-actions with the aqueous matter.

Voegelin proposes that sound art is a genre that is defined by the technological and conceptual possibility of this displacement. This possibility enables a collective performative model to act or sound out a particular identity within a particular relationship and the potentiality between forces, human or natural. Within that connection, our auditory imagination and creative impulses are composed and conceptually act out our relationship to the in-between – of what causes the sound material and what floats in-between. The intra-actions of subjectivity in the participation of the performer and the possibilities of the sounding body in relation to using technologies is a techno-cultural relationship, as Voegelin conceptualizes, between space, time, and objects intra-acting with sonic phenomena (as in Figures 4 and 5).

There are, in addition, a myriad of ways to create a different sense of material and of self through these invaluable processes in relation to the possibilities of technology as a platform to trigger a different sense of the world, and becoming with the sonic recipe, as we drift into our posthuman techno future. *GRETA* comes at you with a political philosophical sense of what is possible within the context of sound art and these connections affect not only the listener but also the sound artist. As Neimanis points out: “We live in watery commons.”<sup>43</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In homage to the activist work of Greta Thunberg, *GRETA//A PLASTIC POEM* praises and echoes her repeated impassioned messages that reverberate around the world, presenting realities that many refuse, or have refused, to acknowledge. The sonic message in a bottle is that we are living on a very damaged planet. The recurring sonic breaks of noise and then silence intra-act in *GRETA* and alert us to an abrupt

<sup>42</sup> Voegelin Salomé, “Technologies of sound art. Techno-cultural occurrences,” in *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, ed. by Bull Michael (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 202.

<sup>43</sup> Neimanis, “Hydrofeminism: Or, on becoming a body of water.”

change in the tone or register of the voice that is sounding out. Thus, the resonant crackling plastic matter being handled by the participant performer expands and dramatizes their voice and the sonic encounter into a form of noisy communication articulated in a Plastic Activist tone.

The sonic recipe builds as bodies are activated and sonic resonances emerge from the live participatory enactment. Voegelin describes performative action as a techno-body truth that is not realized by technology but the practice and coincidence of the body and the machine: the voice and technology that meet in the experience of expansion of what things are, how they belong together, and where they belong.<sup>44</sup> On an exhausted planet, the entanglement of sound art, technology, and voice manifest into an environmental quantum sonic futurism or new materialist “slam.” What is being created in the live act proposes a rupture – activating an agential cut into the future by inserting this matter.<sup>45</sup> It is in this moment of “potential” that sound and somatic movement in the technological process are (re)framing, floating future feminist quantum possibilities.<sup>46</sup>

While Alaimo asks us to be aware of what is now brutally exposed in a plastic sea and our physical bodies, Oliveros points us to becoming with a dynamic deep listening environment for expanding on the poetics between bodies, words, and situations. Both affirmations activate a sensory canvas for change, an open sonic apparatus, set as an alternative acoustic ecology rising up against our environmental disconnect to satirize humanity; but also, to expand inherently, to go beyond our capabilities. This paper integrates and recognizes that we need to speak louder and develop palpable extensions of using sound matter as an acoustic message for the future of the human species.

And what if we really want to make progress on the climate front and in our plastic seas? Perhaps unsurprisingly, people respond poorly to hopeless depictions of catastrophe, but I would argue, do respond to music or sound affirmatively. In other words, doom and gloom do not a movement make. It is significant to conclude that an acoustic ecology is one that encourages self-care alongside activism, that works intentionally to foster excitement for the posthuman future we desire. We all need healing, and could it be that the medium of sound provides healing? Hope is a right we must protect as we navigate the climate threat, and we would do well to listen to sound collectively, as we cohabitate in the path of the collapse of our eco-systems.

As feminist materialist thinking proposes, our response to the flows of global power can be followed with a trans-species, trans-corporeal, and transgressive approach. This damaged planet will undergo a further fundamental change in our post-human future – glaciers will melt, sea levels will rise, and the acidity of seawater will increase more than it has in the last 50 million years. These changes will affect all life

<sup>44</sup> Voegelin, “Technologies of sound art. Techno-cultural occurrences,” 202.

<sup>45</sup> Karen Barad, “Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart,” *Parallax* 20, 3 (2014): 168–87.

<sup>46</sup> Annette Arlander, “Agential cuts and performance as research,” in *Performance as Research: Knowledge, methods, impact*, ed. by Annette Arlander, Bruce Barton, Melanie Deyer-Lude, and Ben Spatz (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 133–51.

on Earth – within the oceans and beyond – straining ecosystems, shifting biological patterns, and creating dire challenges for future generations of humanity. We should all listen, deeply.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 1:** Ink Drawing by Jesper Hjorth, 11 years old. ©Larissa Hjorth. (2021)



**Figure 2:** “Sonic Electric”, Sound and Performance Art Collective. The Make-It-Up Club, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. ©Juliana España Keller (2019)

<sup>47</sup> Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation.”



**Figure 3:** “Sonic Electric”, Sound and Performance Art Collective. The Make-It-Up Club, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. ©Juliana España Keller (2019)



**Figure 4:** “Sonic Electric”, Sound and Performance Art Collective. The Make-It-Up Club, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. ©Juliana España Keller (2019)



**Figure 5:** “Sonic Electric”, Sound and Performance Art Collective. The Make-It-Up Club, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. ©Juliana España Keller (2019)

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Article received: April 25, 2021

Article accepted: June 21, 2021

Original scholarly paper