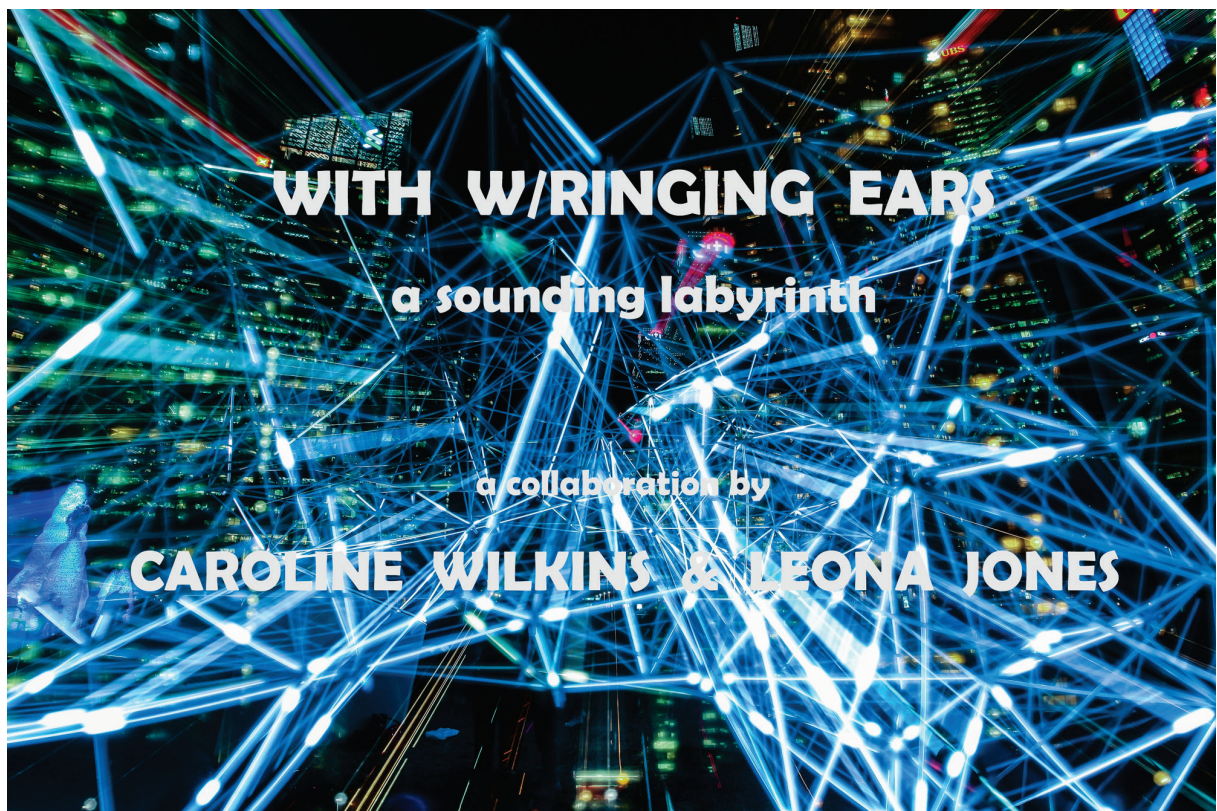
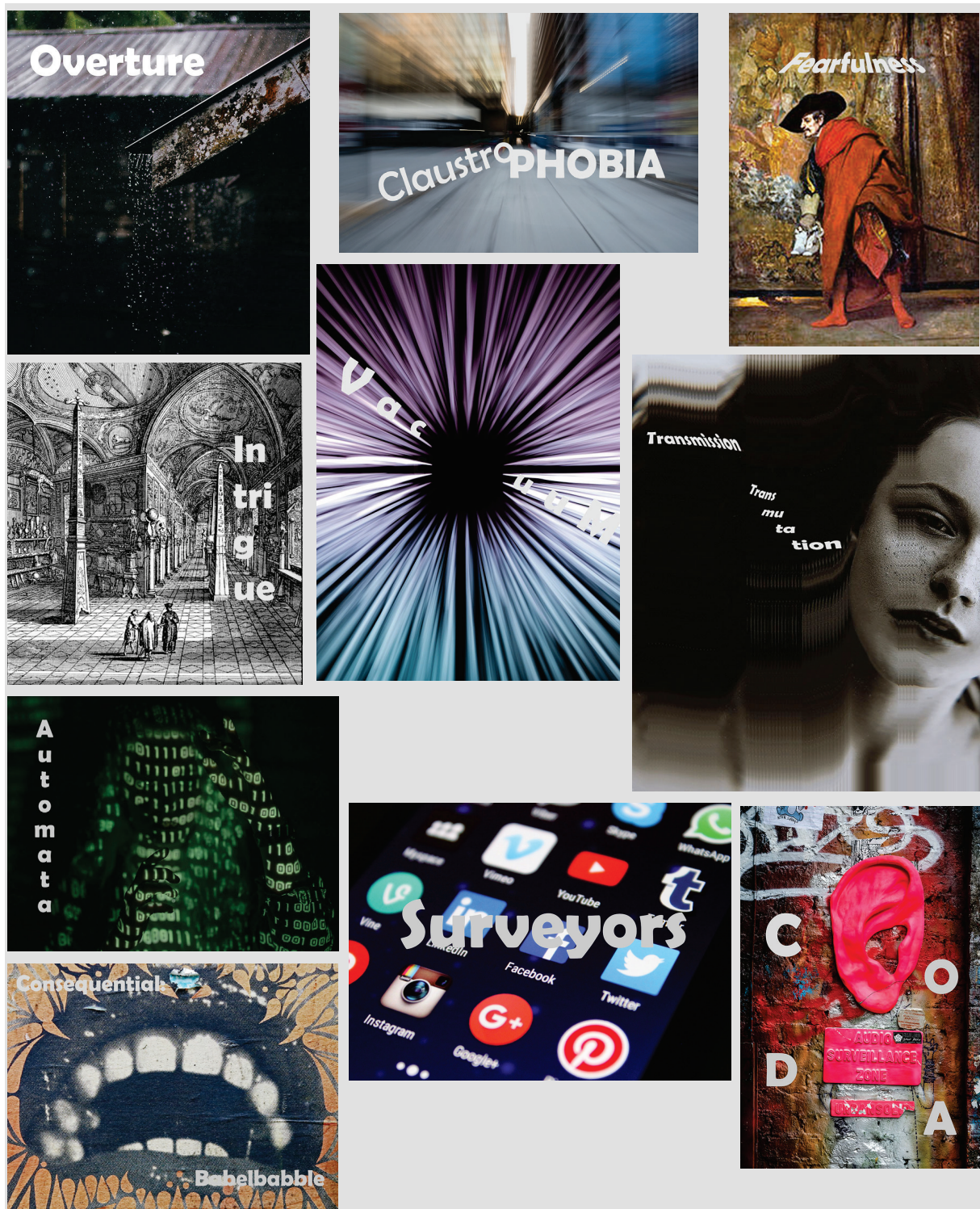




PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY





Listen: <https://performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/350/465>

(for original script see Wilkins [2016])

> Overture <

Drip drip drop drop

Eaves drip drip drip drop er eaves drop er eavesdropper eavesdropper eavesdropper
eavesdropper eavesdropper eavesdropper eavesdropper Eavesdroppers eavesdroppers

> Claustrophobia <

remember contain the memory fear hatred anxiety excitement snatch breath taste
space leave trace like sweat-heat chill-touch cling to skin shiver-in drip-in conspiracy
troubling - seduction words drop-in words babbling space soak fibres vibrate vacuum
words words - spike attack confound moments of deadly turbulence

> Fearfulness <

screens of protection words seep through reassuring presence damp breath in / chilly
musty breathe in dank words on the floor waiting scraps of knowledge moist under
the table hide inside skin fine layers keep mask of pretence

> *Intrigue* <

can't hear speak up fear discovery enjoy provoking split in two at that moment hear
echoes of conversations sound-in confine-in space nerve-racking double role no
spontaneous gesture no spoils of gossip intrigue-in

> *Vacuum* <

mouth - an echo chamber of thoughts ears - bounce off inner walls of involuntary presence a
messenger a medium lined up along a double role one long tunnel boring through
cavities spiralling to a wall

< *Transmission* > < *Transmutation* >

voices approach listen nearer spring into speech transmit share thoughts pass on each
successive perhaps pass on caught in the act anonymous voices powerless victims
omnipotent beings carrying messages - a construction complex mechanisms of acoustics
mathematics and optics - illusions - natural magic - alchemy

< *Automata* >

creations of imagination speak and give power enormous creatures and miniature
figurines defy time in endless circles of cycles of now present helpless to intervene restless
spirits plagued by apparitions

< Surveyors >

eavesdroppers listening to twists and turns lies and intrigues speak catch in time and
action listen from the vantage point of beyond lend an ear idly anonymously
claustrophobically all-listening heads one after another one row after another row after
row capture - with a word

< Consequential > < Babelbabble >

let loose a sigh witnesses resound in response a cry a laugh a sharp breath of anticipation
feelings thoughts eyes ears and voices heavily-laden spaces that separate quietly and
rapidly captured in webs of consequences disputing truth loudly secret knowledge a double
role tempers flare a noise a shout a thin mask of doubled material incessant talk noisy
vast interjections at full volume interspersed a surrounding babble lowered voices
lowered tones confusion secretive

< Coda >

audiences doubling as Eavesdroppers controlling through utterances parts in the chorus
listen-in attentively thoughts in minds' ears

Contextualisation

In the fast-changing world of social media, it is imperative to have a text that changes with the times. (Mosco 2019)

With W/Ringing Ears emerges from *The Panacousticon*, a performative response in the form of a script by Caroline Wilkins (2016) to an essay by Freddie Rokem (2015) on eavesdropping in classical theatre. Rokem took as his point of departure eavesdropping scenes from plays, coupling them with philosophical discourse. This moment of convergence between philosophy and performance practice prompted Wilkins's response with regard to an act that occupies an acoustic space, one that deliberately includes a figurative phrase within its title. A natural consequence of the script manifested itself during 2020 in the form of vocal recordings, which then led co-authors Wilkins and Jones to explore non-narrative ways of presenting the spoken word as an audio equivalent to digital literature. Thematically, this method of working rebounds on the subject matter itself, eavesdropping being a practice that deals with a chain of hearsay passed from one source to the next and modified each time, something that has now evolved into a highly sophisticated means of (mis-) information.

Digital literature is a relatively new medium, one in which literature is defined in the broadest way possible (Electronic Literature Organization 2021; see also Rowberry 2018, Rinehart 2006). The boundaries of its methodological approach are porous, overlapping with those of established literature, cinema, visual art, poetry, video games to mention but a few. There's no standard form, no current canon, no criteria apart from digital technology being used to both create, present and interact with the work. All this is its strength and its difficulty. Now seems a fine opportunity to embrace the experimental and develop an audio work that follows such principles. Digital literature fragments words, hurls them around cyberspace as a succession of noughts and ones, undermines the expected (and fictional) linearity. We wanted to treat spoken word in the same way and create a fluid audio montage in the head of the listener. Navigation is open and performative; (w)reader becomes collaborator. Choosing a personal path via hyperlinks through the fragment headings offered mirrors the meandering effort needed during practice research enquiries. We're living in exciting/fearful times. Times to question ways of doing and being. Times to find different possibilities, try things out, discover what happens.

Parallel thematic and formal references have also occurred in recent years. In 2008 an ongoing investigation into contemporary forms of eavesdropping was held at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Australia (2018). It took the same historical starting point as Wilkins's original representation, namely an acoustic surveillance system invented by Athanasius Kircher in the 1600s, the purpose of which was to 'spy' on conversations and verbal intrigues taking place within the public space of the court. Placed in a contemporary context of audio surveillance by means of digital devices, the concerns of curators Joel Stern and James Parker reflect on the politico-legal problems of such a widely-practiced action that has continued well into our century. Historically speaking it became a minor public order offence in Great Britain during the 1700s.

A further reference for this work emerges in the form of a arts-based practice initiated by Rebecca Collins and Joanna Linsley entitled *Stolen Voices* (Collins and Linsley 2019a, 2019b). The project asks a fundamental question, one that also reflects Wilkins and Jones' starting point: 'What is the relationship between a listener and what is heard?' Whilst Collins and Linsley's *Stolen Voices* explores an expanded eavesdropping practice to investigate a fictional unknown event, our questions form the basis of an abstract soundscape, one that examines the lazy binary of active speaking and passive listening.

Listening is now regarded as an art form in itself, a burgeoning field within and beyond sound art, with practitioners such as Pauline Oliveros, Hildegard Westerkamp, Lawrence Abu Hamdan and the collaborative group *Ultra-red*, and researchers such as Angus Carlyle, Pia Palme and Salome Voegelin exemplifying the diversity within this expanding field. Listening itself is being understood as a holistic act, a back and forth between listeners, rebounding in the wider sociopolitical context. The global reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic involved a rush on-line, substituting so much previously gained from live gatherings and personal experience. The pressure has been on to virtually listen to and watch each other even more than previously, foregrounding surveillance, the corporate, divisions and connections. How can an individual 'wring out' their ears in order to avoid being rendered inert by overload?

In *With W/Ringing Ears* two voices (uttering speech and using extended vocal technique) are heard intermediating between a received world of mechanical sonic reproduction and that of personal utterances based on direct experience. (The work intends framing our twenty-first century Infostorm as worldwide mass overt and covert 'eavesdroppings'—defined as acts that occupy an acoustic space of sorts.) These soundscapes are sculpted from a collaborative text in which language and form take different shapes. Acts of thinking out loud take place, entering into direct confrontation with what is simultaneously being heard and said. This un/manipulated material is mixed to create colour and texture, sense and non-sense. Voices rebound around a labyrinth of sound, creating a complex series of abstract patterns that goes beyond syntactical meaning and enters into a compressed space of vertical time. Shifting back and forth between the tragic-comic aspects of eavesdropping, *With W/Ringing Ears* brings fictive protagonists together as characters that rebound from each others' dramaturgical positions. Caught in this multitude of dialogues that fire back and forth, a potential live audience becomes witness—as an additional eavesdropper—to the various scenarios, creating a version of events that depends both on location and people's own personal experience.

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Biographies

Leona Jones

An inter-disciplinary practitioner centred on Word/Sound as event/performance, Leona uses spatiality, audio and field recordings as well as text as she seeks to highlight physicality, location and context, considering them crucial to inter-relationships between maker/word/world. Her commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, research and intuition means she questions definitions, unnoticed boundaries and assumptions. Leona gained a Masters in Performance Writing from Dartington/Falmouth University, and her work has been supported by Arts Council UK as well as individual organisations and galleries. [Soundcloud](#).

Caroline Wilkins

Independent Composer/Performer/Researcher Dr. Caroline Wilkins completed a practice-based PhD in Sound Theatre at Brunel University in 2012. She has presented at international conferences including ARTECH (Guimares), IFTR Congress (Munich), Sibelius Academy (Helsinki) and Caen University (Normandy). Publications online and in journals include *Perspectives of New Music* (2013), *Studies in Musical Theatre / International Journal of the Performing Arts & Digital Media / Journal of Interdisciplinary Vocal Studies* (2012-18) with Intellect Books, and *Performance Philosophy* 2 (1) (2016). She presented at the Performance Philosophy Biennial Conference 2019, Amsterdam, in conjunction with artist Leona Jones. <http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/wilkins-caroline>

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