Passages: Luke Fowler, Florian Hecker, Susan Philipsz
16.02.19–21.04.19

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Curated by Stephen Cleland

Passages features installations by Susan Philipsz (Scotland), Luke Fowler (Scotland) and Florian Hecker (Germany). The exhibition seeks to explore the potential of sound to both articulate space and convey meaning. The artists have been brought together because each, in distinct ways, selectively foregrounds and reflects upon the history of electronic and experimental music as it evolved through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The title 'Passages' points to a number of threads that run between these artists' diverse practices. In the context of sound, it refers to musical progression – a succession of notes or sounds that may be experienced in isolation or as part of a larger whole. It also infers the narrow configurations of spaces that make up Adam Art Gallery's physical architecture. A total of 24 channels of sound have been projected into these timber, concrete, plasterboard and rubber-clad surfaces, and sound-absorbent materials added, to exploit the dynamic potential for sound to reverberate, reflect and be manipulated. Finally, each of these artists is concerned with not only progressing their own work but with indexing a composer of the past. 'Passage' therefore evokes an elegiac association refering to the transition from life to death. These artists locate their work in the material residues and score-based fragments that a composer leaves behind.

In distinct ways, each artist in *Passages* builds upon the ambitions of other progressive composers. In doing so, the exhibition uniquely traverses radical turns in musical composition, touchstone moments in the twentieth century such as the development of serial or atonal music, innovations brought about by electroacoustic composers, advances in mathematically produced compositions, and the exploration of multi-channel sound environments. Each artist openly embraces dissonant ruptures: Philipsz applies twelve-tone music to an early ecological film; Fowler responds to the daring compositional structures of post-Cagean music and electroacoustic composition; Hecker situates us within a complex web of intense computer-generated sound.

In sympathy with these ambitions, the exhibition has been conceived as an integrated triad of time-based installations, with each artist's work occupying a single level of the building. Programmed to play episodically to create a chain of sonic and moving-image events that activate the Adam's architecture, the installation of the works produces a succession of abrupt and at times jarring auditory experiences. This reveals something about the materiality of sound and its sculptural potential to articulate space.

In writing the title *Passages: Luke Fowler, Florian Hecker, Susan Philipsz* as a single sentence, I set out to indicate a flow from one artist to the next. Ordered on the page by the conventions of alphabetical placement, they appear as a progression of linguistic signifiers. But in actual space, their locations demand a different sequence, one that follows our passage through the gallery's various levels. This is the order in which I now discuss each work.

Working from top to bottom, we first encounter German-born artist Florian Hecker's installation. At the Level 3 entrance we are met with a constellation of speakers and monochrome sound-absorbing wall panels, which continue into the long Upper Chartwell Gallery. Within this suspended architecture of loudspeakers and acoustic panels Hecker distributes his computer-generated spatial compositions, deploying a range of sonic reverberations in order to activate the listening process and engage the audience's auditory experience.

While seemingly operating as a single installation, this nine-channel arrangement actually comprises three separate three-channel compositions of the same duration. The works began as *Formulation* (2015), originally produced for the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin in 2015. The three 'cloned' compositions presented here enact a series of resynthesized pieces from this initial artwork, which has undergone specific processes of analysis and resynthesis hinted at in Hecker's titles; *Formulation DBM Self* (2015–2017); *Formulation as Texture [hcross]* (2017); and *Formulation Chim III* (2017). Working with a range of practitioners, Hecker takes an eclectic array of synthetically produced sounds through a process of synthesising one composition into another according to time-based scripts. These procedures introduce gradations and scales, create variances in their very sonic matter and timbre, and filter the material through a web of different resolutions. Played back simultaneously as a single installation, we receive constant registers of the source composition, yet each of these recognisable tones are simultaneously offset by marked differences in their execution. The effect of collating and synchronising this material to the minutest detail is that each sound has a distinct material register. While completely artificial, at times the sounds have an anthropomorphic quality that seems to result from these layered transformations. By not diluting this process and by panning or mixing between different instances of these sounds, each speaker 'represents an individual voice; like frogs sitting at the edge of a pond or the breathing of aquatic animals.'[1]

Hecker self-consciously locates his concerns between art and the legacies of mid-twentieth century electroacoustic music. Within the visual arts, his floating panels recall Hèlio Oiticica's suspended paintings from the 1960s and – in their serial repetition – the simple materials and procedures favoured by minimalists. These panels situate us inside the work: we are not merely passive observers but active agents within the composition. Hecker's works are equally informed by early innovators of electronic music, such as composer and architect Iannis Xenakis, from whom Hecker has directly adapted algorithms in order to continue the former composer's pioneering work with mathematically-generated compositions. Hecker employs a similarly rigid application of system-generated sounds, allowing data to form its own aesthetic register. In each composition, like minimalism's similarly strict self-imposed restrictions, Hecker creates enough space for the output to be perfunctory – to simply express his system of making.

Hecker's suspended architecture of loudspeakers, cables and acoustic panels delineate a series of auditory environments which allow for distinct overlaps between the works. As we walk between these spaces we encounter sound which is directed towards both the panels and the surrounding room, creating dynamic situations for blending mono-directional, ambient and reflected sounds. In turn, Hecker's intention is for us to perform our own live edit as we navigate the spaces. This concentrated experience of sound is articulated in such a way our very presence affects the acoustics; this sequence cannot be experienced by two people in the same way.

Luke Fowler: Which piece is this?

Christian Wolfe: This is from Miscellaneous Collection, which are pieces which are dedicated – they are written for other people – let's say they are tributes. This one's for Alvin Lucier…

As we descend the first flight of stairs to Level 2 Luke Fowler's *For Christian* (2016) commences with a sequence of blank footage and a recording of a brief dialogue between Fowler and the composer Christian Wolff. Immediately following this conversation Wolff is heard skillfully performing his solo piano piece. As the music begins Fowler initiates a sequence of hand-held footage capturing scenes at the composer's farm in Vermont – a flock of sheep, a curious donkey and picturesque scenes of Wolff's house nestled amongst paddocks and blossoming trees swaying

in the wind. From the outset Fowler seems remarkably present, not only through the audio dialogue, but because of the distinct bodily feel of the camera's movements. Filmed with an analogue 16mm Bolex, favoured by filmmakers operating in the British Free Cinema movement, the mobility this camera affords allows Fowler to make swift downward gestures, which communicate like a body falling into the grass. As we enter Wolff's house and listen to the composer describe his compositions, the camera meanders within the living spaces, lingering on books and hand-written scores with an intense curiosity. In some scenes, Fowler himself is captured as a reflection in a window – a frame which would surely be left on the cutting room floor of a 'serious' documentary. But for the artist such traces of his presence drive home a philosophy of film making which stresses that 'behind every portrait is a self portrait'.[2] His work actively blurs the roles of subject and artist, exploring by visual means their actual and conceptual entanglement.

Christian Wolff was a member of the New York School. Initially receiving a short series of lessons from John Cage, he was quickly embraced by the composer's inner circle: composers Earle Brown and Morton Feldman, pianist David Tudor, and the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. However, unlike Cage, Wolff was neither prolific nor a self-promoter. As a result, when compared to these giants of twentieth-century experimentation, his music remains largely unknown. As Wolff deftly discusses a variety of innovative compositional methodologies ranging, in Fowler's words, 'from writing text scores for non-musicians, to indeterminacy, cueing, and his turn in the 1970s to writing pieces with a consciously progressive content'[3], it becomes clear that Fowler's focus suggests Wolff's place in the canon requires revision.

Turning left into the Kirk Gallery, Fowler's film *Electro-Pythagorus: A Portrait of Martin Barlett* plays on a continuous loop. Bartlett (1939–1993) was a proudly gay composer and pioneer of electronic music, who, like Wolff, remains a marginal figure in the world of experimental music, dying early of AIDS related complications. Bartlett exerted a significant influence on the art and music scenes in Canada both as a composer and by co-founding the Electronic Music Studio at Simon Fraser University and the Western Front, Canada's longest running artist-run initiative.

In a manner recalling his earlier films based on psychiatrist R.D. Laing and composer Cornelius Cardew, Fowler produced *Electro-Pythagorus* long after the composer's passing. The film draws from a range of archival material, including letters read aloud by Bartlett's friends and digitised reel-to-

reel compositions, many of which are played for the first time since the original one-off live performances. These are supplemented by Fowler's own footage recorded some years later in Bartlett's lived environment. The film includes curmudgeonly letters to Bristol-Myers, a pharmaceutical company, expressing the debilitating side effects of the drugs prescribed to treat his illness, and intimate letters where the composer expresses his fascination with the music and gay subcultures of Indonesia. Like *For Christian*, Fowler's portrait of Bartlett seems to narrate his own learning, charting a diaristic map of his deepening insights into the composer's life. Yet, like the passages of music experienced within his film, our perspective is always partial. Fowler is willing to sacrifice narrative cohesion in favour of an expressive effort to cross the thresholds of film and music.

The life and growth of the glacier depend on the smallest changes of annual temperature. All the glacier's icecaps, billions of frozen tonnes, rest on delicate shifts of wind and climate.
—White Flood, 1940 [4]

At the base of the building on Level 1, we encounter a large screen with 12 speakers lining the two sides of the room. Susan Philipsz' *White Flood* (2019) continues her exploration of the legacy of German-Jewish composer Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) in a new installation shown for the first time here. This uses footage from the little-known 1940 documentary film of the same title for which Eisler wrote the score.

White Flood is a short documentary originally made in 1940. Produced by the American film collective Frontier Films, a group of left-wing film makers based in New York in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it features a series of icescapes filmed across Alaska. Delving deep into geologic time, the original 14-minute black and white film explores the formation of icescapes and their effect on the environment. A particular focus is an extraordinary series of glaciers and the film narrates their journey from their conception during the ice age to their incremental movement across land over vast timescales, and finally to their disintegration as they meet and collapse into the ocean. The voiceover originally accompanying the work highlights the impact these melting glaciers can have on our environment, particularly on sea water levels. Though originally viewed as an apolitical nature film, *White Flood* is clearly prototypical of ecological film, a genre of documentary that only gained momentum as our awareness of environmental issues became more pressing from the 1970s onwards.

At the time of the making of the film, Hanns Eisler was conducting research, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, into film music at the New School of Social Research in New York. The results of this were eventually circulated in his book *Composing for the Films*, co-written with the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno and published in 1947. *White Flood* appears to have been a key work in his struggle to resolve the 'interrelation of picture, spoken comment and music',[5] which lies at the core of the book. In one instance Eisler stated: 'Three editions of *White Flood* were made, one with the usual tireless narrator, the second with very limited talk, and a third that omitted every spoken syllable and used subtitles. This last version, in my opinion, is the most effective.'[6]

As if to lay bare and extend Eisler's enquiry into the relationship between film and music, Philipsz has gone one step further, removing the subtitles and extending both image and sound into the room. The original footage is projected on a large suspended screen, positioned high enough for us to walk beneath the image and observe its object-like qualities. One of Eisler and Adorno's insights was that, in comparison to the dominance of the image within western culture, comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of sound in feature films. Philipsz' treatment of the sound in relation to the image and the architecture seems sympathetic to Eisler and Adorno's larger research project.

In particular, she treats Eisler's attempt to integrate Arnold Schonberg's twelve tone composition into film music as one of her central subjects. Focusing in on the violinist's contribution to the original score, she re-recorded this instrument's contribution in isolation. This new recording allowed her to single out the twelve tones as individual channels. In the resulting twelve-speaker installation, these individual tones are fragmented and distributed across the speakers within the gallery space. The music has a heightened sense of fragility, with long pauses during the sections where other instruments would have filled the silence.

Philipsz' longstanding interest in Eisler is connected with her ongoing investigation of the connection between music and place. At the time he composed this score, Eisler had fled Nazi Germany and was trying to settle in the US. Soon after this film score was produced he became a victim of US senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist campaign. In 1947 he was the first artist to be blacklisted and brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Deported by the FBI because of his political beliefs, Eisler returned to Europe the following year.

Philipsz' works utilise a passage of music as the connecting tissue between densely layered historical events. Like Fowler, her work seeks out a sonic means to capture less tangible and emotive connections to her subjects' layered biographies. In a manner comparable to Hecker, this is achieved through her decisive strategies to place her listeners at the centre of the piece, through carefully orchestrating the sound across a space in such a way that we are required to complete the loop.

Each of these works open up a passage of time which, as one writer noted, 'make us acutely aware of what cannot be retrieved, or controlled, and how memories move in and out of consciousness.'[7]

—Stephen Cleland

1   Luke Fowler, 'The Technical Sound—On Florian Hecker's Synopsis and the apparatus of Electronic Music.', exhibition guide for *Florian Hecker: Synopsis*, Tramway, Glasgow, 26 May 2017–30 July 2017. https://www.sadiecoles.com/usr/library/documents/florian-hecker/florian_hecker_synopsis.pdf

2   Luke Fowler and Ernst Karel in conversation with Amy Cimini, *Sonic Acts Festival – The Noise of Being*, 26 February 2017 – De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-tmbdL3X2E

3   Luke Fowler, notes for *For Christian*. https://lux.org.uk/work/for-christian

4   *White Flood*, Frontier Films, 1940

5   Hanns Eisler and Theador Adorno, *Komposition fur den Film Suhramp (Composing for the Films)*, 1947, p. 175

6   Ibid. p 175

7   Barbara London, 'Study for Strings', in Susan Philipsz, *You Are Not Alone*, Köln, 2014, p. 206

1 2 3 *Formulation DBM Self*, 2015–2017, 24 minutes, 7 seconds
4 5 6 *Formulation as Texture [hcross]*, 2017, 24 minutes, 20 seconds
7 8 9 *Formulation Chim 111 [hcross]*, 2017, 24 minutes, 20 seconds

Pluriphonic computer-generated sound, loudspeaker system, acoustic panel system

Sound synthesis software design, unless otherwise noted, by Alberto de Campo; texture synthesis algorithm for *Formulation Chim 111 [hcross]* and *Formulation as Texture [hcross]* by Axel Robel and members of the Analysis Synthesis Team, IRCAM, Paris; auditory chimera algorithm for *Formulation Chim 111 [hcross]* by Jayaganesh Swaminathan

Courtesy of the artist, Sadie Coles HQ, London and Galerie Neu, Berlin.
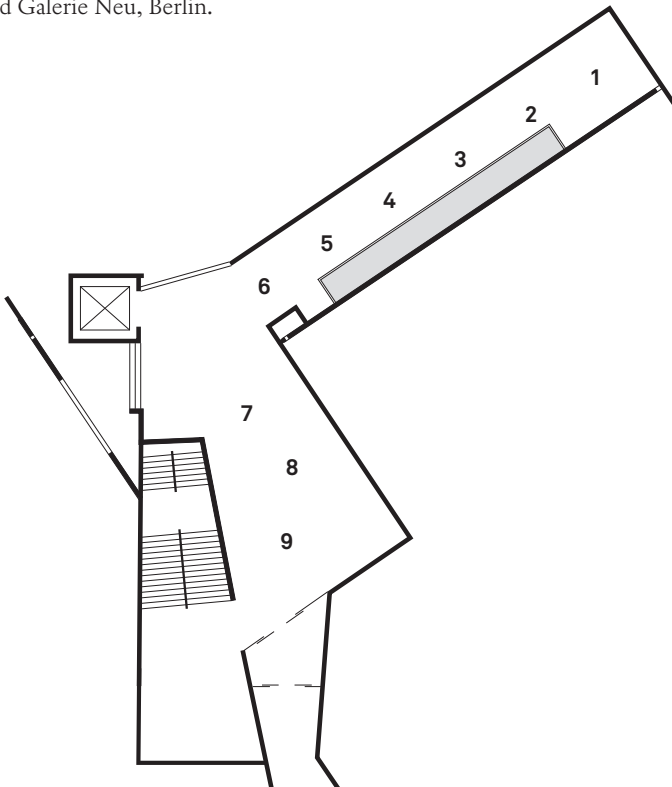
L2   **Luke Fowler**

Stairwell:
For Christian, 2016
16mm film transferred to HD video, 6 minutes, 45 seconds
colour, mono, 4:3

Kirk Gallery:
Electro-Pythagoras (A Portrait of Martin Bartlett), 2017
35mm film transferred to HD video, 45 minutes, colour,
stereo, 4:3.

Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow
and Gisela Capitain Gallery, Cologne.

L1   **Susan Philipsz**

White Flood, 2019
12-channel sound installation and HD film, 15 minutes

Courtesy of the artist, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York
and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin.

Artists

Susan Philipsz (born 1965, Scotland) lives and works in Berlin. Initially trained as a sculptor, Philipsz has developed a practice exploring the psychological and sculptural potential of sound through a series of site-specific installations. Philipsz' work has been the subject of a number of substantial solo-exhibitions including *I See a Darkness*, The Tanks, Tate Modern, London (2018); *A Single Voice*, Baltic, Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2017); *Part File Score*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin (2017); *War Damaged Musical Instruments*, Tate Britain, London (2015); and *Lowlands*, Glasgow International Festival, Glasgow (2010). Group exhibitions include *Divided We Stand*, Busan Biennale, Busan (2018); documenta 13, Kassel (2012); and the *29th Biennale de São Paulo*, São Paulo (2010). Philipsz won the Turner Prize in 2010 for *Lowlands*, the first sound work to be accorded this accolade. Philipsz is represented by Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin.

Florian Hecker (born 1975, Germany) lives and works in Edinburgh, Scotland and Funchal, Portugal. Traversing performance, installation, and publishing, his work engages postwar compositional modernity, audiology, and psychoacoustical knowledge. He studied Computational Linguistics and Psycholinguistics at Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munich and Fine Arts at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna. He has mounted solo-exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2017); Tramway, Glasgow (2017); Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2015); MMK, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2010); IKON Gallery, Birmingham (2010); and Chisenhale Gallery, London (2010). His work was included in documenta 13, Kassel (2012); the 3rd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville, Seville (2008); and Manifesta 7, Trentino, South Tyrol (2008). He has been a Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Edinburgh since 2014. Hecker is represented by Sadie Coles HQ, London and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Luke Fowler has presented solo exhibitions at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2018); Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, The University of Chicago (2016); Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth (2013); Whitechapel, London (with Mark Fell) (2013); Serpentine Gallery, London (2009); and Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich (2008). His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including, *The Inoperative Community*, Raven Row, London (2015); *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*, MOMA, New York (2013); *Younger than Jesus*, New Museum, New York (2009); and *Radical Nature*, Barbican Art Gallery, London (2009). Fowler was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2012 and was the inaugural recipient of the Derek Jarman Award in 2008. He is represented by The Modern Institute, Glasgow.

Public programme

Thursday 14 February, 6pm
Screening: *Pilgrimage from Scattered Points*
followed by a discussion with
Luke Fowler and Mark Williams
City Gallery Wellington

Friday 15 February, 6pm
Passages: Luke Fowler, Florian Hecker, Susan Philipsz
exhibition opening with guest
speaker Dugal McKinnon

Saturday 16 February, 8pm
Luke Fowler presents *Glyphs (Tapes from Martin's Archive)*
By Fowler/Karel (2017)
Adam Concert Room
Gate 7 on Kelburn Parade

Monday 18 February, 6pm
Susan Philipsz' artist talk
Adam Art Gallery

Thursday 28 March, 6pm
passages, a response
Five postgraduate composers
from the New Zealand School of
Music – Te Kōkī (NZSM) present
musical responses to the artworks
on show through a unique 25
channel speaker array. Featuring
Jesse Austin-Stewart, Sharyn Brand,
Marcus Jackson, Jimi Wilson, and
Jack Woodbury

Saturday 13 April, 6pm
Passengers: Amy Jean Barnett, Lucien Johnson, Antonia Barnett-McIntosh, Rob Thorne, Thomas Voyce
Join us for our special closing week
event, featuring five internationally
renowned composers and musicians
performing live. Organised by
Dugal McKinnon and Thomas
Voyce with support from NZSM.
Refreshments served

Lunchtime talks:

Thursday 28 February, 12pm
Curator's tour, with
Stephen Cleland

Thursday 7 March, 12pm
Walter Langelaar discusses
computational aesthetics in
response to the work of
Florian Hecker.

Thursday 14 March, 12pm
Ralph Chapman discusses climate
change, in response to Susan
Philipsz' new work *White Flood*

Thursday 21 March, 1pm
Esteemed composer Michael Norris
discusses the work of composers
Christian Wolff and Hanns Eisler
and the legacies of serial music.

Thursday 28 March, 12.30pm
Berlin-based composer Antonia
Barnett-McIntosh reflects on her
various approaches to writing music in
the context of the works in *Passages*.

Acknowledgements

The Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi is the university art gallery of Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

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Exhibition Officer:	Andy Cummins
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