



Curatorial > INTERRUPTIONS

This section proposes a line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view organised in curatorial series.

With **INTERRUPTIONS** we make the most of the vast musical knowledge of the artists and curators involved in the **Ràdio Web MACBA** project, to create a series of 'breaks' or 'interruptions' in our Curatorial programming. In à-la-carte-music format, our regular curators have carte blanche to create a purely musical experience with only one guiding parameter: the thread that runs through each session must be original and surprising. In *The Beauty in Breathing* Kenneth Goldsmith investigates the artistic use of breath.

Curated by Kenneth Goldsmith

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Kenneth Goldsmith's writing has been called 'some of the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry' by Publishers Weekly. Goldsmith is the author of ten books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive **UbuWeb**, and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which was the basis for an opera, *Trans-Warhol*, that premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. An hour-long documentary on his work, *Sucking on Words* premiered at the British Library in 2007. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. He held the The Anschutz Distinguished Fellow Professorship in American Studies at Princeton University for 2009-10 and received the Quartz Electronic Music Award in Paris in 2009. In 2011, he co-edited, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* and published a book essays, *Uncreative Writing*.
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INTERRUPTIONS #7

The Beauty in Breathing

The mix presented here investigates the artistic use of breath.

01. Summary

The world's biggest collector of text-based art is a doctor in Miami Beach named Marvin Sackner. He was trained as a cardiologist and made his fortune by inventing a heart valve, which permitted him to first accrue a vast collection of Russian Futurist works and then later to expand into visual and concrete poetry. Today, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive for Visual and Concrete Poetry possesses hundreds of thousands of works ranging from Vladimir Mayakovsky to Jenny Holzer. The collection is a wonder to behold, housed in an enormous warehouse packed to the gills with artists' ephemera, audio recordings, books, furniture, and sculpture all made out of words.

In 1992, to celebrate his invention, Dr. Sackner commissioned 167 artists to create text-based artworks based on the idea of breathing for the annual meeting of the American Thoracic Society in Miami Beach. The result was more of an intervention: imagine a room full of doctors dedicating their lives to the health of the chest cavity surrounded by insane avant-garde works of art. But as Dr. Sackner is so renowned in his field, one can assume that his peers initially scratched their heads and then ultimately gave him the respect he deserves. After all, once you reach a certain income bracket, it is expected that you will collect art works; but far from adorning his walls with Picassos or Warhols, Dr. Sackner was in love with words and their driving audible force: breath.

What Dr. Sackner was getting at – in addition to his professional concerns – was the fact that at the root of much poetry is the voice and, by extension, the pulmonary and respiratory systems, which produces breath and voice. After the Second World War when microphone technology made it possible for the average citizen to record and manipulate sounds which previously went unheard, a slew of artists began experimenting with sounds their bodies made. One pioneer, the French sound poet Henri Chopin, went so far as to entitle a series of recordings *The Body is a Sound Factory*. Thus evolved a certain strain or tradition in sound poetry which focused on the breath itself. While one could easily make a case for the purity of that gesture and extend it into an illuminating – but somewhat tedious – radio programme, I've instead decided to focus on the sort of impurities and misreadings of this tradition – and things that stray far from it, such as our lead-off track, Pierre Raymonde and Bugs Bower's 'Breathing Warm Ups' from their *Erotic Aerobics* album, which fuses two types of bodily workouts. After all, it's hard to imagine either a porn film or a gym session without heavy breathing. Kraftwerk's 'Atem' (Breath), from *Kraftwerk 2*, which is just the sound of a person breathing, seems to justify the radical use of repetitious electronics, as if to say that the most basic form of minimalism is the rhythmic breathing that's with us from the day we are born.

Along the way, you'll hear two artists who are obsessed with and create art out of balloons, Bill Morrison and Judy Dunaway. Bill Morrison, also known as The Balloon Man, was a first-tier nutjob based in L.A., trying to break into show biz with balloon tricks (he didn't get any further than a TV pilot in the seventies). Conversely, Judy Dunaway is a serious improvisational artist who uses balloons as sound sources for compositions. She rubs them, inflates them, deflates them and pop them often in collaboration with artists such as Christian Marclay and Shelley Hirsh. On this programme, she covers a Kurt Weill's 'Surabaya Johnny', made entirely from balloons.

Similarly, avant-garde vocalists are always concerned with breath. Many are trained as classical singers who must learn vocal projection and stamina. Three



[Marvin Sackner]

classically trained women are featured here: Meredith Monk, Annea Lockwood and Joan La Barbara. Each exploits classical vocal techniques of breathing: Monk with short spurts of breath, Lockwood in a more improvisatory manner, and La Barbara's drawn out, durational technique in a work that was, not surprisingly, commissioned for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

You'll also hear the amazing breath-based games of the Inuit peoples. Generally comprised of two people, they keep breathing and huffing and making sounds at one another until one of the competitors give up. It's astonishing stuff. The shady L.A. based Language Removal Services literally removes speech from recordings of famous people's voices. Here, for example, they take away all of William S. Burroughs's language, yet his nasally 'ums' and 'ahs' are still every bit discernable as are recordings of his normative speech. And interspersed throughout the programme, you'll hear a plethora of techniques and approaches to the idea of breathing, from Mel Torme to the avant-garde bagpiper David Watson. You'll even hear an obnoxious Bud Lite commercial that grapples with bad breath.

The Zen Buddhists insist that during meditation the practitioner must focus exclusively on their breath. When stray thoughts enter your mind, you must always go back to your breath. What they mean by this is that if you are breathing, you are alive. What we do every second is something we take for granted. Coming at it from a very different angle, these artists want to make us aware of the same thing: by highlighting our most commonly shared – yet almost invisible – bodily function and using it as the basis for sonic exploration, they reveal something at once cosmic and mundane, that which is right under our nose, but which we somehow ignore. John Cage once said that music is all around us if only we had the ears to hear it. I think the same can be said by these artists: breathing is all around us, if only we had the tools to pay attention to it. This compilation is, hopefully, one small step toward that end.

02. Playlist

- Pierre Raymonde and Bugs Bower, 'Breathing Warm Ups'. From *Erotic Aerobics* (label unknown, 1982).
- Kraftwerk, 'Atem'. From *Kraftwerk 2* (Philips, 1972).
- Mel Torme, 'You Leave Me Breathless'. From "It's a Blue World" (Reissue Affinity, 1985).
- Annea Lockwood, 'Breathing Machine'. From *The Glass World* (Tangent Records, 1970).
- Bill Morrisson, 'Blow It Up'. From *The Balloon Man* (Sharpeworld, 2004).
- Joan La Barbara, 'Time(d) Trials and Unscheduled Events' (excerpt). From *Sound Paintings* (Lovely Music, 1991).
- Language Removal Services, 'Marilyn Monroe'. From *Static Language Sampler* (Self-released CD, undated)
- Meredith Monk, 'Little Breath'. From *Impermanence* (ECM, 2008).
- Ken Nordine, 'Breathing'. From *Ken Nordine Does Robert Shure – Twink* (Philips, 1967)
- Joël Hubat, 'The Beauty in Breathing, Side 1' (unreleased, commissioned for the Sackner Archive exhibition of the same name, 1992).
- Inuit Throat Songs, 'Katajjaq'. From *UNESCO series of Musics & Musicians of the World* (undated).
- Phil Minton, 'Breathing Out'. From *The Blood, Muscle & Air: The Intimate Voice* (Sonic Arts Network, 2008).
- David Watson with Shelley Hirsch and Makigami Koichi, 'Throats'. From *Feld* (Ecstatic Peace!, 2007).
- Bud Light Real Men of Genius Advertisement, 'Mr. Really Stinky Breath Breather Outer' (2003).
- Chuck Jones, 'NPR Breathing' (excerpt) (<http://babygorilla.com/>, undated).
- Language Removal Services, 'William S. Burroughs'. From 'Static Language Sampler' (self-released CD, undated).
- Bill Morrisson, '24 Single Breath Blow'. From *The Balloon Man* (Sharpeworld, 2004).
- Language Removal Services, 'Marcel Duchamp'. From *Static Language Sampler* (self-released CD, undated)



Judy Dunaway

Judy Dunaway and David Hanson, 'Surabaya'. From *Unreleased Balloon Tracks* (UbuWeb, 1999).

Alastair Noon, 'Voiceless'. From *Homo Sonorous: An International Anthology of Sound Poetry* (National Centre for Contemporary Art, Kaliningrad, Russia, 2001).

Enno Stahl 'Breath Attack'. From *Homo Sonorous: An International Anthology of Sound Poetry* (National Centre for Contemporary Art, Kaliningrad, Russia, 2001).

Ivor Cutler and Linda Hirst, 'Breathing Regularly'. From *Privilege* (Rough Trade, 1983).

03. Credits

Curated by Kenneth Goldsmith. Produced by Roc Jiménez de Cisneros.

04. Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the featured artists.

05. Copyright note

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