

# Listening for other languages

## Cia Rinne and the soundpoetic event

essay by **Hannah Lutz**

### EXCERPTS FROM NOTES FOR SOLOISTS, CIA RINNE 2009

1  
one  
ohne  
oh no  
ono  
on  
o.  
(oh no)<sup>1</sup>  
[...]

1 no  
no.no  
no)  
no9  
no.9  
no.nine  
no.nein  
no.no.<sup>2</sup>  
[...]

sur scène:  
sur scen  
sen, sur  
censur.<sup>3</sup>

What is the relevance of these lines to the sounds of Cia Rinne, the Finnish multilingual poet I wish to introduce in the following pages? How can the soundpoetic event be approached in the form of an article in a journal? For many of its practitioners, creating sound poetry means vigorously demonstrating the here and now of the poem, which has no counterpart in text; encouraging the people in the audience to place trust in their own listening rather than look to a text for answers; and by extension challenging the idea of an object which lends itself to ownership, or can be saved to experience later. Do we listen differently when bereft of a text version? As performance art has taught us, we can question representationalism by creating works of art that demonstrate their inseparability from the hour and the space in which they take place, and therefore cannot be copied, sold for profit, or archived.

However, when Rinne performs, she carries a book in her

hand, in a sense bringing us back to the text. Moreover, her text poems – particularly in *notes for soloists* – suggest an immanent relationship to sound, as illustrated by the lines quoted above. In a sense, this reinforces the idea of representation, as the poem appears to be either imitating sound, or anticipating its own becoming sound. Why is engaging with Rinne’s sounds a difficult yet worthwhile challenge? Why choose Rinne over the many sound poets who do not rely on text versions of their poems? Why even call Rinne a sound poet?

I hope to demonstrate that it is precisely in the odd relationship between text and sound in Rinne’s performances that we may find openings into her poetry and its powerful potential. Rinne seems to suggest the possibility of a soundpoetic event in which spaces, bodies, texts, and times can assemble in surprising ways, and generate new and radical modes of negotiating language and meaning.

### CIA RINNE ON STAGE

After my first live experience of Rinne’s poetry, I was left contemplating the presence of sound in her texts and the presence of text in her performance.<sup>4</sup> Sensing that the tension between the two raises intriguing questions, and interested in further exploring this tension, I brought a copy of *notes for soloists* to her next performance.<sup>5</sup> Attempting to follow the poems in the book during the course of the performance, I found that the words in the book remained firmly glued to the page. Rather than bringing the lines of the book to life, Rinne articulated long sequences of words like foreign sounds she was toying around with, uncertain of how to use them as tools of communication. She transformed into a machine, or perhaps a playful child, bridging gaps between languages by linking them through their similarities in sound, rather than through literal meaning. She is speaking Spanish, I decided as she repeated a sequence of sounds, only to find myself seconds later constructing a sentence in Swedish out of the same sequence of sounds, and wondering when she had changed linguistic codes.

Occasionally, she would plunge into repeated, rhythmic hissings and clickings, per-

haps intelligible as German, perhaps only as the sound of a tongue moving around in a mouth. A copy of the book was in her hand as well as in mine, but I could not go back and verify what she actually said. Gradually the separate languages I was listening for seemed to dissolve, and all I could hear was air traveling between lips, tongue hitting teeth, vocal cords vibrating.

Thus, the sound and the text worked against each other when I attempted to organize them in a relation of representation. This relation can be reconfigured as a delezoguaritarian “becoming”. Deleuze and Guattari draw on Nietzsche in asserting that there is no being, no intrinsic ontological unity, only becoming through blocks that connect different phenomena: humans, animals, texts, sounds, machines, bacteria, etc. The movement of becoming is non-teleological and “produces nothing other than itself”.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, becoming moves rhizomatically: unlike trees with their hierarchical branching, it spreads in all directions; any point can connect to any other. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity”.<sup>7</sup> The rhizome, however, is a non-centralized system, and therefore undermines the idea of representation.



Illustration: Moa Thelander



## CIA RINNE, POET AND ARTIST

I meet Cia Rinne at Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, where she just attended a panel discussion on the current problems of Roma filmmakers in Europe. Rinne knows well the situation of the Roma in Europe, having spent extended periods of time with Roma communities in seven different countries. Together with photographer Joakim Eskildsen, she translated parts of this experience into a book of essays and photographs, *The Roma Journeys*.<sup>1</sup>

Cia Rinne thinks of her poetry as less directly political than her work on the Roma. Nevertheless, she is intrigued to hear that her poems have sparked a reading that connects them with new forms of community beyond the nation. Born in Sweden and raised in Germany and Finland, Rinne never experienced national identities as central. Her extensive linguistic facility with at least ten languages makes it possible for her to study and play with language beyond specific linguistic contexts. She illustrates her approach to language with the words of an Argentinean friend, who says that language is like a revolving door. There is not one, but several possible directions to go in.

Some weeks before our meeting, Rinne performed her multilingual poetry at *Ausland*, a project space in Berlin focusing on experimental performance art. On stage, Rinne's poems from her second poetry collection, *notes for soloists*, become a sound event, as Hannah Lutz observes in her article. Rinne's first book of conceptual poetry, *zaroum*, beautifully designed by the poet herself, focuses on the visual rather than aural aspects of language. However, this book also ended up producing a medial transformation of sorts, as it became an interactive Internet piece with moving images, *archives zaroum*. The contexts for Rinne's transmedial art are thus manifold, to say the least, and include art museums and exhibitions as well. ✕

kaisa kaakinen

Cia Rinne's installations *indices* and *h/ombres* and sound installations *sounds for soloists* and *7/ [seven solidus]* are being shown at Grim-museum in Berlin from June 23 to July 19, 2012. Rinne will also read in three performances at the exhibition (June 23: Cia Rinne, July 5: Anders Lauge Meldgaard and Cia Rinne, July 19: Tomomi Adachi and Cia Rinne).

Cia Rinne's works on the internet:

Interactive piece *archives zaroum*:

<http://www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/archiveszaroum/>

Sound installation *sounds for soloists*:

[http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Rinne/Rinne-Cia\\_Complete-Reading\\_Sounds-For-Soloists\\_2011.mp3](http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Rinne/Rinne-Cia_Complete-Reading_Sounds-For-Soloists_2011.mp3)

## reference

- 1 Joakim Eskildsen and Cia Rinne, *The Roma Journeys/Die Romarcises*, Göttingen: Steidl 2007/2009.

Rather than resonating back to the tree, the root, the Father, or the Nation, meaning is created by flattening out the relationship between text and sound, placing them on a single horizontal plane where they can infect each other, dislocate each other, and co-construct each other, but never represent each other.

By this token, despite the book in Rinne's hand, a sound poem was never on the page. The book may function as part of the event of the sound poem and a physical component of the performance, but it does not constitute the past of the poem. Similarly, despite Rinne's text poems' pronounced relationship to sound, they will never become sound. Here I find an interesting deterritorialization of both text and sound: the text moves forward through its desiring sound, and sound is reconfigured as the driving force of the text, as the desire that brings the poem into existence.

How can "becoming", in this context, be understood as a possible political engagement with the world? Equipped with Karen Barad's idea of "entangled agencies"<sup>8</sup> and Rasmus Fleischer's concept of "the postdigital", I hope to demonstrate that Rinne's poetry undermines arborescent systems of generating meaning, and creates openings for a politics built on other premises.

## BARAD: ENTANGLED AGENCIES

"Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them", Deleuze and Guattari suggest.<sup>9</sup> While Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the entanglement of all the components of an event, the feminist and quantum physicist Karen Barad shows agency – and thus responsibility – to be intrinsic to processes of becoming: "[R]elations are not secondarily derived from independently existing 'relata', but rather the mutual ontological dependence of 'relata' – the relation – is the ontological primitive."<sup>10</sup> This opens up a place for agency, which "does not take place in space and time but in the making of space-time itself".<sup>11</sup>

In light of this, it seems to me that the poem comes into being as a part of the body and the space; when bodies inhabit space and affect each other they create time, and none of the parts of the event are exchangeable, all are constituted by their relations of becoming. Agencies, then, emerge from this mutual entanglement and from intra-acting and do not exist as "separate individual agencies that precede their interaction".<sup>12</sup> According to Barad, it is here, in understanding our entangled agencies, that we can develop new forms of political engagement. For Barad, epistemology, ontology, and ethics are inseparable; you are responsible for the becomings in which you engage and through which you exist. Possibilities for acting and intervening are immanent in every situation, but practicing politics based on attentiveness to the specificities of the circumstances is no simple task.

## FLEISCHER: THE POSTDIGITAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

In his 2009 book *Det postdigitala manifestet* [The postdigital manifesto], Fleischer focuses mainly on how digitalization affects our relationship to music.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, many of his thoughts may be advantageously applied to sound poetry, particularly as collective experience. Struggling to challenge the idea of saving and owning with the idea of listening as becoming, we enter Fleischerian territory. In discussing music

experiences increasingly shaped by abundance and access, in which we stare at our screens paralyzed by the task of choosing between all the songs we "have", Fleischer finds the concept of the postdigital useful. This does not signify "a new stage in cultural history, but rather a maturing of the digital experience which causes us to attach renewed importance to presence".<sup>14</sup> Hence he suggests a postdigital understanding of music influenced by new materialism. By this definition, the files on your computer are merely *potential* music: music is that which takes place, that which is materialized in time and space, that which affects bodies.<sup>15</sup>

Fleischer imagines a future in which collective experiences become increasingly important as our access to digital files becomes increasingly unrestricted. In contrast to the private, practically unlimited accumulation of music files, a collective event imposes limits through its physical and temporal manifestation, through bodies restricting and affecting other bodies. This heightens sensation and makes certain kinds of becomings possible: "Since [collective experiences] cannot be copied, deleted or calculated, they set strong desires in motion. Desires can spread contagiously in the postdigital, from one temporary community to the next, provided that some of the participants return."<sup>16</sup>

This contagion in the postdigital, which sets bodies in motion, challenges the idea of saving, owning, and reproducing with rhizomatic movements of becoming. It suggests an ontology built on sharing and desire, and communities built horizontally, in all directions, and not resonating with a central system of control.

## A POLITICS OF LISTENING

This brings me back to the sound-text relation in Rinne's poetry and the ontological implications of reconceptualizing this relation. In her performances, Rinne appears to be actively engaging with the text poem and freeing herself from it simultaneously. This movement, I suggest, illustrates the poet's affirmative approach to borders as passages, reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's imperative: "Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight. [...] It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight."<sup>17</sup>

Moving "unfaithfully" among languages, Rinne deterritorializes these loci of Western thought and philosophy by creating meaning not within them, but straight across them. By undermining the ways in which they control discourse and thought, Rinne is not negating meaning. Rather, she initiates other meaning-making processes which work "against the Father", as Deleuze would put it, "without passing through the [Platonic] Idea".<sup>18</sup> Rinne's claims to language are, in the manner of the seductive simulacrum condemned by Plato, "made from below, by means of an aggression, an insinuation, a subversion".<sup>19</sup> Sounds from one language can physically transform into the sounds of another language without passing through an arborescent structure. Thus her poems do not resonate with anyone's national project. If I allow meaning to emerge at those points where I lose track of the codes, I discover how the body itself, the grain of the voice, the language in its materialization, has the capacity to undermine systems of control, making matter mean.

This makes possible a politics of listening: if the poem is inseparable from the time of my listening, and the event is inseparable from the bodies in the room, meaning is always a collective, physical, and temporal process. Consequently,

politics means taking time to listen for ways of responsibly intervening in the world's becoming. A postdigital desire for embodied yet open-ended collectivities, rather than political programs or national flags, can trigger a contagious feeling of responsibility, and this excess of energy and desire could perhaps be directed towards creating and sustaining communities by horizontal movements. Famously, Derrida once made a "plea for slow reading, even at a time of political urgency"<sup>20</sup> – perhaps the soundpoetic event may serve as a space for slow listening, a space in which the Nation and the language of the Nation may be challenged by other, as yet unformed languages and meanings. ✕



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## references

- 1 Cia Rinne, *notes for soloists*, Stockholm 2009, 6.
- 2 Rinne, *notes for soloists*, 7.
- 3 Rinne, *notes for soloists*, 10.
- 4 Cia Rinne, poetry performance, Århus, 2010-11-5.
- 5 Cia Rinne, poetry performance, Copenhagen, 2010-11-8.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 238.
- 7 Ibid, p. 16.
- 8 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC 2007.
- 9 Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 263.
- 10 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", in *Material feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2008, p. 150 note 20.
- 11 Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", p. 135.
- 12 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 33.
- 13 Rasmus Fleischer, *Det postdigitala manifestet*, Stockholm 2009.
- 14 Fleischer, p. 45. "[This does not] betecknar [...] ett nytt kulturhistoriskt stadium, snarare en mognad av den digitala erfarenheten som får oss att åter lägga vikt vid närvaro."
- 15 Fleischer, op. cit. p. 69.
- 16 Ibid, p. 63. "Eftersom [kollektiva upplevelser] inte kan kopieras, inte raderas och inte kalkyleras sätter de starka begär i rörelse. Begär kan spridas vidare som smittor i det postdigitala, från en tillfällig gemenskap till nästa, förutsatt att vissa av deltagarna återkommer."
- 17 Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 161.
- 18 Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss, "Plato and the Simulacrum", in *The MIT Press* 27 (1983), p. 48.
- 19 Deleuze and Krauss, op.cit. p. 48.
- 20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Note on the New International", in *Parallax* 3 (2001), p. 15.

# The land, the sea and the water in between

## On the liquefaction of culture

lecture by **Sven Rücker**

On September 2 in the year 1967, Paddy Roy Bates, a former major in the British Army, landed in the middle of the water. He occupied a marine fortress called Fort Roughs, which has roughly the size and the appearance of an oil platform, 10 kilometers away from the British coast on the open water. After landing, Bates immediately founded the state of Sealand and proclaimed it to be sovereign – a constitutional monarchy with, of course, himself as the king. Since then, the Royal Navy has tried several times to reconquer the platform; one of the citizens of the "Principality of Sealand", the German Alexander Achenbach, even started a revolution. Bates, however, has successfully defended his state by both judiciary and military means until today. Currently, ten people live on the platform, and so Sealand lives on too, with its own currency, its own passports and its own flag.

Even though the sea is characterized by its transgression of all borders, the founding of Sealand has shown that one can transform the sea into some sort of land, into Sea-Land. Because the sea is dislocated, one can set up a location. Because it is not the realm of defined territories, one can declare part of it as a territory and thereby align it with the land and the terrestrial idea of a state. But if one does, it is no longer "sea" in the strong sense of the word,<sup>1</sup> but rather a symbolic aggradation of the sea – just sealand.

**While these sea commonly** stands for homogeneity, the classic symbol of culture is the house. The house sets up the basic opposition of inside and outside, just as classic culture defines itself by the separation from other cultures or from non-culture: in other words, by its frontier. It is the frontier that permits localization and creates a closed territory.

Culture begins with the installation of a border. But not only culture, the world itself begins with a border. The Book of Genesis starts with the spirit of God, hovering above the indifferent water: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. [...] And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas."

On the first day, God created Sealand. But what God does is actually not creating, but dividing. He divides (as Moses will do later) the water from the water, then he divides the water from the sky, and in the end of the beginning, he divides the water from the land. Creation means division: it means setting boundaries and, by doing so, defining territories. As long as there is only water, there is no world in the sense of the Greek kosmos, an organized and well-regulated totality – only the chaos of transgression.

The work of God is also the work of his legitimate successors on earth, or on dry land: the philosophers. Thinking also means creating order by dividing one from the other, by setting boundaries. In spite of a heretical tradition beginning with Heraclitus's sentence, "Everything flows", the exponents of mainstream – or rather, mainland – philosophy use architectural terms to describe their work. Thinking is building in a concrete sense. It uses repetitive elements and connects them with the help of the laws of logic to build a system in which one element supports another. That is what Spinoza and Descartes called "geometrical method" and what, from another point of view, Heidegger analyzed in his text