

**Chapter 8 - Moments of Laughter:
Recording Childhood, Performing Motherhood, Refusing to Shut up, and Laughing**

[Abstract](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Appendix A](#)

[Appendix B](#)

[Appendix C](#)

[Appendix D](#)

[Bibliography](#)

It has been a learning process for us to enjoy life, to get past that seriousness, and the older we get, the easier we find it to laugh. And we did laugh quite a bit during these interviews, like when Gisleen protested our rigid upbringing. "Little German girls are raised to be little good girls. It took a long time to stop being a good girl, and I resent that. One misses a lot in life by being a little good girl. Cinderella was a wimp." With others it was a different kind of laughter, a soft laughter as, together, we tried to fill in the first lines of a song or poem that we half-remembered from childhood...

What serious children we used to be ... Raised within the silence, we lived in communities where the adults were always right, where obedience and loyalty were valued above all. (Hegi 1997: 300) The theme of childhood soundmaking has always been an important one for Westerkamp, from her Master's thesis, which uses her own childhood experience of Christmas music as a case study; to her autobiographical Breathing Room III, which includes a song that she used to sing as a child; to an article in Musicworks magazine ("A Child's Ritual" Summer 1986 issue); to many references to the importance and freedom of childhood soundmaking in her oral presentations. She explores this theme most fully in her work for tape and female voice, Moments of Laughter (1988). I think this piece raises the most difficult issues of all of Westerkamp's work in relation to what counts as music, and what stories people want to hear. I believe that this work transgresses borders in several directions at once, in terms of compositional choices and the thinking behind them, cultural expectations regarding the distinctions between public and private domains, the roles of children and women, and the importance of children's non-verbal communication.

My own response to the work was at first quite ambivalent. Having lost custody of my children in a court battle that raised all kinds of questions for me about what constitutes motherhood and fatherhood in our culture, I have since been particularly sensitive to stereotyping in musical constructions of motherhood. When I first heard the work, I heard the performer's reading of a poem in the middle of the piece as stereotyped, too sweet.

When Westerkamp gave me the score, I noted that although the piece had been performed only by professional vocalists with ample knowledge of extended vocal techniques (Meg Sheppard, Elise Bedard, and DB Boyko), Westerkamp's instructions in the score made the work accessible to a wider range of performers: for instance, when she asked for a particularly difficult vocal technique, she also included alternatives for less developed performers. Aware that the work had been performed several times when it was first composed in 1988, but not since, I decided to perform it myself. It had bothered me that at first I was only able to present this performance work to people on tape, and knew that a live performance would be better. Even though I had only attended short workshops in extended vocal techniques, I had had lots of experience singing with groups and vocalizing with young children. I had enjoyed this interaction with my own children, and continue to enjoy vocal play, particularly with babies and toddlers discovering their vocal range and abilities. I performed the work on community radio in Toronto, at a festival of sound art by women in Chicago, and at the Modern Fuel art gallery in Kingston, Ontario. Learning to perform the piece, and practising it, gave me a much deeper knowledge of it than I would have had otherwise, and allowed me to move beyond concerns about stereotypes into a more subtle and nuanced approach to the intricacies of motherhood.

Context

In the liner notes for Moments of Laughter, Westerkamp refers to the work of French psychoanalyst and semiotician Julia Kristeva:

Moments of Laughter is dedicated to my daughter Sonja whose voice forms the basis for this piece. Her voice has accompanied mine for many years now and has brought me in touch with an openness of perception, uninhibited expressiveness and physical presence that I had long forgotten.

I have made recordings of her voice since she was born and from the age of four on, she has made her own recordings of stories and songs. Moments of Laughter utilizes these for the tape portion of the piece, tracing musically/acoustically the emergence of the infant's voice from the oceanic state of the womb: from the soundmakings of the baby to the song and language of the child. According to Julia Kristeva, moments of laughter are those moments in infancy and early childhood in which the baby recognizes the "other" as distinct from the "self." They are the first creative moments that speak of recognition of self and place. The child expresses these moments with laughter. (HW: Program note)

Westerkamp analyzes Kristeva's writings about moments of laughter in her Master's thesis.

Kristeva takes us as far back as the moment of separation from the womb. All human beings share this first loss, these first feelings of lack: life as a separation from the "oceanic state" in the womb. All creative process is based on the desire to recreate this

state of wholeness. (Westerkamp 1988: 117)

This theme is an important one for Westerkamp: I have seen variations on it in several of her writings and musings. She associates creative work with attempts to create the sense of total immersion and connectedness that characterizes the womb state. While Westerkamp accepts this desire to return to a state of oceanic immersion as perhaps the strongest creative urge of human beings, it is important to note that others may not share this desire: remember the dichotomy articulated by David Schwarz (discussed in Chapter Five): "On the one hand, envelopment suggests undifferentiated, oceanic, expansive oneness; on the other hand, it suggests being contained, enclosed, and marked off." (1997: 277) For some, immersion could be positive, for some negative; for many, it is likely to be somewhat ambivalent.

Westerkamp continues:

The young baby is still close to this state of wholeness, is still in a relatively balanced situation. Impression and expression, listening and soundmaking happen simultaneously and play a large part in maintaining a sense of wholeness. Desire for such wholeness emerges once the baby recognizes an "other" as distinct from its "self," that is, once the wholeness becomes harder to attain. (Westerkamp 1988: 118)

When Westerkamp uses the term "relatively balanced situation," she is referring to a balance of sound impression and expression, that the baby makes sounds in balance with what she or he hears. However, this is not necessarily an emotionally or politically balanced situation. Kristeva says that during the first three months of life, the baby cries in distress, in what she calls *anaclysis*:

Every cry is, psychologically and projectively, described as a cry of distress, up to and including the first vocalizations, which seem to constitute distress calls, in short: *anaclyses*. The newborn body experiences three months of such *anaclytic "facilitations"* without reaching a stable condition (1908: 282, my emphasis) This sounds like a particularly unbalanced situation, in which the baby cries in distress without knowledge that the distress calls will be answered. The baby is dependent on adults to provide for her. Kristeva describes the role of the adult, particularly the mother, at this time, as "a disturbed reception, a mobile receptacle, which fashions itself on the invocation" (1980: 282). Paradoxically, the mother is expected to empathize, feeling a "surge of anguish" (1980: 282) and thus to understand the child's distress, yet at the same time to be able to break with this period of "primary narcissism" and allow the child to move on to the next phase, *diatrophie* "so that, with the advent of autoeroticism, the door is finally open to a relationship with the object" (1980: 282). The baby, in distress, does not seem to be experiencing a state of wholeness, but rather a direct need for assistance. It seems that once the baby recognizes an "other" its desire would be for connection with the other.

Kristeva suggests the baby's desire for connection. She says that during the *anaclytic* period of the first three months, the baby begins to experience discreteness through

The breast, given and withdrawn; lamplight capturing the gaze; intermittent sounds of voice, of music all these meet with *anaclysis* ... hold it, and thus inhibit and absorb it ... At that point, breast, light, and sound become a there: a place, a spot, a marker. The effect, which is dramatic, is no longer quiet but laughter. (1980: 283) Westerkamp describes this as a balance of impression (hearing the sounds, seeing the lamplight) and expression (through the sound of laughter). She notes that Kristeva's approach is different from that of theorists such as Deleuze, who describe the recognition of separateness as a violence (Westerkamp 1988: 119). The moment of recognition of another, for Kristeva, is not a moment of angst, of existential loneliness, but of laughter, an expression of joy that someone, some other, is here to relieve the distress and provide pleasure and security.

These scattered and funny moments become projected archaic synthesis onto the stable support of the mother's face, the privileged receiver of laughter at about three months.... Oral eroticism, the smile at the mother, and the first vocalizations are contemporaneous ... The inaugural sublimation ... brings us not only to the foundations of narcissism ... but to the riant wellsprings of the imaginary. The imaginary takes over from childhood laughter: it is a joy without words. (1980: 283)

Here, Kristeva associates the imaginary not with desire for wholeness through a return to the womb, but with joy in a recognition of security through knowledge that desires will be met by intimate others. Westerkamp also describes the infant's first expressions as searching outward for connection with something or someone else, a description that seems different from her earlier statement in which wholeness and balance were associated with the womb. She says:

... one could say that these first "moments of laughter" are also first "productions," first expressions of the infant, in search of a "transcendent viewpoint," i.e. in search of the "other." (Westerkamp 1988: 119) Westerkamp suggests that as the child matures, creative nourishment is recognized in other people, other things beyond the parental figure:

Once the child is a little older, nourishment does not depend on the mother as the only "other," but can now be received through other impressions, other substitute objects. The "other" then can potentially always be a source for nourishment (even though it is a substitute object of the original one, the mother), and therefore a desirable object. Its

distance from the self keeps the self's desire in motion. The space that is created by the distance is also what causes the "other" to make an "impression." Desire therefore is set in motion because the self wants to reduce the space/distance between itself and the object of nourishment. It is in this desire in motion where creativity is located. (Westerkamp 1988: 120) In this analysis, Westerkamp maintains the primary role of the mother. Other objects are only substitutes for this important relationship. Creativity is born of the urge to connect with her, through these substitutes.

Kristeva continues by outlining how the development of language in children follows this idea of people and things as "place-names."

the future speaker is led to separate ... points into objects ... and add to them no longer laughter but phonation archetype of the morpheme, condensation of the sentence. As if the laughter that makes up space had become, with the help of maturation and repression, a "place name." (1980: 287, her emphasis) She notes that many utterances of two and three year-olds are of the type "that's a" followed by a noun, an evocation of demonstrating what things are, combined with other vocalizations related to their earlier sounds, such as "glottal stops and stress (a play on intensity as well as on frequencies of vowel sounds)" (1980: 287).

Kristeva ends by asserting that the use of place-names in the infant's language is an attempted replacement of the mother:

We suggest that naming always originating in a place (the chora, space, "topic," subject-predicate), is a replacement for what the speaker perceives as an archaic mother a more or less victorious confrontation, never finished with her. (1980: 291)

This is a difficult point: Kristeva suggests that naming places, finding connections with objects and people other than the mother is a kind of victory over her, a diminishment of her archaic power over the child. Westerkamp asserts that finding such connections is a type of substitution for the mother while still desiring an original closeness with her, more of a nostalgia than a victory. Which is more accurate? Perhaps there are elements of both.

As a semiotician influenced by psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva describes the role of the mother-child dyad as crucial with regard to its relationship to desire and psychological wholeness. Westerkamp, as a composer, is interested in this desire as it relates to creativity. Lorraine Code, as an epistemologist, describes this relationship in terms of its importance to learning: "recognizing nurturant others, learning what she or he can expect of them, comprises the very earliest infant learning" (Code 1998).¹ Code also points out that in traditional developmental psychology and epistemology, this initial learning is devalued, constructed as an early, private, dependent and inarticulate phase in the development of the child into a mature individual:

Discourses of development and maturation represent "the child" as a being who unfolds out of an infancy in which he is radically, vitally dependent on nurturant others, to a place of full individual autonomy where he becomes his "own" person, renouncing dependence to emerge as a self-sufficient individual. Development thus represented is a linear process that achieves completion at "the age of majority," having passed through well-marked stages or levels en route to this fully separated moment. Cognitive and moral maturity, then, marks an end of dependence on infant and childhood nurturers. It manifests itself in achieved mastery: mastery over "one's own" body is so taken for granted that it rarely receives mention except as a precondition for all the rest; mastery over emotions aligns closely with bodily mastery; mastery over the becoming-adult's physical, social, cultural, and natural surroundings: a complex of "masteries" that represents a solitary coming of age in matters moral, epistemological, social and personal. (Code 1998: 4)

Code challenges this traditional model of child development, suggesting an alternative in which the agency of the child is recognized and respected. Westerkamp's approach to this time of initial learning, desire and creative soundmaking also challenges this linear developmental model through its emphasis on the continuing construction of identity in both children and adults: the mother in the piece is changed by the experience as much as the child, and constantly shifts identities. By taking this relationship as a formal basis of the music, she also taps into important familial power relations, as will become obvious when I discuss listener responses to this piece.

Musical Structure

Moments of Laughter is a nineteen minute piece for voice and tape. In this analysis of it, I will juxtapose Westerkamp's information and instructions from the score with my comments on performance choices.

A live female voice interacts with the tape, performing live. It tries to find its own language and music on the one hand, and imitates, reacts to, and plays with the child's voice on tape on the other hand. It moves through a variety of characters in search of a confident, strong voice. Moments of Laughter explores the edge between the "wilderness" of the child's voice and the cultural formations of the female voice. (HW: Program note)

Note Westerkamp's location of this work on an edge that she describes as a border between wilderness and culture. This explicitly connects the work with some of her other

pieces, such as Kits Beach Soundwalk, which is literally in a marginal place, a beach in an urban park, between land and water, city and nature. It also connects this work to pieces such as Cricket Voice, which explore her experience of wilderness. This description underlines the connection of Moments of Laughter with place, while the previous sentence asserts its connection with dialogue, primarily one between a live adult woman performer and a female child on tape. A dialogue also emerges between the child on tape and earlier recordings of herself. In addition, at one point, the live performer sings in counterpoint with Westerkamp's recorded voice. Throughout, there is a continuing interaction between the recorded and live voices and the other sounds on tape.

Moment One: Prologue

Sounds of rhythmic play begin the tape part, the regular banging of a rattle on a surface juxtaposed with a melody on a harmonica, joined shortly by a higher-pitched melody on a music box and a high drone. The high-pitched music box and drone continue, providing a sparkling background for the introduction of Sonja's voice, sounding about seven or eight years in age:

I come here to tell you that I have been recording since I was nine months old. I was very excited to hear me again, recording from when I was a little baby. I've recorded tons of times, since I was nine months old I think it is. I'm not quite sure. But I am so glad that I've been recording. I love recording. My mum's a composer. She does Fantasie for Horns and records sound. Well, today I don't quite know what we're going to do. But I don't know if we should do anything. Several things strike me about this introduction. It gives an authoritative position to Sonja: she is introducing the piece to the audience. She frames the coming performance. She is experienced and skilled as a recordist: she has recorded "tons of times." She affirms her connection with her mother, who is a composer a specific composer, the one who made Fantasie for Horns, and who also does what Sonja does, recording sound. She expresses a desire for non-intention that John Cage would appreciate: "I don't know quite what we're going to do. But I don't know if we should do anything."

The piece opens in the dark. The performer is offstage or backstage and walks on, breathing slowly, as the child's voice introduces the listener to the piece. As the dim blue lights come on, the performer should be in centre stage intensifying the breathing until the first cries of the baby are audible. In response to the baby's cry the performer emits a joyous welcoming call. Initially I had an African call in mind that is made by women when they are welcoming somebody [ululations]. It is a high warble produced on one pitch. If the performer is not familiar with this sound or for some reason cannot reproduce it I would like to encourage her to find her own welcoming call suitable to her voice range and character. (HW: score)

During the initial minute, while Sonja introduces the piece, the performer is instructed on the score (page one) to take slow deep breaths a great antidote to stage fright, as I discovered in Chicago. It gives the performer the chance to listen to Sonja's voice, concentrate on the tape part and ground herself. At around 1:30, the performer is instructed to breathe more rapidly, and "echo rhythms of harmonica (on out breath)." At this point, the harmonica is playing a mid-range melody of tremulous notes in a descending pattern. As the performer imitates this rhythm, she is also imitating the rapid, focused style of breathing called for in Lamaze classes in the transitional period of labour just before birth. I am always reminded of this experience when performing this section. Gradually, water sounds are introduced into the tape part, then a baby's cry at about 1:55. The performer here makes a succession of welcoming calls. In the DB Boyko performance, this is the high, warbling cry called for by Westerkamp. I could not reproduce this cry, and also did not want to, so made a cry which is simply the word "welcome" using only vowels "eeeeo" and exaggerating the melody of saying the word, rising on the e, then quickly falling to rest on one note for the o.

After the welcoming calls the performer moves slowly towards the rocking chair (placed towards back of performance area), making the following sounds:

sssssh ssSssShh sss

this should be a calm, breathy sound on ssss and sshh, etc. The sound colour can be altered by changing the shape of the mouth cavity.

Then the performer sits down, rocking slowly, and begins to sing the lullaby. The tonal centre for the lullaby is middle "c," which has been established on the tape by that point. The sound of the voice should be chesty, with a lot of body, a "bluesy" voice, calming. As the tape fades out the performer should intensify her singing, forming a bridge between Moment One and Moment Two. (HW: score) As the performer makes the shushing sounds, the child's voice gradually calms, accompanied now on the tape by some newly-introduced high-pitched sounds such as quick, light, glassy and short downward glissandos and more processed sounds derived from water, beginning at around 2:30. Deeper water sounds form a rhythmic gulping close to the listener. The tape part at this point is timbrally dense and diverse, with higher pitches continuing to predominate. Throughout the lullaby section, the child vocalizes, making "ahh" and "uhh" sounds.

Moment Two: "Dadawawa" (6 months old)

A quick knocking introduces the next section, at 4:08.

As Moment Two begins, the lullaby should gradually fade away. As the child's voice re-emerges, the performer gets out of her rocking chair and initially imitates the child's sounds, delighting in producing as accurate imitations as possible. But very soon the child's sounds should become nothing more than take-off points for the performer's own improvisations. Using the sounds typical for this age (such as "da" "wa" "ma" "na") gives the performer the opportunity to explore her own vocal pitch range. All this should happen in a playful manner, as a type of playful "dialogue" between child and female performer.

Around 5:55 ... the child makes a rather throaty sound on tape. I want the performer to find a similar voice quality and sing the simple tune suggested in the score, bridging Moment Two with Moment Three. (HW: score)

On the tape, a wooden xylophone and harmonica accompany the initial knocking. Musical clocks come in, again in a high pitch range, as the child's voice begins with "ahdada." Again, this section activates strong memories for me when I perform it. I enjoy the recognition that crosses a young baby's face when she or he realizes that I am imitating his/her sounds. The number of subtle variations of vocal inflection, pitch, and rhythm that babies can produce is really remarkable. Their willingness to experiment with these subtle variations can lead to long and intricate vocalization duets. It feels somewhat different performing this with a tape rather than with a live vocalist, since each time, the order of vocalizations is the same. The temptation is to go further and further from the taped child's vocalizations each time, for the sake of variety. But at the same time, it is important to maintain the connection with the child's voice on tape.

The child's voice in this section makes a lot of "aa" vowel sounds with various consonants, as Westerkamp notes, as well as quick, deep inhalations (the performer has to be careful not to hyper-ventilate), and blurring noises. At the end of the section, the performer is asked to imitate the nasal inflection of the child's voice, and to sing a tune (on "naaa") with a tonal centre of middle C, and repeated pitches (ee ff ee cc gg etc.) with the emphasis on the second note. The harmonica on tape is playing in the same pitch range, using longer gestures.

Initially, when I began rehearsing the piece, I was bending forward to perform the vocalizations in this part. I realized that this was because when I have done vocalizations with children under a year, it is often done on a blanket. When I sent Westerkamp a recording of a rehearsal of the piece to listen to, she noticed this orientation:

It might be interesting to try to combine the intimacy of your current approach, as if playing on a blanket with the child (that is the image I get from your voice work) and the more outgoing public performance approach. (Westerkamp email correspondence with McCartney, November 20, 1998). In order to make a clearer separation between Moment Two and Moment Three, I decided to perform Moment Two actually on a blanket, with the microphone positioned just above the floor, then perform Moment Three standing up.

Moment Three: "Gegogegodababl" (1 year old)

By the time the child's voice reappears, the tune from Moment Two should have disappeared. This section should be rather "zany" and silly in its vocal "movement." The performer can use the child's voice as cue for some of her own vocal sounds, imitating their mood rather than the sounds themselves. Other sounds on tape, such as toy-sheep sounds, surprised gasps of air, birdsong, etc. may also be incorporated in some way. The order of the suggested sounds and melodies is left up to the performer throughout this section.

I have suggested two tunes for this section. One is a simple skipping tune and the other one is derived from a pygmy woman's lullaby. I chose this latter tune for this section because I associate the large intervallic jumps in the lullaby with a similar "jump" in the child's voice on tape. There was a time when this vocal "technique" was often "practised" by my daughter and I was then reminded of the pygmy woman's lullaby. If the performer is not familiar with this style of singing and/or if this style is outside of her vocal range or ability she can adapt this tune as long as it somehow connects to the child's vocal "jumps" on tape. Also, both tunes can be transposed to a comfortable range maintaining the intervals. The pygmy style tune should sound rather "airy" and light. (HW: score)

When I was rehearsing the piece, I had some problems with the skipping tune at the beginning of this moment. This tune is one that I do not associate with the age of one, but with the age of eight or nine. It was a tune used by children in my neighbourhood to make fun of each other, in a cruel way, to pick on children who wore glasses, braces or had other differences from the tormentors. However, as I performed the piece I noted the similarity of this tune to the tongue games that Sonja plays on tape (moving the tongue rapidly in and out of the mouth). This changed the association for me,³ and I was then able to improvise around the tune more comfortably, emphasizing its association with the tongue game. In this section, Sonja's voice is accompanied more sparsely with birdsong (in a similar rhythm to the skipping tune). Her vocalizations have expanded to include a wider range of vowel sounds (gegogego), and the rapid intervallic jumps discussed above by Westerkamp, interspersed with sounds similar to those in the previous section. After 7:00, the tape includes the sounds of toy animals, particularly a sheep, which Sonja

imitates. The long chords produced by this mechanical sheep sound also anticipate a choral top used in the next section. At around 8:00 on the tape, I hear a man's voice briefly imitating Sonja, accompanied by Hildi's laughter. A high-pitched bell is introduced on the tape, followed briefly by a car horn. Sonja continues to vocalize with fast intervallic jumps. At around 8:40, the performer is instructed on the score:

Hum long tones, interspersed with audible breaths. Harmonic singing would be ideal here, anticipating the choral top [a toy a spinning top that makes sound as it spins]. (HW: score)

Moment Four: "Da Da Do" (1 1/2 years old), Text by Norbert Ruebsaat The choral top on tape provides a framework for the performer's recitation of Ruebsaat's poem. Each stanza of the poem is associated with one long gesture of the choral top.

In this section the pace is calm and reflective. The performer speaks directly to the audience. The text should be spoken in a storytelling mode, perhaps explaining, with quiet intensity. I have indicated the places where the text should be spoken. When the child says "dadado" it is important that this is not covered up by the performer's voice. Otherwise the audience will not be able to make the connection between the poem and the child's voice. My daughter used to use the word dadado to say teddybear, telephone and Jennifer. For that reason these words are stressed in the score. Dadado should be pronounced exactly like the child pronounces it on tape. (HW: score)

Text of "Dadado," by Norbert Ruebsaat, as performed in Moments of Laughter

Words need hugs
They need to find themselves

All those words need lost things
They need places to go.

Dadado
It just turns out that way
It can mean a lot of things

Dadado
You turn around and you just try to find the thing for it.
You pick up the telephone.

It is just a word looking for home.
Like a teddy bear.

All those words
Need lost things
They need places to go
They need to find themselves

Like when you are lost
And you are looking for a girl...

Named Jennifer.

Words need hugs.
That is the thing about them.
They need to go to those places
and find themselves.

As well as the choral top, the tape juxtaposes the sound of rattles (panned from left to right) with Sonja's voice, quietly repeating "aus baan, aus baan." So the first word that the listener hears from Sonja is the German word "aus," meaning "from." At 10:15, Sonja says, more loudly, "dadado." At 10:55, the telephone rings, and Westerkamp's voice says "telephone," with Sonja repeating "dadado."

It is this section that I found too sweet and stereotyped in DB Boyko's performance of this piece. Her recitation of the poem was in a sing-song voice, which seemed to me too similar to the kind of voice that adults use when they are talking condescendingly to young children. When I perform the piece, I try to make my recitation as straightforward and serious as possible.

Moment Five: Song and Play (2 1/2 years old)

This is a meditative piece, in which the performer concentrates on a type of "inner song" that is quite different from what the child sings. The performer's and the child's voice connect only on a tonal level not in terms of musical "style." Along with the child's voice a female voice is audible on tape, singing melodies somewhat in the style of J. S. Bach's arias. These melodies have to be understood by the performer as an emerging memory, which the live voice then echoes in a fragmented fashion. I have suggested when and how the performer should echo the female voice on tape, but this can be altered or adjusted. It is important here to keep a balance between the two female voices interacting with each other and the child's voice, i.e. the performer's voice should have

the same intensity as the female's voice on tape. At no point should the presence of the child's voice be forgotten or covered up.

Theatrically it works well to have the performer positioned in a spotlight in a meditative posture. The posture should express a thoughtful, reflective mood, somewhat dreamlike. (HW: score)

The female voice on tape is Westerkamp's. So in this part of the performance, there are three human presences interacting: Westerkamp, Sonja, and the live female vocalist. At the beginning of this section, as Westerkamp introduces the musical themes, Sonja's voice is processed for the first time, becoming more reverberant and pitch-oriented (one listener refers to Sonja's voice here as sounding like whale song). Then we hear Sonja in the bath, saying sentences for the first time "You are Penny" (repeated). The more processed child voice continues in the background, while Sonja's unprocessed voice continues with some more songlike vocalizations: "Ooh ahh" on a long downward glissando. She goes back and forth between these sentence forms and more extended vocalizations: "You are silly" "Splaaaaaash" "I waaaaant to, I waaaant to," then counts to 10 (begin again). "Oh look it!" "Buy some more?" then ends with laughter.

While I was careful to pay attention to the presence of the child's voice in this section, making sure that my own voice did not cover it up, I found that initially, I could not listen as intently to the child in this section as in others. Because my primary interaction was with Westerkamp's voice on tape, developing a counterpoint between her song fragments and my own, I found it more difficult to listen to Sonja's voice as well, since, as Westerkamp notes, her voice connects with the vocal performer's only on a tonal level. I needed to listen to the tape part by itself several times first, then only later to practice my vocal part with it, in order to integrate all the parts effectively. It would have been easy to ignore the child's voice altogether, in this concentration on an "inner song" developed in counterpoint with the recorded adult voice. This performance situation creates more distance between the vocalist and the child. As vocalist, I re-focused sonically, as a parent at times retreats emotionally from a child, developing an inner song that is only tenuously related to the child's experience. Westerkamp associates this meditative and attenuated state with the music of J. S. Bach.

Moment Six: Self and Other (3 1/2 years old)

As soon as the performer hears the first sound of this section she should jump up from her meditative position as if surprised, move downstage and deliver directly to the audience. This is a conceptual piece. It is about discovering a relationship between self and world, expressed through echo, feedback, reflection. The child's part on tape is about discovering the feedback process between herself and the tape recorder: the ability to listen back to her own voice or hearing it through headphones. The performer's words should be bouncing off of the child's words, but they should also come from "inside." The words should be spoken in a variety of ways: searching, discovering, astonished, surprised, intense. Where indicated the words should be sung. Not all words suggested in the score need to be used, since it may be hard to fit them all into the short timespan, especially towards the end. However, as many as possible should be used. The more lively and playfully this section is performed, the better. (HW: score)

The tape part begins with Sonja's voice humming a tune and using nonsense syllables, or some kind of made-up language. During this part, the performer says words such as "Voices. Sounds. Word. Song. Language." Then Sonja's voice says words which the vocal performer responds to directly:

Sonja - Boy!
Performer - Man!
Sonja - Little Red Riding Hood
Performer - Woman [sung]
Sonja - want to listen back to it
Performer - I want to hear myself
Sonja - I want to listen back to it
Performer - I want to feel my voice
Sonja - I said bye bye to myself
Performer - This is my voice!

Other words are interspersed, both on tape and in the performer's part, which are less directly echoed but still related to each other. Sonja says: "Light! Microphone! Flowers! Speaker! Light! Bed. Pillow. Sleep. How are you?" and tells a short story about a troll living under a bridge. These words are interspersed with laughter. The performer says: "Mirror. Garden. Reflection. Sound. Echo. Home. World. Love. The touch of sound." Some of the words on tape have been processed with reverberation.

Moment Seven: Laughter (4 1/2 years old)

I have given no musical suggestions to the performer here. I see this section as a chance to be funny, virtuosic, outrageous, gross, making faces, being a clown or a fool. Depending on the performer's orientation, this section can contain anything from vocal action to lots of body language, clowning action, things that would make a child laugh and would make the child's laughter contagious to the audience. Whatever the performer decides to do should happen in interaction with the tape, never competing with or covering up the child's voice. The performer should definitely not include laughter into her

vocal actions. (HW: score)

The tape part is all laughter from Sonja. Her voice, with reverberation added, is panned from side to side giving the listener the impression of being inside the laughter. At the end of this part, Westerkamp's laughter is heard briefly.

I was fortunate enough to have an opportunity to perform this piece privately for a mother and child, friends of mine. Initially, I had a great deal of trouble rehearsing this part, because although the laughter on tape is lively and engaging, it is still on tape. I realized how much, when clowning for children, I count on their response to develop what I do. When I knew that the laughter would come anyway, whatever I did (somewhat like a laugh track on a television show), it was difficult to really be funny. But when I had a young child for an audience, I was able to develop an approach which I knew at least worked for her. She started laughing when I hid my face then made gross faces and noises, and imitated a donkey's call while moving in an ungainly way. In the performance, I extended the hiding part to staggering around aimlessly on the floor under the baby blanket from Moment Two, making various gross noises.

Moment Eight: "Songs and Stories" (5 1/2 years old)

At the end of the laughter section the performer moves back to the rocking chair, sits down and opens a fairytale book. In this section the child is singing songs in various languages and is telling a story. The live vocal part consists of a series of beginning lines from fairytales. In Appendix "B" I have given a list of such lines, all of which begin with "once" or "once upon a time" and introduce us to a variety of female characters. The performer can choose her favourite lines and intersperse them randomly throughout this section. Each one should be read with a slightly different expression (slow, fast, whispered, talked, excited, wondrous, mysterious, etc.) A pause must be left in two places where the child says: 1) "the smart little pig/he was very smart/ was very smart..." and 2) "that's the end of you old wolf." Everywhere else the performer can use her own discretion of how and when to place the phrases. (HW: score)

The fairytale beginnings chosen by the performer in this section play a large role in determining the character of this section. There is a wide range of introductions, from fairly neutral: "Once there was a little girl who lived in a wild garden..." to some that are much more stereotyped: "Once upon a time there was a woman who was a real witch and she had two daughters. One was ugly and wicked. The other was good and lovely..." Then there are others that present more realistic situations: "Once upon a time there lived a mother with her three children. She worked hard to support her growing family..."

In the tape part, Sonja's voice is singing songs in German, English and French, and telling the story of the three little pigs in English. Every once in a while she stops and says: "mum, listen to it." The tape part is completely made up of layers with Sonja's voice, unprocessed. There are no other sounds around her.

Moment Nine: To the Heart (7 years old)

This is the performer's chance at a jazzy, freely extended vocal performance. I have suggested the following elements:

rapid breathing as in Moment One. Tiny, close-miked whispered sounds. Glissandos with a warble. Glissandos with an aah or other vowel sounds. Rrs with a rolled tongue or flutter-tongued. "Dugga-dugga," alternating pitches or rapidly going up and down, then landing on a long, intense tone. Improvising tune around the drone on tape. The joyful, welcoming cry from Moment One is returning at the very end of the piece, immediately followed by: A long exaggerated sigh.

This section should start out with breathing and quiet whispered sounds until the child has spoken the looped sentence two times. It is important that the audience gets this chance to understand the child's words. The performer is welcome to invent additional sound elements and is free to perform the suggested sounds in any order, except at the beginning and end of the section.

The idea here is to create the reverse situation of Moment One: there the female voice contained with its structured tune the baby's primal vocal techniques, here the child contains with its structured tune and language the female's extended vocal explorations. (HW: score)

Sonja's voice sings a descending melody, with the words: "My mum dug dug dug down to the middle of the earth, to the heart, to the heart, to the heart [inhale]." This melody is looped throughout the section, and accompanied on the tape by a reverberant organ sound playing a repeated broken chord in G, in a middle register (GDG below middle C). The differing lengths of these two repeated figures give this section a very strong rhythmic sense. After several repetitions, reverberation is added to Sonja's voice. Shortly after this, a high-pitched drone is added in the background. Then Sonja's voice is layered with itself, with the final words of the melody "to the heart" being heard in syncopation with itself. The reverberation is increased throughout this section, making the words less evident. Out of this reverberant field, Sonja's unprocessed voice emerges, saying the words: "Hi mum, see you mum, you're a silly fool, mum," fading out on the third repetition to end the piece.

Listener Responses

This piece formed part of a listening project for a research paper written in 1995 (unpublished) about listener responses to a number of works by different Canadian electroacoustic composers. In that study, listeners responded to a short excerpt of the piece (about six minutes). I also played excerpts of this piece for a number of undergraduate university classes. I played the whole piece on tape for a large grade 10 girls' vocal class at North Toronto Collegiate. As I noted earlier, I also wanted to garner responses to the piece as a whole, performed live, and decided to perform it myself in order to facilitate this. The initial performance was for a friend, Donna Warr, and her three year old daughter, Mawgan, at their family cottage, a safe and still relatively private environment. The next performance was on CIUT radio, on Sarah Peebles's show The Audible Woman, which airs at 8 pm. on Tuesday evenings in Toronto, broadcasting to southern Ontario and upper New York State. I contacted about forty people by email and asked them to listen to this show, and send me responses. Unfortunately, only one listener responded to this call. I also performed the piece live in Chicago, in December of 1998, obtaining a number of responses, as well as in Kingston in March of 1999. In all, the number of written responses to this piece was the largest of all the pieces in my research, with ninety eight in total.

Musical Structure

The most detailed analyses of the musical structure of this piece were made by the Grade 10 girls in the vocal class. Two of the girls described the piece in some detail.

Liane (14f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class) says:

I believe the music was grouped by different stages in the life of the baby, e.g. birth, when began to talk. Tells the story of a baby through music. Background music expresses the emotions. Relationship between mother and child

- 1=birth
- 2=speaking - not English
- 3=playing
- 4=poem
- 5=making child laugh
- 6=reading a story to child
- 7=speaking

This summary includes all of the moments indicated in Westerkamp's score, with the exceptions of Moment five, "Song and Play" and Moment Six, "Self and Other," the two sections following the poem. Many of the other sections have similar titles to Westerkamp's: "Prologue and Birth" becomes "Birth," "Laughter" becomes "Making child laugh," "Songs and Stories" becomes "Reading a story to child." This listener clearly apprehended not only the general idea of the piece, but also its progression through various stages of life indicated through different approaches to sound.

Another student in this class came up with six different sections. Angel associated these sections with different memories and emotions of her own. I have added the moments in the piece that she refers to in parentheses:

The music was full of so many mixed emotions. It had the fears of a child and also some of the joys of growing up and learning and developing into a little person.

I really liked the moment with the baby being washed. It brought back memories of watching my mom wash my little sister. I also remembered having baths with my sisters [Moment One].

The part with the dog barking in the background and hearing the sound of the baby's voice brought back memories of my fear of animals as a child. That whole scene kind of reminded me of the fear and anxiety of being child even though people think it's all carefree there's really so much to worry about [Moment Seven].

The part where it went nana nana na na reminded me of kindergarten and playing little games with all my friends. Then all the other voices added in and it sounded like recess at my school. [Moment Three]

The woman's voice talking about words sounded like the child's ... leading it and trying to get it to say something instead of just meaningless words. [Moment Four/ Moment Six]

The part where there was kind of like a choir singing reminded me of my old school because it was an Anglican school so we had to go to church so that part in the song represented to me the child being introduced to religion and knowledge because she started speaking and saying numbers. [Moment Five]

When the child was singing it reminded me of when I would learn songs at school and I would feel so excited to go home and show my parents. [Moment Eight/ Moment Nine] (Angel, 15f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class)

Like the previous listener, Angel relates to this piece with reference to the development of the baby, focusing much more on the child's experiences rather than those of the adult vocalist representing the mother. This makes sense since she is listening to the piece with reference to her own memories and childhood experiences. The experiences she discusses are fascinating, with references to religion, education, socialization in kindergarten and relationships with parents. Many of these themes arise in other listeners' responses as well, as I will discuss later.

Many people of different ages listened to this piece, including several electroacoustic composers, and yet it was only these two high school students who described the formal structure of the piece in detail with some accuracy. Why is this? To suggest some possible reasons, I will turn to some of the other responses to the piece and its status as music, beginning with the response of my friend Donna Warr to my initial performance of the piece. Her response includes several questions which seemed implicit in some other listeners' responses.

Being a woman who has given birth, the birth sequence, the breathing and the sounds made me go somewhere within myself automatically recesses of myself being addressed. So some kind of contact was made initially for me. Then came an ambiguous/uncomfortable passage, both mind and body, moving around not able to focus, much shifting of self. Mind saying such things: Is she really going to act like a baby? Does she think this is music? Oh my friend is more of a nutcase than I thought. This is unprofessional: does her singing change all the time? Is this legitimate? She is over the edge on this one. This is really silly I am experiencing pain. This passage distanced me from the performance. My mind and body fighting and rationalizing the layers of cultural stigmas and barriers, pulling me away from the experience. Content I was somehow in this comfortable reprieve from the performance: comfort, we so frequently seek comfort=survival. I was pulled out of this self-encased zone by a few spoken words...

Donna continues after this to describe her reaction to the end of the piece. I will discuss that part of her response later. At the moment, I am concerned with several of the questions that she asks in relation to the musicality of the piece and its legitimacy as performance, and how these relate to other listeners' responses.

Does she think this is music?

Several listeners describe the piece as not being music. Larry, an electroacoustic composer in his '50s, says "If this is meant unpretentiously for small children, fine. Otherwise, there is nothing in it musically." Amos, (51f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class) asks: "Is this totally improvised or notated in some way? This is fascinating, but soundscape is a more apt name for it than music I m glad they coined a new term." She can accept the piece as soundscape but not as music, and wonders whether it is totally improvised, perhaps indicating that if it is in some way notated, that the notation would make it more legitimate. Two of the students in this class also dismiss it as non-music. Lively (15f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class): "Child talking doesn't sound like music. Lullaby noises to quiet her daughter." Even the very melodic lullaby is described as "noise" rather than music by this listener. Gwen: (15f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class) "Doesn't really seem like music. No rhythms or pitch." Gwen cannot hear the many rhythms and pitches in the piece because it doesn't really seem like music to her.

Other listeners perceive the piece as a welcome challenge to musical convention. Some listeners focus on its function as a celebration of daily life. Angsax (23f, Waterloo theory class) responds "music is a living thing, celebrating life." Raen (22f, Waterloo theory class) goes a little further, indicating that this idea of music as a celebration of daily life is one that challenges accepted ideas of what constitutes music: "challenges conception of music life is music." Cora (14f, North Toronto C. I. vocal class) says "This music was like an aural photograph album," noting the connection with an aural rather than visual record of relationships within a family. Another student in the class, Amethyst (14f) hears its expressivity while noting its difference from her usual taste: "Moments of Laughter is a very real, expressive and joyous piece of music. It is very different from what I would normally listen to [although I do listen to all music, I m a real fan of hip hop and R and B]."

One composer notes a connection between this piece and the work of an avant-garde filmmaker, searching for a connection in another artistic discipline that will give this work legitimacy. Albert (28m email) says: "Waterbaby what was the name of the film with the birth of the baby? 1st year avant-garde cinema." He is likely referring to the film *Window Water Baby Moving* by Stan Brakhage (1959), which focuses on Jane Brakhage as she gives birth to their child. Brakhage is considered one of North America's most prominent avant-garde filmmakers, in part because of his films that make no clear distinction between (public) art and (private) life, creation and procreation. In visual art, Mary Kelly's (1975) *Post-partum document*, a large piece based on her relationship with her son from birth to age six, does similar work.⁴ Westerkamp's *Moments of Laughter* was composed in 1988, much later than either of these works, and is the only musical piece that I have heard which is based on the sounds of a developing relationship between a parent and a child over time. Some people still will not consider it as music, or consider it to challenge current conceptions of what music is. Donna Warr suggests that, for her at least, to dismiss its legitimacy as music both allows her to remain in a comfortable position in relation to it, unquestioning of cultural conditioning, yet at the same time distances her

from the performance, as she is unable to engage completely with it from this insulated position. Perhaps this insulation and lack of engagement is why there were so few descriptions of the musical structure, even from people who are musically trained and who were able to describe the structure of other pieces. The blocks surrounding responses to this piece are simply too high for some to surmount.

Within the electroacoustic community, there was very little said about this piece. It was performed at Convergence, a Canadian Electroacoustic Community conference held at the Banff Centre for the Arts, in 1989. After the concert, a few composers spoke privately to Westerkamp, telling her that they found the piece "too personal." The work has been performed rarely since that time, and I only know of one review of it. There has been no discussion of it in any public forum. Perhaps this silence reflects lack of interest, embarrassment, ignorance, or something else. Silence about a work is ambiguous. Since the criticism was made that the piece is "too personal," I will explore the possible meanings of this phrase, which is itself ambiguous.

Are the visceral bodily sounds that are represented too personal for some? A short segment of the work imitates (albeit in a very muted form) the sounds of birth, a part of life that is rarely represented in music. Suzanne Cusick attributes this silence about birthing to a "cultural horror" of the act of birth-giving (1994: 26). She suggests that part of the social discomfort with the act of giving birth is that the changes in breathing and the cries of a labouring mother can sound sexual. Some listeners initially interpreted the birthing section as a representation of sexuality, and were embarrassed by it. Another listener notes that the birth section was very stylized. But if it had been even more visceral, perhaps it would have caused even greater embarrassment. Beth (23f, Waterloo music theory class) interprets the bodily sounds as dangerous: "don't like the breathing giving birth or doing something she shouldn't to a baby [psycho] while they are in the bath." Live (20f, Waterloo music theory class) also hears these sounds as evidence of the mother being a danger to the child: "scaring the poor baby [moans and groans]. Splashing in the bathtub. Mommy had a little too much to drink." The conflation of sexuality and motherhood through the bodily sounds of heavy breathing and panting is a cultural danger zone: Jo Anna Isaak, reading Julia Kristeva, claims that "the figure of the 'mother who knows sexual pleasure' is the most severely repressed 'feminine' figure in Western culture" (Isaak, in Kelly, 1983; 205).⁵ To make these sounds public is considered by some to be obscene, embarrassing, or potentially dangerous (sexual). I would suggest that the act of representing this repressed figure by making these sounds public is radical and transgressive.

Is the call-and-response too close to the sonic play between parent and child that I myself initially found "too personal" to be considered music? One aspect of the vocal work that excites commentary is its exploration in Moments Two and Three of non-verbal communication between mother and child, as the child learns language. Some listeners like this expression of communication without words. James (20m York electroacoustic composition class) says: "I liked the call/response between voice and baby playful like a child... Reminded me of how we learn to associate sounds and what it would be like not to have any associations." James notes how the piece leads him to think about free play with sound. Kapok (16f North Toronto CI vocal class) likes this part because of the interaction between woman and child: "I particularly like the communication between the performer and child, and the reaction that performer has towards the child. I also like the performer's imitation of the child's noises." Max (21f York electroacoustic composition class) says: "I like the variation and call/response between child and woman, very artistic idea. Generally the interaction of sounds really works with this piece. WHOA! The last groan (by woman) is brilliant sounding." Mark Heinrich (24m, York electroacoustic composition class) locates the musicality of the passage in the presence of the female vocalist: "woman's voice repeating conversations of vocables between baby turning it into music and mother." My own initial response to this section was "Why, this is exactly what I did with my children. But it is just play, not music." Of course, when I was asked to make similar sounds in an extended vocal workshop,⁶ I did not question their musicality. When I associated this kind of sound-making with the musical context of an extended vocal workshop, they seemed musical. In the context of my home and my own children, perhaps I associated them too much with the domestic realm. Putting these sounds, and the sonic relationship between parent and child, in a concert setting challenges these assumptions.

This is unprofessional: does her singing change all the time? Is this legitimate?

I have since reconsidered my initial response that questioned the musicality of childhood vocables, remembering the concentration, improvisation, repetition, and interaction that characterized daily sessions of soundmaking with my children. Perhaps because Westerkamp calls for extended vocal techniques in this piece, it allows audience members to make the connection that she wishes between musical expressivity and the sounds of young children. Perhaps for some this also tends to situate the musicality of the piece in the virtuosity of the female vocalist's responses to the child's sounds more than in the child's sounds themselves, which are not considered musical in themselves. For instance Mark Heinrich, above, speaks of the vocalist turning the child's sounds into music. Also, one of the responses to my performance in Chicago focuses on my more limited scope as an extended vocalist as a weakness of the piece:

I've heard other pieces by Hildegard and am most familiar with *In the Forest Floor* [sic], which is quite different from this piece. The tape part is interesting enough, but I strongly feel that this piece necessitates a very strong, wide-ranging, and truly exploratory

vocalist, which was not the case in this performance. So the responses to the tape were very unsatisfying improvisations, which distracted and detracted from the piece. (Decker, no other information given, Chicago) Decker claims that the piece "necessitates" a very exploratory vocalist, not considering the possibility that Westerkamp could have written it to accommodate people with a wide range of technical abilities, as she did. When Westerkamp provided alternate suggestions for vocalists, she was emphasizing the development of a relationship between vocalist and taped child that depended less on virtuosity, and more on subtle movements from imitation to interplay. Blue-Green (27f composer, Chicago) finds the variation in interplay to be most interesting: "baby section was most interesting when performer's voice was not mimicking exactly kept the piece in a realm beyond nostalgia." While Westerkamp asks the performer to improvise rather than mimicking the child's voice exactly, she does not want these responses to become too virtuosic, or to take over from the child's voice. Many times throughout the instructions to the performer, Westerkamp reminds her to balance her voice with that of the child's, avoiding competing with or covering up the child's voice.

Does "too personal" refer to Westerkamp's decision to leave the vocal sounds on tape relatively unaltered, and therefore recognizable, not abstracted from their context? As I note in the chapter on epistemology in relation to electroacoustic music, technical skill with equipment is highly valued in the electroacoustic music community. Many of the sounds in this piece are juxtaposed but not altered: this is more characteristic of this work than of others such as Cricket Voice or Fantasie for Horns, for instance. Westerkamp decides how much to manipulate particular sounds based on her relationship to the sound, her care for it: she admits that she is more ruthless with the sounds of truck brakes than with the sounds of organisms, and she is even more careful than usual with the sound of her own daughter's voice, as I discussed earlier in Chapter Three.

Some listeners share Westerkamp's careful attitude towards the manipulation of sounds. Eve Angeline (27f, individual contact) says:

kind of 'dangerous' sounding, about things that are explicitly private [invisible?] in relation to the symbolic order. Voice not particularly altered: I worried about scary alterations of mother/baby voice. Anticipated [she anticipated such alterations with fear]... Safety is important to me ...i.e. don't want composer to 'turn baby into machine'. It is interesting that the first time Sonja's voice is altered is during Moment Five, when the child is two and a half years old. This is the point at which children begin to express themselves more fully with language, entering the symbolic order. At that point, perhaps Westerkamp feels less of a need to protect the child's voice from alteration, since she has moved out of the realm that Eve Angeline describes as "explicitly private" in relation to the symbolic order. Eve Angeline wants the child's voice to remain safely unaltered, and anticipates frightening alterations of it. Jane (20f, York undergraduate electroacoustic music) says "the child seems vulnerable and helpless amid a hostile and potentially dangerous world."

This theme of the innocent child menaced by a hostile world is one that has been used repeatedly in Hollywood films, as Lou (31m, composer, Chicago) points out: "Kids' voices recorded are a horror show cliché. It's creepy and sentimental." It is not Westerkamp's intention to present such a dramatic context: this is not a story about a child being menaced. Yet nineteen listeners use words such as "scary" and "sinister" in their responses.⁷ As in my analysis of Cricket Voice, I believe that this has less to do with Westerkamp's treatment of childhood sounds, and more to do with Hollywood's dramatization of them. As Eve Angeline points out, it is the anticipation of a possibly dangerous environment that characterizes her response, rather than the perception of one intended by the composer; in Jane's words, a "potentially dangerous" world rather than one that is actually dangerous. It is plausible that listeners would anticipate a dangerous environment for the child's voice since the treatment of a child's voice in a dramatic context such as television or film is often to create an image of innocence that is menaced.

Westerkamp chooses to keep the child's voice safe by only changing it slightly rather than radically, and by doing this she loses some of the composers, who wish for more manipulation of the voices. Elizabeth (21f, York undergraduate electroacoustic composition) says: "Interesting things are done with the voice. The singing voice in the middle sounds a bit out of place needs to be a bit more 'abstract' or experimented with." Biff (22m York undergraduate electroacoustic composition) comments: "I really think that the vocals would have sounded better altered like at the beginning." In these responses, there is no concern about the safety of the child's voice, but rather a description of it as a resource, something to be experimented with, or altered, or made more abstract. These responses by young composers already seem to reflect the emphasis on technique and abstraction that also characterizes electroacoustic textbooks, and the traditional values of the genre.

Is she really going to act like a baby? ... This is really silly...

Is the simple presence of a child's voice in a public place controversial? Should children (and perhaps women) be seen and not heard? Some listeners in my study reacted very negatively to the voices. Zubian (20m York electroacoustic composition class) says: "Extremely annoying child talking. Excited woman grabs attention. I feel like I'm intruding on the woman and child's privacy. Towards end of piece voice becomes unbearable torture. Shut up lady!" Cora (25f, Queen's University gender and music course): "Can't take this. Can't stand the little girl's voice who sang I love recording. Both these listeners

use very strong language expressing their distaste for the voices such as "unbearable torture" or "I can't stand this." Gwen (15f, North Toronto CI) writes "very interesting ... shut this kid up already!" then crosses the latter phrase out. Another girl in the same class (using the same pseudonym), is equally ambivalent about the voices:

I am trying to be open-minded, but I find this song annoying. I feel like I'm at home trying to have some peace and quiet but my family is annoying me...the lady reading reminds me of the storytellers on polka dot door [so phoney]. She has a nice voice! (Gwen2 15f, North Toronto CI) While there were many responses which did not complain about the characteristics of the recorded and live voices, the intensity of many of these comments leads me to wonder what is at their basis. Is it an insistence that the private sounds of a mother and child should remain private, not cross into the public domain of a concert hall where listeners could feel that they are intruding on a private space, spying on a home? I find this challenge to the public-private dichotomy an exciting and important aspect of the piece.

The controversy around the use of a child's voice as the focus of imitation could be a reflection of the cultural denigration of children's activities. In an article on this topic, composer Pauline Oliveros and music theorist Fred Maus have the following interchange:

[Oliveros] ... there is the whole cynical attitude about babies and children that their activities are to be sneered at, not to be taken seriously. "That's just a baby!"⁸

[Maus] And of course, that's tied in with the way that women are thought about "That's just a baby" and "That's just the way that women spend their time, watching the baby do these silly things." (1994: 181) With a deeply-rooted cultural prejudice that babies have nothing to say, particularly before they learn language, it would seem foolish to base a musical piece on imitation of the baby's sounds hence, perhaps, the judgment made by some listeners that there is nothing musically worthwhile in the piece, or that the baby's voice is annoying, just baby babble, not worth listening to. This is similar to the reaction of the traditional art world in 1975 to Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document: "the mainstream art crowd denigrated the piece because it was just about a woman and her baby, thereby no fit subject for high culture" (Lippard 1983: xi).

Being a woman who has given birth...

Lippard records another reaction to Kelly's piece about the mother-child relation:

the piece joins the broad spectrum of feminist art attempting to rehabilitate denigrated aspects of female experience, from needlework to maternity to female sexuality and language. On one hand, then, PPD could be said to reinforce stereotypes by identifying a woman artist by her motherhood, although eventually it becomes clear that Kelly is interrupting rather than propagating clichés. (Lippard 1983: xi)

My initial reaction to the piece reflected a similar concern: I heard the performer's rendition of the poem as too sweet and cloying, indexing a stereotype of motherhood as simply sweet, soft and nurturant. Some other women listeners discuss similar feelings. Jean (42f, woman composer, individual contact) says:

At various times in the piece I feel a tension between being very engaged in the sound world being created, and at other times am uncomfortable with the sentimentality being expressed. This could have to do with my uncomfortableness with the "mother" culture, and how it forces adult women to remain at a child level. This is not necessarily inherent with the work, but I feel that because at times one is able to feel a sense of female power and at other times these references to more sentimentalized female culture, the piece doesn't fully address this cultural problem.

Cora (25f, Queen's University gender and music course) has a stronger reaction, in which she cannot stand hearing the child's voice, as I mentioned earlier. This adverse reaction seems to be located in her feeling of not belonging, of not knowing what she is supposed to be feeling, in a feeling of intimidation:

I can't take this. Can't stand the little girl's voice who sang I love recording. Sounds of giving birth, water, baby.....Nature me? My female body, is this where I belong? I guess the combination of these sounds supposed to be.....peaceful....normal.... soothing. But I can't stand it. I can't stand abnormally loud (amplified) sound of the water. I prefer sound which is more visual, (for me somehow) than this - too artificial sound which imitates nature. I don't know what I am supposed to be feeling. Not only I can't stand but also I feel intimidated.

Her feelings of intimidation in relation to the piece bring to mind the many descriptions of this piece as "scary" or disturbing among the high school girls' responses. Jen (15f) writes her response as a poem:

the birth of the child
the cues and laughter too
the mind warps of the toddler
who to the world is new
the growing process now begins
the pains of aging, amongst things
the growling of dogs

the singing of mom
she teaches the child
a new song
now the child is older
learnt new interesting things
the child will grow and love
into the world a new child it brings
listen to the laughter
as it grows
and again the seeds of life
it does sew

This poem describes a cycle of life based on giving birth and raising children. What are the "pains of aging" that this young woman mentions? Another student in the class, Amantha (14f) mentions "fear of the unknown," while Kate (15f) says "later in the song, the talking and emotions made me feel scared." For some of these teenage girls, the fearful unknown may be the role of motherhood. On the one hand, they have been told that giving birth is a miracle (three girls used the phrase "miracle of birth." One of them put the word "miracle" in quotes, indicating a degree of skepticism). On the other hand, they see their own mothers' lives, as well as mass media versions of motherhood, and wonder about how this role would shape their identity. Danae (15f) imagines a mother's identity as completely linked to the child:

my bodily fluids immerse you,
washing and cleansing.
my blood is your blood
my body your body
my heart beating... your heart pounding
mother and child.

This poem was accompanied by a Madonna image.⁹ Hope's discussion of motherly identity is more complex:

Very loving and motherly. Mysterious (a few parts). Calming (in some sections). Enchanting, very unusual, a little uncomfortable. The moments in a baby's life sound comforting, rewarding, and they cheer you up (the sounds). One sequence of this composition made me feel sad and it even made me miss my own mum even though she is at work. (When the mother is solemnly humming and singing to her baby, as the baby is playing, it sounded as though she was sub-consciously watching her daughter grow up). Dreaming. This part was also a little sad, and it made me feel as though mentally I was travelling through time and back. It's hard to explain. When the woman sings it sounds like those old folk songs in the times of slavery. (Hope, 14f) Here, Hope describes different parts of the piece in terms of the unknown (mysterious), a construction that makes the unknown seem more enchanting than fearful, but still somewhat uncomfortable. She hears the baby's sounds as comfortable and rewarding, and at the same time sad. It is interesting that at this point she travels back and forth in time, attempting perhaps to associate the imaginary mother identity she has constructed so far with that of the child: it makes her miss her mum and also identify with the mother watching the child grow up. This description recalls Westerkamp's description of the self as desire in motion,¹⁰ searching for nourishment for her creativity in the mother, then in others. Hope's association of the blues lullaby with the times of slavery is musically accurate and also politically interesting, in light of the possible meanings of this sense of loss felt by a mother as her child matures.

As I mentioned earlier, mothers are put in the difficult situation of forming a strong empathic bond with a young dependent child, then later allowing the child to develop independence. The child's increasing independence is further complicated for the mother by its association with the learning of language. This acquisition of language establishes a place for the child in the symbolic order, and at the same time reminds the mother of her negative place in that order. As she watches the child gain independence, she begins to lose the power that she had in the child's life as primary nurturer. In Laura Mulvey's review of Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document, she describes Kelly's approach to the work of art as a fetish to replace the child as fetish, to deal with a sense of loss, and to express rebellion against her secondary place in the symbolic order:

As the child grows through the various stages of increasing independence from his mother, she experiences a sense of loss that Mary Kelly describes as reliving her own previous Oedipal drama, undergoing castration for the second time and re-learning the fact of her negative place in the symbolic order. Within these terms, the mother has two possible roads open; recognition and acceptance of her secondary place or rebellion against it. Her rebellion takes the form of the fetishisation of the child (as substitute phallus), clinging to the couple relationship and refusing to allow the child to emerge as an independent entity. Part of the fascination of the Post-Partum Document lies here: the exhibition in all of its obsessive detail fetishises the child, but in this case, the mother has reconciled her 'natural capacity' with her work as an artist. The art object as fetish replaces the child as potential fetish. (Mulvey 1983: 202) Westerkamp's performance piece is different from Kelly's installation. A performance cannot work as a fetish object quite so successfully, because it is not an object, but an ephemeral event. But there is no question that rehearsing and performing this piece contributed to my understanding of this sense of loss, to my rebellion against my secondary place in the symbolic order, and to my ability to deal with this sense of loss.

Perhaps the analogue of a fetish object in performance is the ritualization of rehearsal, its investment with significance and emotional intensity. I was careful to schedule my rehearsals for Moments of Laughter in the privacy and comfort of my home studio. I paid attention to the emotional effect of different moments, writing about these in my journal or corresponding with Westerkamp about them. Even before I considered the significance of using a blues song as a lullaby, it felt right in rehearsal, seeming to express much more than the attempt to help a baby sleep. Blues songs are commonly understood as a musical form that expresses loss, as well as rebellion against the slaves' secondary place in the social and symbolic orders; the choice of that form as a basis for the lullaby could invoke these associations, and I believe they did in my case although I could not articulate these associations initially. Kelly explicitly describes the loss of the child through his growing independence as the point at which a mother relearns her secondary place in the world, at which point she can either accept this or rebel against it. Westerkamp does not discuss this process explicitly, but chooses a musical form that has been used to express both loss and rebellion.

The adolescent girls' responses to the piece were often related to their memories of their own childhoods, as well as anticipation of, and imaginings of a future role as mother. But what about reactions by men? I have often wondered, for instance, whether a man could perform this piece. The inclusion of a birthing sequence near the beginning would mean that a man would need, at least at that point, to be "cross-dressing" in a way that I have never heard before. Certainly, this would contradict Westerkamp's intent, since she appears quite clear that this is intended for a female vocalist, to explore feminine identity in terms of motherhood. Does a performance by a female vocalist exclude men from the role of audience, or does the piece still speak to them as people who may be parents, and certainly were children, themselves?

Some men do relate to the piece as parents. Albert (composer, 28, individual contact) says "I must continue to record Ivan and Lizzie." Larry, another composer (50, individual contact) relates as a parent, and finds the sounds problematic: "Background sounds trite-no depth (sonically)- just too cute- I lived with my daughter on a boat in B.C. until she was two. These are not the sounds I remember." Brit (40m, Waterloo theory class) is also reminded of his daughter's early life: "memories of my daughter's birth and early months at home." Several other male listeners described the work as a mother-child piece, and did not refer to any memories of their own childhoods. These responses (twelve in total) were fairly neutral, interested without expressing a high level of engagement or alienation.¹¹

Five other responses were clearly alienated, to differing degrees. Ishmael (35m, individual contact) says "Yikes. This is all rather personal isn't it? Somehow because it feels documentary-ish, I don't really feel like I'm here." Zubian Marys (20m, York electroacoustic composition) says "I feel like I'm intruding on the woman and child's privacy ... Shut up lady!" Windblower's (39m, Chicago) distanced response describes the piece as too academic:

Interesting premise but I find it rather academic. In view of the emotive, reciprocal non-verbal interaction between the child and adult. I am reminded of the structuralists' concerns (passé) with words, and the associating with meaning. An interesting juxtaposition of sounds but lacks enough power to clearly elucidate in a non-verbal way the particulars of the relationship (and human element) between adult, child, the interdependence between both. Perhaps I would have a different reaction if I had more time to hear it/digest it.

Lou (31m, composer, Chicago) also criticizes the work because of its academic nature:

This work is a dead end to me. Vacuous to me. Not speakin' to me. As it goes on I like it less and less, even though I'm trying to breathe deeper to concentrate on it.... Academia is a big waste of time in my opinion, unless you can get the big money with some sort of cultural-femino research.¹² Chris (23m, composer, Kingston) says:

I'm not sure I fully understand this work. Perhaps it's because I'm male, and don't have any "maternal instincts" (if there is such a thing). With the help of the program note, I understand the process and purpose, but I find my reaction strangely blank. At the Kingston concert, I also played Westerkamp's piece The Deep Blue Sea, which is based on a non-custodial father's experience of parenting, both before and after losing custody. Chris had a much more engaged response to this piece: "A strange, warming, yet sad story. The intonation of the voice and the background sounds blend perfectly to create the mood." Chris wonders if his lack of engagement with Moments of Laughter is because of his maleness and lack of maternal instincts. Is it because The Deep Blue Sea was based on a man's experience (Brian Shein), read by a man (Norbert Ruebsaat), that it was easier for Chris to identify with the narrative? But some of the male listeners, quoted earlier, did have more engaged responses to Moments of Laughter, so Chris's response seems more idiosyncratic than generally male.

I was surprised, however, that none of the men's responses referred to their own childhoods, or to their relationships with their family members, themes that arose often in the responses of the adolescent girls in particular, as well as some of the adult women. For instance, Morgan (22f, Queen's gender and music):

These sounds are so familiar. I too loved to hear my voice on tape recorder (tape retort-

I called it) When I was small. The baby sounds are like my baby brother. The catches in the voice and breathing to catch air to make a sound, like the baby is not sure what is going to be effective in making the sound it wants, is familiar. Newton (22f, Queen's gender and music): "Little girl's comments are cute and remind me of when I was young and recorded my own voice and thought it was fun." Two of the adolescent girls also refer to recording their own voices when they were little. Several of the girls mention memories of being a child or caring for children as a babysitter.

For some of the girls, the piece led them to revalue their mothers. Alex (14f): "makes you think what a world without a mother to talk to, to be with, just to love and be loved by, would be like." Bab (14f):

I remember when my mum used to teach me patty cake. She also taught me to read. I used to go to my mom if I had a bad dream. This piece brought back the good memories that I had when I was little. It also made me think about life. We have a lot to live for. The responses from the adolescent girls in general indicate much greater access to memories of early family life, or at least their willingness to talk about these memories, than other respondents. Would the same be true of adolescent boys? Perhaps in the future I will find out. It also seems that some of the women listeners were able to relate the piece to their own childhood, while the men either related as parents or did not seem to be able to identify strongly with either woman or child. Is this because white middle-class Western men are pressured to individuate more clearly, defining themselves as mature adults, to fit their stereotyped gender role? Certainly it seems that while women such as Donna, who have given birth, have the clearest access to the piece at least initially as listeners, if someone has not given birth, it does not mean that they cannot listen to it. Parenting as a father, memories of childhood and of relationships with other children can also provide access.

There were significant differences in listener responses to this piece, based on age and gender. Cultural specificity is another possible limiting factor. Referring to Carol Gilligan's approach to developmental psychology, Lorraine Code notes that Gilligan's are markedly white texts, contrasting with developmental stories from other racial and cultural locations. She quotes a striking example related by the writer, bell hooks, in *Bone Black* :

...in traditional southern-based black life, it was and is expected of girls to be articulate, to hold ourselves with dignity... These are the variables that white researchers often do not consider when they measure the self-esteem of black females with a yardstick that was designed based on values emerging from white experience. (hooks 1996: xiii)

This description of expectations of articulation and dignity for young black girls in traditional southern life is quite different from the silence and subordination required of young white European girls, as reflected in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Westerkamp is clear that her piece is based on her own experience, with her daughter. She was born and raised in Germany, where children are expected to be silent and serious, as noted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. When she searched for cultural representations of female power, such as the welcoming call in *Moment One*, she sometimes borrowed expressions from other cultures (in this case an African welcoming call). Other cultural borrowings include the blues lullaby in *Moment One*, and the pygmy music in *Moment Three*. Listeners' responses to these cultural borrowings seemed to focus on whether they fit or not. When I discussed the piece with the girls' vocal class, several mentioned that they found the welcoming call rather frightening. Not understanding its meaning as a welcome, they heard it as a loud and perhaps threatening sound.¹³

Several listeners describe the blues lullaby as not fitting with the sounds of the baby, without being specific about what not fitting means. David (30f, composer, very white)¹⁴ says "singing the blues-like part doesn't fit for me." Biff (22m, York electroacoustic composition, white) responds "that jazz improv scat thing in the middle sounded like shit out of place with the rest of the piece. Maybe that was the intent." Ralph (15f, North Toronto C. I., Vietnamese [1st gen, cdn born]) comments "'jazz' sounds odd, doesn't suit baby noises." Other listeners enjoyed this blues section. Esther L (23f, Queen's gender and song, Asian Korean) says "nice jazzy melody that mother's humming." Amos (51f, North Toronto C. I., American) says "gorgeous voice sensuous jazz-style lullaby." Jamca (33f, Waterloo theory, Jamaican-Canadian) responds "every day mothering sounds cool with the humming and bluesy singing." In a small sample such as this, with under a hundred listeners, it is difficult to make any extrapolations about how a sense of fit is related to cultural background. However, it is interesting to note that the only response to the blues singing that mentions its political implications came from a young woman who is Guyanese-Iranian, Hope (14f, North Toronto C.I.): "When the woman sings it sounds like those old folk songs in the times of slavery (slightly in particular sections)." Is it her cultural background that prepares her to hear with this level of awareness?

Only one listener expresses concerns about cultural appropriation and universality. Larry (50m, composer, white anglo) says "I also have trouble with the all too obvious great mother woman child bit the 'universal representation' a bit of jazz, black soul pygmy music to boot." Dympna Callaghan, in her discussion of feminism and the problem of identity, notes:

The crucial contradiction of the liberal humanist aesthetic is that individual identity and personal experience are paramount aspects of art so long as they provide evidence of a universal human nature on the model of the privileged white male; but they become

specious once they mark specificities (gender, race, etc.) that are diametrically opposed to this hegemonic model of identity. (Callaghan 1995: 202) Westerkamp's cultural borrowings reflect her urge to expand the piece beyond her personal experience, to find powerful women's voices elsewhere, creating a version of motherhood that aspires to greater universality, that attempts to speak to an audience beyond white European women. They are aspects of other women's experience, and her attempts at greater inclusivity are clearly considered specious by this listener, who speaks from the privileged position of a white male composer, and who also criticizes the sounds she uses from her personal experience: "trite no depth (sonically) just too cute. I lived with my daughter... These are not the sounds I remember." Some listeners criticize Westerkamp for being too personal in this piece, for relying overmuch on her personal experience. This listener criticizes her for attempting to go beyond her personal experience by borrowing aspects of sonic styles from other cultures. Perhaps in both cases the criticism is because it is the experiences of women that are the focus of her work in this piece, experiences that mark specificities that differ from the hegemonic male model of identity.

The charge of essentialism of positing an essential, unchanging feminine identity, is one that tends to arise whenever Westerkamp uses 'natural' or bodily sounds, or refers to aspects of women's experiences. This issue emerges also in listener responses to *Breathing Room*. In *Moments of Laughter*, the concern about stereotyping arises in response to the birthing sequence, an experience that is limited to (some) women. But sometimes, listeners who were concerned about this possible essentialism had changed their minds by the end of the piece. For instance, Blue Green (27f, composer, Chicago) says "Great ending! Not sure about beginning. Actually, it set me up for a sentimental scene that was not as predictable as I thought it would be."¹⁵

While essentialism would posit a fixed, unchanging identity, Westerkamp asks the performer to engage with a range of identities. I believe that the piece is not essentialist, because the vocalist is asked to move through to perform a series of different identities in relation to the child's development, culminating in that of the fool, a parodic character. At times the female vocalist is soothing, at another she is discovering the joys of vocal performance with the child, at another she is involved in developing an inner song, at another she is teaching the child about feminine identities through story-telling, at times she clowns to make the child laugh. In the ending, there is a sonic expression of the tension between the woman as earth-mother and as clown, expressed by the child: she sings "my mom dug down, down, down to the middle of the earth, to the heart, to the heart" and her final words are: "Hi mum, see you mum, you're a silly fool, mum." Throughout the piece, the performer revels at times in being silly, in playing both child and fool simultaneously, the fool who is childlike. In Westerkamp's work, as in *Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document*, the identities of both child and parent constantly shift. Kelly states:

In the *Post-Partum Document*, I am trying to show the reciprocity of the process of socialisation in the first few years of life. It is not only the infant whose future personality is formed at this crucial moment, but also the mother whose 'feminine psychology' is sealed by the sexual division of labour in childcare. (Kelly 1983: 1) Lorraine Code notes that recognition of this type of reciprocity is unusual in most feminist writing about motherhood, in which primary attention is usually given to the woman as subject:

In mothering relations throughout their duration, it is difficult to 'let go' of a child sufficiently to see her, or him, and act with her in full cognizance of her own agency; to resist treating her as a projection of her mother. Maternal thinkers' sometimes excessive valuing of connectedness can represent such 'letting go' as neither right nor desirable. Moreover, in most feminist writing on motherhood, mothers are the 'persons' and children are the 'others'.... Engaging with one's child as 'the person she or he is', however fluctuating her identity, requires more separateness than the early articulations of maternal thinking allow. (Code 1991: 94) Throughout *Moments of Laughter*, the adult female performer is directed to balance her soundmaking with that of the child, engaging sonically with the child's voice as it is at that point.

In response to the baby's cry the performer emits a joyous welcoming call. (Moment One) Using the sounds typical for this age (such as "da" "wa" "ma" "na") gives the performer the opportunity to explore her own vocal pitch range. All this should happen in a playful manner, as a type of playful "dialogue" between child and female performer. (Moment Two) The performer can use the child's voice as cue for some of her own vocal sounds (Moment Three) When the child says "dadado" it is important that this is not covered up by the performer's voice. (Moment Four) The performer's and the child's voice connect only on a tonal level not in terms of musical "style"... It is important here to keep a balance between the two female voices interacting with each other and the child's voice, i.e. the performer's voice should have the same intensity as the female's voice on tape. At no point should the presence of the child's voice be forgotten or covered up. (Moment Five) The performer's words should be bouncing off the child's words, but they should also come from "inside." (Moment Six) Whatever the performer decides to do should happen in interaction with the tape, never competing with or covering up the child's voice. (Moment Seven) A pause must be left in two places where the child says: 1) "the smart little pig/he was very smart/was very smart..." and 2) "that's the end of you old wolf." Everywhere else the performer can use her own discretion of how and when to place the phrases. (Moment Eight) The idea here is to create the reverse situation of Moment One: there the female voice contained with its structured tune the baby's primal vocal techniques, here the child contains with its structured tune and language the female's extended vocal explorations. (Moment Nine) (HW: score)

These directions to the performer differ from moment to moment, at times emphasizing connectedness with the child through dialogic improvisation, at other times moving towards more detachment through the use of contrasting musical styles or delivery. Throughout the piece, the performer is never intended to overwhelm the child's voice with her own: she is to aim for balance as much as possible, indicating a respect for the child's voice and position, while maintaining different positions in relation to her. This dialogue acknowledges the importance of mother and child to each other as second persons, while allowing their identities to shift interdependently.

The performer is both mother and not-mother,¹⁶ as Homi Bhabha says of a character in another production, "the mother's simulacrum, at once a symbol of her presence and the sign of her absence" (1992: 61). Remember the teenage girl who said this piece made her miss her mother? This being mother and not-mother simultaneously complicates the private-public distinction further: the performer is a symbol of motherhood, a shifting symbol at that, as well as a sign of [real] absent mothers.¹⁷ I can only agree with Minfe (51f, Indian, individual contact), who says:

Worthy of more attention. No one has, as far as I know formulated such sounds of a baby so closely. I would like to interpret with my soprano voice this vocal score. For my fun would anyone else like to listen to it? I wonder! Certainly, performing this piece was physically, intellectually and emotionally demanding as well as fun. Playing it for a variety of listeners brought me to realize the complex and important issues that it explores, especially regarding the strong boundary that still exists between private family life and public performance. Not only has no-one "formulated" the sounds of a baby so closely, no other composer has explored musically the positions of a mother in relation to a child in quite such a complex way. The emphasis on a musical dialogue between performer and tape, and the wide range of sounds voiced by the child make it challenging to perform and remind the performer of the value of listening to children's voices. Because it tugs at the walls of the family home, it excites more emotional responses than with other works, and in some cases more hostile responses. In others, listeners thought of their mothers or families with greater appreciation. Each time I presented it, people talked of recording the voices of their children, and some women pored over the score, announcing that they would like to perform this piece.

1 For a more detailed discussion of Code's ideas about second-person epistemology, see Chapter Three.

2 Also, I was aware by this point that several listeners had been disturbed by the intensity of this cry, which was not always interpreted as a welcoming sound. For instance, Newton (22f, Queen's gender and music class): "after the baby is born, the noises which the mother makes are quite disturbing until the mother starts to hum."

3 The unpleasant associations were also changed as a result of an email conversation with Westerkamp. I told her of my reservations, and also mentioned that my dog, Nikita, responds strongly to my rehearsals, howling and watching me intently. When I emailed Westerkamp with my concern, she replied as follows: I wonder how Nikita would react to your interpretation of that moment? You could try to use her name with it and see what happens. Her suggestion worked: when I rehearsed that section using Nikita's name to sing the melody, it re-framed it sufficiently that I was able to perform it more effectively. Also, once the initial block was removed, I was able to hear associations between that melody and some of Sonja's vocalizations on tape, that I had not been able to hear before because of the strong emotional tone of my memory.

4 "The work, begun in 1973 with the birth of her child, is an extended documentation of the mother-child relationship. It covers the first six years of the child's development and is divided into six sections including, in all, approximately 135 pieces. Each section examines a stage in the constitution of a woman's identity in and through significant moments in her child's development: for instance, weaning from the breast, weaning from the holophrase (learning to speak), weaning from the dyad (periodic separation from the mother), the first questions about sexuality and the collection of cathected objects which represent loss, not only of the child but of the maternal body, and finally the child's entry into the law of the father learning to write, starting school. The child's entry into the patriarchal order is experienced by the mother both as a loss and as a re-enactment of her own initial negative entry into language and culture." (Isaak, Jo Anna 1983: 203)

5 Even the highly sexualized Madonna of popular music changed her image radically when she became a mother, protecting her child from public scrutiny and toning down her stage persona, projecting spirituality more than sensuality. Perhaps she is aware of the power of the mother stereotype, and does not wish to tamper with it. Although Madonna may seem transgressive in her projections of sexuality, perhaps she does not dare take on this very difficult issue of sexuality in motherhood.

6with actor, singer and vocal coach Richard Armstrong, in Toronto Fall 1993.

7 Ten of these were from the class of Grade 10 girls.

8 I attended a Deep Listening workshop led by Oliveros at the Kitchener Open Ears Festival. There was a baby there, who vocalized during the first few minutes of the workshop, as we listened.

9 I was impressed by the number of drawings that accompanied the teenage girls' responses. There were many more than in other responses. Also, there were many poems, and references to playing with sound in similar ways to those heard on tape. It was heartening to see this level of expressivity among teenage girls a time when I remember losing touch with my own in the wash of hormones and social pressures. I created a section of the site which juxtaposes excerpts from the piece with some of these images.

10 Once the child is a little older, nourishment does not depend on the mother as the only "other", but can now be received through other impressions, other substitute objects. The "other" then can potentially always be a source for nourishment (even though it is a substitute object of the original one, the mother), and therefore a desirable object. Its distance from the self keeps the self's desire in motion. The space that is created by the distance is also what causes the "other" to make an "impression." Desire therefore is set in motion because the self wants to reduce the space/distance between itself and the object of nourishment. It is in this desire in motion where creativity is located. (Westerkamp 1988: 120)

11 Here is an example of such a response, by Dave (20m, York electroacoustic composition): "Representation of child birth, mother and child. Exploration of voice as an instrument. Different cultures - jazz, Indian ragas, etc. - orderly adult voice vs. atonal baby voice."

12 This focus on academia is perhaps because the listener response forms identified me as a PhD candidate, and I was also simultaneously acting as performer of Westerkamp's work as well as composer of my own.

13 This was not an issue in my performances of the piece, since I was not able to reproduce this vocal style.

14 Since this discussion refers to cultural differences, I include the ethnicity of each respondent, as they describe it.

15 I am interpreting Blue-Green's use of the word 'sentimental' as a concern about stereotyping based on a singular idea of the mother culture, as in Jean's (42f, composer) use of similar terminology: "... at other times I am uncomfortable with the sentimentality being expressed. This could have to do with my uncomfortableness with the "mother" culture ..." Beverley Diamond expressed a similar response to the piece to me privately, noting that she worried about essentialism at the beginning, but found the range of identities represented in the performance complicated that response later on.

16 Perhaps this is part of the reason I was drawn to performing this piece: in my position as mother and not-mother, it was in some ways similar to my position as a non-custodial mother.

17 When I performed this piece, people often thought it was my piece, even though I had included program notes listing it as Westerkamp's. To complicate matters further, when I performed it with Coiled Chalk Circle and a young girl was in the audience, (Taylyn, the daughter of my friend Kate) some people thought that she was my daughter. I am reminded of the woman who said that she only likes baby babble when she is with the baby: there is an emphasis on authenticity in relation to motherhood: people wanted me to be a real mother, to have a real daughter who was present.

[home](#) [introduction](#) [in the studio](#) [moments of laughter](#) [soundwalking](#) [dissertation](#)