

Carla Harryman: Experiments in Sound

By Austin Publicover

The following links are short experimental audio clips I have created in collaboration with Carla Harryman. They are enhanced sound pieces based upon Harryman's readings. ¹

The two older pieces, "Swell" and "Sue", foreground process as their idiom. "Swell" repeats two disparate phrases, both pitch-shifted & time-stretched, from two different sections of Harryman's work *Baby*. They slowly degrade their looped signals with identical noise tactics, twinning the two atop progressively glowing chords of New Age synth, attempting to "make new" the interventionist's inquiry into becoming, into growing, and revealing how that growth slips or decays from its original. These recordings stress nominal intelligibility, that which is something entirely other, something sublime and tangibly felt.

"Sue" literally echoes its own narrative literary process with sound's diverse dynamic range, through a constant left-right panning of eight separate channels mixed into stereo. This effect culls a hallucinatory and near-baseless redundancy that never quite repeats, and seems to be a direct preoccupation of the characters'

¹ Times for these works in their entirety are: Swell (4:05), "Sue" (21:17), Regard for third Object (8:32), and Regard I.V. (Communication) (13:37).

http://how2journal.com/vol 3 no 2/harryman/publicover_experiments.html

uncertain actions. Underpinning "Sue" is an ominous, non-vocal presence of growls and hums. I hoped to grant to this recording a creepy atmosphere, one that might suggest semi-moored "happenings." I added a progressively altered sample of Colombian pop singer Shakira's voice, which serves as a motif for "Sue" herself: beautiful, precocious, and extended into the horizon – as if on a waffled razor's edge.

"Regard for Third Object" is Number Three of four pieces from a CD with the working title, *If Normality is Death*. "Regard" fractures and reworks Harryman's reading of her essay from the just-released *Adorno's Noise*, "Regard for the Object, Rather Than Communication, Is Suspect," which Harryman read during her St. Mark's Poetry Project reading on March 7, 2007. (Thanks to the Poetry Project staff, especially Corrine Fitzpatrick and Anselm Berrigan, for granting permission to record.) "Regard" wields materiality of voice on the frontline, suiting an essay whose concerns run from post-9/11 hegemony to the preparation of a body for, we presume, an open casket service. A contiguous landscape is used throughout three pieces and into the fourth, by the maintenance of a volcanic, swirling and randomly truncated noise skein. I felt that, in lieu of presenting a "straight reading," the noise skein both would preserve threads of the essay while acting on Harryman's spoken content – the latter experienced as obscuring agent. There is always the presence of the noise, however, whether receded beyond background or manifest as a pure sine wave. The noise coheres Harryman's ideas even as the voice occasionally "unravels" them. Too, the voice itself joins the noise, as if willingly. Yet it is subsumed and, seconds later, resurrected in the foreground as some brilliant element in the recording .

“Regard I.V. (communication),” is presented as a final piece, both in terms of content (death, the corpse) and form. It is as if the noise has “passed away,” too, abandoned to the synthesizers, yearning for something that goes steadfastly unaddressed (at least in this section of the essay) by Harryman. And because Harryman's vocal prowess is unfailingly impressive, it was a delight to let her voice run full-out, unfettered by the sonic labyrinths which precede “Regard I.V.” There is a certain sense of decompression that comes with this piece. While the first three often tend toward the dystopian, “Regard I.V.” offers itself tenderly, with its softer, implicit commonality, that indicating endings or death.