

ON SOUND_

Culture of Sound • Sound as Culture

Writing on the 2019 Alberta Media Art Conference

by Lindsay Sorell





Thirsty Wind

a white noise
rustles of peace
many grasses dancing
with us rather than for us
for we are dancing too
strands of hair whip
eyelashes bat
prairie dogs scuttle
poppies wink
clouds roll over to watch us
slow-moving boats
transport for molecules
here we are
in the middle of a
migration pattern
an age-old pathway
of many systems
who remember
the steps of the buffalo
on their roots
the rumble of hooves
perking their ears
tempo of their rolling gait
deep groans
as we step
shuffle
drink coffee at the coffee station
then the wind reminds us
it is thirsty

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Culture of Sound • Sound as Culture

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Society engages in promotion,
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of Alberta's media artists.

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Introduction _

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ainai Nation Elder Miiniipook'a (Peter Weasel Moccasin) and I were drinking tea after he introduced AMAAS's 2019 On Sound media arts conference because the coffee I made

was too watered-down to be consumed. Woven into our wisecracks, he shared some of his life story with me, and left me with some words that shaped how I understood the following days of the conference: "Talk less, do more." As much time as is carved out for talking about doing, there **needs** to be an even greater time for the doing itself. Otherwise, why talk - why make sound - at all? How have the sounds of this land changed since colonization? What sounds were here for millennia that are no longer? How does sound colonize, how can sound disrupt colonization?

We all sat in a circle on the first cold Friday morning of the conference, huddled together, braced against the wind and the moisture. Miiniipook'a stood in the middle. He shared some teachings with us, a prayer, and a song his grandfather passed down to him. The song began quietly and gently, mingling with the cool wind trying to carry it away. The song he uttered found its way into my heart. I was reminded of what my uncle was teaching me just days before: "When someone tells you a story, it's so much more than intellectual, it will grab every molecule in your body. It is so much more profound and impactful than written stories, it's the power of oral tradition." I didn't understand the words of Miiniipook'a's song, sung in the Blackfoot language, but I did feel every molecule in my body stirring. This song was an immense gift to us. With it, Miiniipook'a's grandfather and ancestors were singing through him. He demonstrated the ability of sound to cross generations, revealed how sound is capable of folding time, and how people of different generations overlap.



Heather Kai Smith, *Circle*, 2019

As for me, I am a Métis on my mother's side from kistapinanihk (in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan) and of mixed European descent on my father's side. I live in Treaty 6 territory where I go to school amiskwaciwâskahikanihk (in Edmonton). During the On Sound conference - and whenever I visit Treaty 7 territory - I was/am a guest on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Piikani, and Kanai Nations), as well as the Tsuu'tina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). As a white-passing Métis cisgender woman, I am humbled to recognize what privileges have been afforded me due to structures of racism in colonial Canada. While aware of my privilege, I am also daily motivated by the role racism has played in the identity formation of my own Métis, Cree, and Crow family members - brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents, ancestors - and in the attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples on a broader level. As a graduate student spending my days reading and writing about decolonization, I am still on a journey toward turning my learning into active accompliceship, turning my talking into doing.



I write because I want to think about and share the ways treaty people (Indigenous peoples, settlers, refugees, displaced peoples, etc.) in North America, specifically in Alberta, can use art to partner with each other. On Sound - co-curated with Curtis Running Rabbit-Lefthand (Amskaapipikuni, Siksika, and Stoney Nakoda Nations) - was my second time at an AMAAS conference. I think it's important to note that I have never been to a conference where I have made so many lasting friendships and community connections. For the second time, it felt like a weekend with loved ones. I was on the programming committee for EMMEDIA for years, and a recurring question was: What exactly is media? I think we settled on something like "anything that uses electricity." After my experiences at AMAAS conferences however, I would add: "Why does media art have a propensity for bringing people together?" and "How can that propensity be used to decolonize the insides of all treaty peoples?"

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Heather Kai Smith, *Experiencing Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits*, 2019

I: Sound Uttered _



When someone speaks, they give a gift. There is a certain transparency and openness to translating your spirit to other people through sound, something at once terrifying and unequivocally linking, touching. Sound leaves a person's innards exposed, not like skin rubbed raw, but more like a cherished offering.

We gathered under a tent, trying to stay out of the cold, and sat on folding chairs around Richelle Bear Hat (Blackfoot/Dane-Zaa Cree), Matthew Cardinal (Plains Cree), and Curtis Running Rabbit-Lefthand (Amskaapikuni, Siksika, and Stoney Nakoda Nations) with our coffees. It was a panel discussion titled "Storytellers: Indigenous connection to sound". Something Cardinal, musician and member of nēhiyawak (Cree people) and IITAAKOOWAA (it made a sound), said during the discussion stayed with me. He described the relationship between digital and natural instrumental materials, and how sound is about creating from who you are in your spirit. "There is a spirit to anything you do," he said. The goal of making music is to create from that place, and to shape it accurately according to that place, whatever tools you use - digital or natural.

Richelle Bear Hat, a good friend of mine and one of the On Sound artists-in-residence, created an outdoor installation, an utterance that radiated from her spirit in this way. *Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits* (2019) invited viewers to lay down on quilts and blankets spread out over a circular patch of short grass carved out of the landscaped grounds of the Coutts Centre for Western Canadian Heritage. Surrounded by small Bluetooth speakers sunken into the ground, the sun beat down hot on us.

My eyes were closed, eyelids blazing. *This is what it feels like to be in the centre of Richelle's voice, I think, as close as you can get to someone's heart.* I listen to her speaking words in Siksiká through the speakers, her words echo in a waterfall of sound all around us. "These are the words I carry," she had said during the panel discussion, "the words of my ancestors." These words have been intertwined with this territory, with the seasons and history of this landscape, for millennia. These words are being returned - to both the land and its people.

Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits: this is how Bear Hat spelled and audibly practiced the Siksiká words for "these are my relatives." Guests of all backgrounds settled next to her heart and listened as she uttered these, the words of her ancestors. She invited viewers, our community - people she knew and did not know - to engage alongside the landscape in this intimate moment with her, of releasing the words that have always been on her tongue, in her throat, in her heart. As with Miiniipook'a's song, the Siksiká words uttered were not simply language, but a radical enactment of ceremony and philosophy, and the rights of Indigenous peoples to practice culture unencumbered. It was a radical act of inclusion and generosity, one that both calls on Bear Hat's ancestors, and asks those present to reflect on their relations as treaty people to the speaker and the land.

As an artist-in-residence for On Sound, Bear Hat had been staying in Jim Coutts's family home, sleeping between their tartan sheets, laying on their couch, drinking from their faucet. Rather than focusing on the colonial aspect of the Coutts Centre, she chose to seek out connections with the caretakers of the Centre, to recognize their love for the landscape, their diligence, and care. She described the pressure she feels as an Indigenous artist to make work that is highly critical, and the choice she makes rather to focus on the tender, and on building connections. With this work, she wanted to give a sensation of comfort, to translate for others how special the process of learning the words of her ancestors is. It is about finding solidarity in shared spaces.

Bear Hat described growing up with English as her first language, and how she viewed that as a barrier from her culture. With *Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits*, she recounts how this perspective underwent a transformation – toward reconciling with this cultural blockade, and embracing what stage of Siksiká language-learning she is at rather than allowing it to confine her sense of identity. Rather than shielding her phase of language-learning, she seeks out the repetition required to learn and amplifies it. In doing so, she transforms the space around the installation from what could be cast off as significantly colonial – cultivated, mowed, and fenced in – to recognizing it as primarily an Indigenous space – one that is being shared. Through sound, she subtly allows viewers to conceive of the space we lay in as interconnected, and Indigenous spaces as all around us rather than confined to certain designated spaces. She points to a recognition through sound of our interconnectedness on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Tsuu’atina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda.

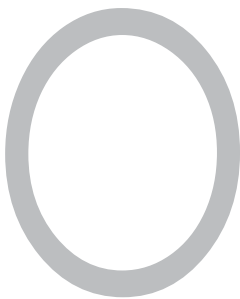
I think of Kristen Hutchinson’s discussion of Brendan Fernandes’s 2008 video work *Foe* in her talk on “Contemporary Canadian Video Art & Identity” at the conference. *Foe* records Fernandes as he learns the accents of his cultural backgrounds from a vocal coach. He practices sentences memorized from a scene in the sequel to *Robinson Crusoe* by J.M. Coetzee, also titled *Foe*. Fernandes writes, “In the book, Friday (the savage) has been mutilated; his tongue has been removed and he cannot speak” (“Foe”). Both Fernandes’ and Bear Hat’s works find points of connection as they respond to the disassociating effects of colonialism and diaspora. They use sound to battle that disassociation, to both create new opportunities to re-connect with culture, and expose racist frameworks.

As the title of this conference asserts, sound is culture. As such, crafted sound is incredibly powerful, and offers a radical way to share vulnerabilities, build shared understanding, fold time, to pierce through the internal and external barriers colonialism has built and continues to try to construct. It is a resistant social activity.



Heather Kai Smith, *The Aud*, 2019

II: Sound Not Uttered _



ur voices quieted as the guide lead us up a set of darkly lit stairs to the second floor of the hotel. At the top, we herded ourselves into a charred hallway of closed doors, each lit dramatically by a spotlight from above. The doors were blackened and scorched by fire, some flaking off in shards. Each had a peep hole to look through. I leaned in to peer through the tiny hole, and my nostrils filled with the smell of smoke. Repulsed, I drew away and had to take a gasp of breath and hold it before moving back in to get another look.

I saw the inside of a hotel room, sparsely decorated with early- to mid-century furniture. It was inhabited by the ghostly projection of a man in the space (played by Telly James), dressed in a suit jacket and thin tie, singing old country favourites alone and pining. In another room, the same man tells the story of the time his abusive stepfather told him he didn't want him. Whether the man was speaking to themselves or to me, I wasn't sure. Peephole after peephole held behind it another vignette - another character in their intimate space, a past presence seen from a blistered hallway. A boy (played by Owen Soop) lights a match in a dark closet. A woman (played by Stacy Dasilva) recalls Avon perfume names while applying makeup. Onlookers peered into these knob-less rooms like prison guards or peepshow customers, pacing the halls, isolated from but entertained by those captured presences.

One of the rooms had no door, and I walked right in. No projected figures or viewers were in this room but me. The radio played a recording of a couple arguing. Two beds sat close together, empty alcohol bottles posed on an old desk. The floor creaked as I walked and I had the nagging feeling I get when

I walk into someone's bedroom for the first time - kind of embarrassed. It's the intimacy of feeling my presence overlapping with the palimpsest of others, imagining their fingertips tracing the dresser's edge, them falling into bed after an exhausting day, them crying fat tears into their pillow. A hotel room is a shared space of intimacy, always perfumed by the last person to stay in it. It is a space of transition, travel, adventure, uncertainty, and new relations with the world around you. A hotel bedroom has seen it all, and we peered in as some of its narratives were unearthed from its walls.

Hotel Room (2019) is a collaboration between Tara Beagan (Ntlaka'pamux/Irish Canadian) and Andy Moro (Euro/Omuskego Cree) and the Auditorium Hotel in Nanton, Alberta. Beagan and Moro make up Article 11, an Indigenous live performance collective named for the eleventh article in the Indigenous-led United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This article identifies the rights Indigenous peoples have across the globe to both practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs, including "the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature" ("UNDRIP Article 11"). With this in mind, the Article 11 collective works to not only to fulfill a need for more Indigenous designers, stage managers, production managers, producers, and administrators in theatre production, but to guarantee Indigenous cultural workers a supportive environment and sustainable income ("Mission & Mandate"). As Mohawk/Chinese activist Jessica Danforth has said, "If we don't create songs about our time, who's going to sing about us in the future? Who's going to know about us if we're not doing these things of our time?" (McKegney 123).

The eleventh article protects "past, present, and future manifestations" of Indigenous cultures. The Auditorium was built in 1902 about twenty years after the buffalo herds had been destroyed, and shortly after the railway was established from Calgary down to Fort Macleod, passing through DeWinton, Okotoks, High River, Nanton and Claresholm (Conrad).

Downstairs in the bar, a buffalo head is mounted on the wall. By projecting ghostly Indigenous characters into charred and derelict hotel rooms, Article 11 reaches into the past of a colonial building and establishes not only Indigenous presence here now, but re-casts the building's history with Indigenous actors. Through the theatrical installation, viewers are asked to see parallels between the destruction of the burnt-out floor of a historical colonial hotel, a symbol of "progress" in the West, and the distress of Indigenous peoples with their livelihoods taken away in the same process.

Settler ally and scholar Mark Rifkin describes haunting in the work of Cherokee poet Qwo-Li Driskill as the awareness of other histories that are present but unrealized (Rifkin 54). A similar haunting takes place in *Hotel Room*, where a sense of untold human narratives – specifically Indigenous narratives – becomes palpable. Characters are defined by their isolation rather than through intimacy, by their separation from one another, and from the viewers. One character wears a disheveled suit and tie signifying the relationship between individualistic, capitalist policies, and sensations of isolation and cultural alienation – a violation of the eleventh article of UNDRIP.

Alex Moon's installation and performance *Granular: A Sonic Analog of the Grain* at Nanton's Canadian Grain Elevator Discovery Centre was a fitting companion to the theatrical ghostliness of *Hotel Room*. Moon took viewers on a performative guided tour of the historic grain elevator, where audio recordings seemed to re-materialize the pouring of grain and moving trains in all their monumental grandeur. *Granular* examined the role Western technology such as the rail had in the colonization of Western Canada, and transported viewers into a narrative and economic dependence on grain that was not so long ago. Through the process of making this work, Moon prioritized his relationships with those involved – again, the caretakers of the space. Like Richelle Bear Hat's *Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits* and Article 11's *Hotel Room*, *Granular* used an immersive experience to identify commonalities between diverse sets of human experience.

For Bear Hat's *Amok-so-ka nik-so-kii-waits*, and *Hotel Room* identifying these commonalities also worked to re-centre the conversation, and illuminate holes in the dominant narrative of history. Art historian and editor of *Luma Quarterly*, Kristen Hutchinson gave a talk about Canadian video art and identity that identified sound, projection, language-learning, and film footage appropriation as key methods through which the dominant colonial narrative can be held accountable to its gaping holes. She used the example of Kent Monkman's (Cree) *Sisters & Brothers* (2016), a film that splices together NFB archive materials of buffalo being rounded up, and Indigenous children in residential schools - filmic records of the construction of racism in Canada. Monkman superimposes footage of a buffalo over children walking, so it appears they walk inside the buffalo. The survival of one is the survival of another. Putting these scenes to the track "The Road" by a Tribe Called Red featuring Black Bear, and rolling the credits to the sound of the buffalo stampeding, Monkman upends the original colonial intention of this footage. Footage that was once meant to anthropologically document the erasure of Indigenous peoples is capsized to tell rather a story of Indigenous resilience, survival, and spirit - to show the human faces of those children who will never be erased.

Media archives make very obvious who holds the tools and the privilege of writing history. Sifting through these materials for their omissions, where trans, racialized, colonized, and oppressed peoples have been misrepresented or undocumented altogether, their presences can be re-materialized. The reverse side of media records tell the real story of the dawn of "media" itself. In the gaps of historic media-making, of theatre production, of language production, of cultural production, is the unrecorded resiliencies of those peoples on whose backs capitalism - and the entirety of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th Centuries - was built. Even when sound is not uttered, or events not documented, in those silences or hauntings their presence is ever speaking with and to us.

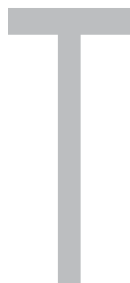
This land has been without the buffalo since the 1880s. To acknowledge this absence is to acknowledge the history of this territory. The Siksika, Piikani and Kanai Nations lived for many thousands of years alongside the buffalo, each contributing to the prosperity of the other. Today, despite the devastating loss of the buffalo, these Nations, in collaboration with the Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut'ina Nations remain the traditional stewards and keepers of this land.

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This acknowledgement is part of Living Text, a perpetual project that seeks to edit, add to, rethink and renovate land acknowledgments in the Treaty 7 region. Living Text is comprised of many contributors and is supported by Untitled Art Society.



Heather Kai Smith, *Matthew Cardinal and
Curtis Running Rabbit-Lefthand*, 2019

III: Technology _



he On Sound conference saw the uttered human voice and presence often combined or manipulated with digital technology and generated sounds. It seems like a strange combination - the intimate and exposing quality of the voice, and the cold digital pulses of an algorithm. Matthew Cardinal and Curtis Running Rabbit-Lefthand talked about knowing or not knowing where the materials of an instrument came from, whether they were made of specifically sourced natural materials or electronics. What is the effect of sound emanating from digital technology, made from obscure metal parts shipped from Japan, from laser sensors and electrical current? What is it for, and why do we pursue it apart from or in combination with language?

Cardinal and Running Rabbit-Lefthand's collaborative project IITAAKOOWAA (it made a sound) performed with their equipment laid out on a blanket, its cords and wires co-mingling with fresh sage they laid out. They built digital and guitar sound loops over a recording of "Take Back the Earth," a speech by the 1960s American Indian Movement (AIM) leader, John Trudell. The performance also incorporated a ceremonial teaching, spoken in Siksiká by Rabbit-Lefthand. Their performance seamlessly blended interchronological acoustic, vocal, and digital sounds and beats - both the uttered and not uttered. As Article 11 endeavours to do, Cardinal and Running Rabbit-Lefthand protect, practice, and revitalize ceremony, while incorporating beats that result from globalized forms of electronic music-making.

I thought about this while watching the performances of Edmonton sound artists Shawn Pinchbeck, Gary James Joynes, and Raylene Campbell.



Heather Kai Smith, *Raylene Campbell*, 2019

Experiencing the sounds they made, and seeing Kristen Hutchinson across the way absorbing it with her eyes closed, I wondered if the desire to create electronically amplified beats fulfills the desire to come to grips with the inner pulses of the body by echoing them and shaking you to the core. In a way, all sound works to immerse the physical body of a person into the animacy and vibrancy of a thing, person, or spirit - whether it be electronic, magnetic, or taking the form of data. Sound is not heard but experienced as an object itself, a sculpture in space, an encounter with its invisible force. It is a grappling with that force, the battle an electronic pulse has with my own heartbeat, the way a subwoofer can pull out the very dirt from my pores, that point to existence itself, an existence that is everywhere. And even in the midst of all of that, it was ironic that the call of the birds around us pierced even the most intense of generated sounds.

The animations in the screening titled “Sonic Structures”, curated by Ryan Von Hagen from Quickdraw Animation Society, mapped out the connection between sound and subject. Malcolm Sutherland’s *Birdcalls* (2004) translates bird calls into written symbols. Brandon Blommaert’s *e:e:e:e:* (2015) transforms digitally created sounds into 3-dimensional virtual space in a visual language correlative of 1990s *Winamp* audio visualizations. Greg Doble’s *Broken Communication* (2016) parallels the glitching of a piano riff with the breaking down of symbols - wine bottles slowly breaking, candles burning down, static increasingly disrupting the picture. Doble’s caption of the piece online writes:

This is not a dialogue.
This is a monologue.
This conversation is broken.
This conversation is not real.

Including animations from Richard Reeves, Mark Dicey, and Arielle McCuaig & Craig Storm, “Sonic Structures” expressed the perpetual desire animation has to seamlessly correlate the sonic and the visual. The screening collected animators’ efforts to translate sound into symbol and

symbol into sound, and a broader desire to open lines of communication between beings, human, and other-than-human.

Let's not forget however that technology is political. Technology has existed in the Americas since long, long before colonization. Unpacking the "civilization versus the savage" dichotomy, Métis scholar Emma LaRocque lists the multitudes of material and non-material technologies and inventions Indigenous peoples in North America have produced - tools, textiles, methods for effective resource management and fire regulation, mathematically precise knowledge of astronomy, so on and so forth (153). And yet, contemporary colonial concepts of "technology" often exclude Indigenous technologies, labelling them as archaic and outdated. "Technology" as defined by the colonial framework, relates to the sphere of technological capital, Silicon Valley, and the mobile phone race. "Technology" by this definition seems to require electricity. "Technology" must be an iteration of what came out of the Industrial Revolution. If media art is defined by its interaction with this exclusive characterization of "technology," it is crucial that media art's relationship to class and systematic oppression is examined.

The staggering amount of money digital sound making costs today was a recurring theme at the conference. From sound artists Gary James Joynes and Shawn Pinchbeck to a panel with representatives from provincial and national media art project funders, conference attendees did a dance of both frustration and encouragement when it comes to funding their projects. Funding bodies communicated a huge desire for fostering diverse media arts creation, while media artists commented upon their long-term frustration for a jury-dependent paralyzing wealth gap. A representative from Canada Council noted that they get very few applications from Alberta, and the little they had has been decreasing. A representative from Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity said they hope to foster more dialogue amidst the largest wealth gap in history: "Wasn't technology supposed to be a good thing?"



Heather Kai Smith, *On Raylene Campbell's Soundwalk*, 2019

Part of the lack of applications media artists in Alberta make for Canada Council grants may be structural gender inequalities that remain in technology-grounded artmaking, especially in the world of sound. In “Gender and the DJ Battle,” settler hip hop scholar Mark Katz describes the Western socialization of men as technophiles from the time of the phonograph to the contemporary DJ. He argues, “Men claimed the machine as their own, starting exclusive phonograph societies and developing a distinctly masculinist discourse around the technology” (584). Less support systems and informal networks are available to female or nonbinary-identifying people interested in digital technology and sound making processes. Additionally, psychological studies have shown that, although women-identifying people may deny these stereotypes and believe themselves equally capable, “the mere awareness of stereotypes” may lead them to “underperform in technological activities or avoid them altogether” (Katz 584-5).

Katz discusses how changes in technology have minimized “the traditionally male-dominated discourse[s]” of “crate-digging” and “shop talk,” and feminist activist collectives of women-identifying DJs such as Females wit’ Funk (began 2005) and Anomalies (began 1997) have brought more gender diversity to the turntabling world (590-91, 594). But I am challenged: how do we as media artists and facilitators work toward examining dismantling internalized colonial conceptions of masculinity, technology, and sound in our geographic area?

Conclusion: Steak Thursday _

It's warm.
Full of guns and taxidermy,
wagonwheel chandeliers and the
crack of a cue ball
in a garden of wooden wainscoting.
Painting of a cowboy on a horse
gazing at the lumps in the foothills
one foot thrown over the saddle
like he's eating a sandwich.
The din of Steak Thursday
a local I recognize
He's an escapee of the city he says
He wished he had moved here a long
time ago
he says
the chatter of farmers
what can I getcha
playing and listening
to pints of country music
after repairing the head gasket on the
tractor and
digging the Cat out of the mud
I watch through a peephole
my purview a stalker
with Authentic Mexican Food
on the other side of the wall

There are stupefying barriers to simply getting started as a soundmaker or producer of media. The difficulties of obtaining funding, sustaining your income, and of overcoming colonial structures of racism, sexism, and classism in the colonial nation-state of Canada are just a few. The On Sound conference however made obvious a possible tool for overcoming these barriers: the strong desire media artists in what we call Alberta for community-building.

All of the media artists who spoke at On Sound expressed a deep desire to connect with collaborators and locals. Tara Beagan and Andy Moro described their pursuit of a connection with Larry, the proprietor of The Auditorium Hotel. I still love the story of the first time they met - at 11am, when he was doing shots. Richelle Bear Hat's work too comes out of the decision to focus on building connections, to search for the tender. Her intentional celebration of the caretakers of the Coutts property, and the connections she allowed her heart to be open to, taught me a way to decolonize through seeking relationality. I think of Alex Moon's reliance on human connections and collaboration - with the proprietors of the Grain Elevator, and on Audrey Burch who he brought on as a technician. I think even of the local people of Nanton over at the Auditorium Hotel & Bar. One described to me the reason they live there, the joy they find in the community they have with each other in the town, in gathering for Steak Thursday, in seeing and making music together every week.

Sound engenders community accountability. Sound is an incredible teaching tool for learning about our relational responsibilities as treaty people. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard writes in *Red Skin, White Masks*, "Indigenous societies have truths to teach the Western world regarding the establishment and preservation of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world that are profoundly nonimperialist" (16-17). How can we teach and be taught if criticism doesn't take a backburner to relationality? I think of Article 11's attentiveness to dreams and Indigenous knowledge-making, and the work they do to prioritize ethical accountability. They identified two community-based guidelines



Heather Kai Smith, *AMAAS Executive Director Sharon Stevens*, 2019

for themselves in their panel discussion: make things your ancestors are proud of, and make what people connect with, regardless of limiting structural factors, advantages or disadvantages they have. What really brought these guidelines into focus for me was to see the respectful and generous manner with which Beagan and Moro interacted with each other and other members of the panel they were on. They did not limit their value for community accountability to just their art.

Sound, and the act of listening, is inherently community-building, collaborative, requires advice, and a sharing of resources and skills. The economic challenges alone of being a media artist require us to pool resources to make projects work. Sound possesses theatrical and immersive qualities that have the power to create coalitions between peoples, build empathy, and empower those peoples whose voices have been and are actively being oppressed. The inherent relationality of sound requires from us a self-reflexive perspective of the structures of privilege and technology that determine what we hear, and who is making sound. Sound requires us to talk less, and do more.



Heather Kai Smith, *AMAAS President Vicki Chau*, 2019



AMAAS is a Provincial Arts Service Organization and as such hosts a conference every two years bringing together media artists and member organizations as a partial retreat, professional development and opportunity for learnings and renewing energies. We've held 16 conferences in our 25+ years of existence and we believe the conference is the most significant service and program we produce.

In June 2019 we produced On Sound: Culture of Sound/Sound as Culture Alberta's Media Art Conference bringing our community together for three days in the prairie town of Nanton. Nanton is such a welcoming town with a bunch of real character places and people who have helped make sure our artist-in-residence experiences were extraordinary. We staged the conference at a farm? a ranch? a garden venue? – it's the Coutts Centre for Western Heritage. Jim Coutts was a lawyer, an advisor to two Prime Ministers, a

rancher and an art collector. When he died in 2014 he bequeathed his land and properties to the University of Lethbridge who now manage the venue. With a full time horticulturalist on site, a maintenance staff and ingenious ideas from staff at the University – the place has been transformed. The chicken coop is a classroom, the barn a double-decker classroom, the grain bin a camera obscura. There was plenty of land to roam, paths to explore, gardens to enjoy and little cottages to sit in. We built the schedule to provide opportunities to gaze at the prairie vista and hear the sounds of the prairie birds and take time for reflection.

Lindsay Sorell was our Writer-in-Residence with Heather Kai Smith the illustrator to provide this booklet as an archival documentation of our media art experience.

– Sharon Stevens
Executive Director

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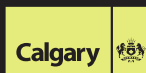
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