Laetitia SONAMI
REQUIEM FOR the *LADY's GLOVE*
1991-2016

Around 2014 I decided to start retiring the lady's glove, the instrument I had used for
the past 25 years. Here is looking back… and forth.

Over the years, the *lady's glove* merged with my left arm, an active layer between skin and muscle. Full of urgent needs, limitations, humor and failures, it became a language I could ride with my eyes closed [1].

Sprung from satire [2], the *lady* settled into an indispensable interface, inextricable from my imagination. What first started as dreams of control and virtuosic display, turned into dreams of chaos. From circus dog, it imagined itself roaming wide plains, yet still tethered by thick mesh of wires [3].

Instead of re-inventing herself, it stepped aside.

- Virtuosity?… Are you doing anything?
No… just dreaming

Sounds, events, emotions migrated to specific gestures, and some became fused:

The bending of the wrist (upwards / palm down) attached itself to mechanical sounds, functional or dysfunctional (pumping, breathing machines and various clicks);

Hands moving back and forth became changes in density or changes in acceleration as they scanned thru layers of sound deposits;

The bending and scribbling of all left fingers like a spider's legs, to speech utterances or small events near by [4];

The bending of just the index with arm extended, to recalling far away sounds such as pigs and screeching wheels;

Rotating the hand, palm to the sky, to halting all sounds or to an abrupt change in landscape (halting can also be associated with bending the elbow and moving forearm up: a traffic stop);

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[1] Ride, as in horses.

[2] The first version of the lady's glove was built for a collaboration with Paul DeMarinis "Mechanization takes Command" (1991). Made from kitchen gloves, it was a response to the macho, robotic, grey rubber Power Glove from Mattel – a vision of women in the kitchen doing electronic music while washing dishes.

[3] The twenty-eight or so sensors embedded in the black arm-length lycra glove (two ultra sounds, three accelerometers, seven bending strips, one pressure pad, nine micro switch, five Hall effects, one microphone) were first conditioned in Steim's Sensorlab and sent as MIDI input to Max-MSP where all the mapping would occur, hence the dark web of connecting patch cords. Michel Waiswisz (1949-2008), previous director of Steim and master of 'the Hands', seemed always puzzled at how inflexible my mapping strategies were…

[4] I most often think of sounds as distances (see Arcana III -Musicians on Music by John Zorn: "Seizing a sound and smelling its belly to fit it in a folder").

Bending and moving the hand close to the ground, to what is always there: water, low frequencies or empty spaces;
Elbow back, palm up, hand by the waist while curling fingers, to something like "come on…."
and on and on…
Gestures, sensors, sounds, sonic narratives and emotions engraved themselves in pre-arranged patterns, and became irresistible.

- How many buttons do you need?
0 buttons
- Not possible
Then give me 5, I will find where the edge is

A major issue in designing digital interfaces or hybrids is the apparent limitlessness of 'materials' – each thought has its own button. I do believe now that the instrument exists on the edge of its limitations – Those are not clear at first as the choices are vast, but eventually one needs to settle on a particular configuration, and play with its limits [5].

The hand does all kinds of things without its owner noticing. Small gestures that escape consciousness, small gestures that point to other worlds. These are not nervous ticks, they are the sounds that escape the main line, harmonics and air…birds.

- Where did you bury it?
Under the tree… with the dead dogs [6]

I stopped playing the *lady's glove* because my imagination and the *lady's glove* had merged into one
I knew what it could do and I knew what I could do
My hand became the camera, scanning thru sonic territories with its favorite angles; the angles needed a major shift
I did not want to stand onstage at ninety shaking my arms with trembling folds of flesh
Gestures, sounds and geographies slowly became mummified

I left it behind because I did not want to blemish it with poor looking associations [7]

So…I leave gloves and other wearables to small dictators and corporate powers.

[5] Not that I wish to advocate a paucity of resources, but the early digital music of the late seventies for example (with musicians like David Berhman, John Bischoff, Paul DeMarinis) and the 8 bits /1k memory of the KIM-1, seems to have a "palpable" materiality.

[6] Not true

[7] Recent gloves and their parametric monotony: do you really need to bend your finger to raise the pitch of your voice?

And now the **Spring Spyre** [8]– it started as a conversation, a wandering.

There were desires and some rules, dictated by the *lady's glove* [9]. After three years, it is starting to talk and it wants things. It is a bit more tyrannical, I do not expect we will merge. It sits like empty space and I stare at it, recalling the Oracle. I am trying to understand its language. I think the Spring Spyre wants a story, it wants characters [10].
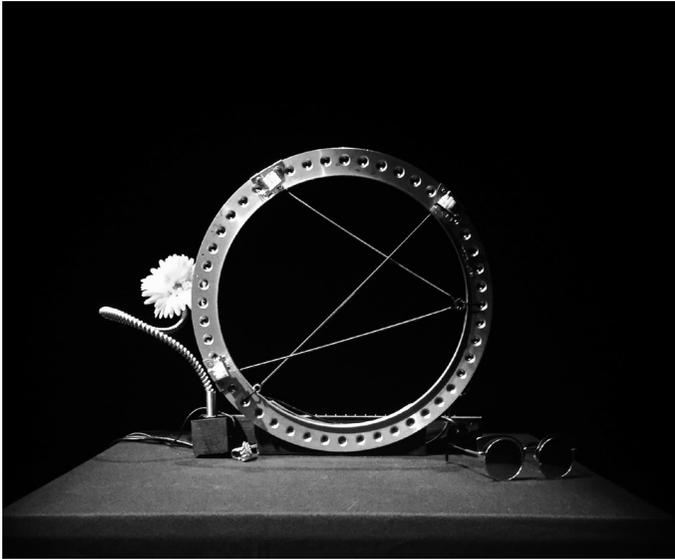

Photo by: Jean Piché

[8] The Spring Spyre was named by Eliane Radigue who composed its first piece, OCCAM IX. It was built to allow for a more improvisational approach, and also more unpredictability, which is ironic as Eliane's music is all but unpredictable or improvisational. It currently has three audio pick ups stripped from reverb tanks. The three audio signals are analyzed (i.e. "feature extraction") and fed as inputs for training the neural nets in Wekinator (Machine Learning software by Rebecca Fiebrink). The nets control the audio synthesis in real time in Max-MSP. A bank of faders (from a hacked Peavey PC 1600) allow for the mix of the various synthesis. The range of unpredictability can be adjusted by the "width" of the training.

[9] The new interface needed to be easily replaceable, pass TSA screening smoothly, generate a more complex sensing signal, and again, be somewhat unreliable.

[10] I am currently developing a story about three women living in Peripheral Vision, a small town off of route 95, inspired by suburban women and night scientists. The women eventually merge after an earthquake strikes the town.

Photos by: Frank Baldé