

twisted relationships on talk shows, the quotes of President Bush saying something horrible, and the cartoon show sound effects all came off as strange and unsettling. While not engaged with any political project, the incorporation of topical material in *Channel Surfing* created a break in the pattern of strong culture-enforcing messages on television—creating a sense of unease about the messages one would expect to receive and be less likely to question in their ordinary context.

Books Not Bombs National Student Strike Sound Project

The Books Not Bombs sound project represents an ongoing initiative to record and instrumentalize sound and video from anti-war events and coverage of the war in Iraq. By organizing recordings of anti-war rallies, teach-ins, and speeches, Books Not Bombs seeks to sustain and reuse powerful anti-war messages. By creating anti-war installations and radio art, and building an archive of anti-war sound the project seeks to enliven anti-war activism and amplify the political power of anti-war sounds.

In addition to preparing *Artificial Space* and *Weapons Inspections* leading up to my 15 February thesis concert, I also attempted to organize a number of individuals to record sound at the New York City anti-war protest held the same day. I hoped to use the material in an installation I was planning to create for the 5 March Books Not Bombs national student strike against the impending war. I planned to recycle the piece into a radio art project for broadcast later in the month. My goal was to meld topical sound recording with other anti-war organizing efforts through a community approach to creating the piece. The sound material, which I planned to locate in accessible and politicized contexts, was aimed at maximizing the social mobilization potential of anti-war sound in installation and radio formats.

I located people with tape and MiniDisc recorders and others who were willing to use those recorders to gather material at the protest using existing anti-war networks at Wesleyan. I was forced to minimize my organizing efforts, needing to spend most of my time working on *Artificial Space* and *Weapons Inspections* for my concert. I assembled a collection of tape recorders and one MiniDisc recorder and found just enough volunteers to make use of all of the devices. Six people recorded sound on the 15th and I drew all of the sound material for the installation I produced for 5 March from the products of their efforts.



As the student strike drew nearer, I began working in tandem with a group of organizers interested in creating a community art space on the day of the strike. The process of collecting equipment, finding a location, and determining the format of the piece thus became enmeshed with other organizing activities around the student strike.

We obtained funding for art materials and managed to reserve a central location for the community art space and installation. Working with Jake Levin, one of the organizers, who was interested in collecting video for the display, I reached out to the anti-war activist community at Wesleyan to locate footage. We thereby obtained digital video recordings of past Wesleyan anti-war events and a VHS recording of CNN and ABC coverage of the 15 February anti-war demonstrations,

including considerable coverage of the New York City protest. The arts organizing committee, which also included Zach Goldstein, Mary Thomas, and Rachel Wallis, also located three TV/VCRs and a CD player, fleshing out the equipment necessary for the installation.

The sound installation I ultimately made used two CDs to create a four-channel installation evoking a protest-like sound environment. The installation featured a constant background of ambient protest noise—drumming, distant chants, and undecipherable voices. Layered on top of this background were anti-war chants, songs, police sirens, and other more ‘present’ sounds, which panned across the room, lending the ‘protest’ a sense of motion. A shifting collection of Wesleyan students and professors worked in the midst of this protest was, painting, creating banners, sculptures, giant puppets, and other anti-war visual art.



The art-infused politicized environment complemented the shifting presentation of different perspectives on the then-impending war and the anti-war movement, displayed in visual and

aural counterpoint around the room. In addition to the material described above, the installation featured dynamically emphasized clusters of personal accounts. In these accounts Wesleyan students and other individuals who the people recording in New

York had chosen to speak with declared their opposition to the war, and presented their analyses of the situation or their reasons for showing up to protest. Containing concise anti-war messages, the chants that traveled around the room provided additional perspectives on the conflict. The televisions, displaying CNN and ABC coverage of the events of 15 February, with their audio quiet but audible also contributed analyses of the situation. Video documentation of earlier Wesleyan and Middletown peace events containing speeches and other activities contributed further to this mix. The documentary quality of the piece's content and its location in a creative artistic context helped to minimize the cultural capital of the installation.

This complex texture of sound and video placed views and individuals in interactive dialogue, edited on top of each other or played simultaneously in different places around



the room. Each of the channels of sound and videocassettes was a different length, causing the different sources of material to match up differently as the day progressed. As people engaged in their own anti-war activism in the room, making giant puppets, other anti-war art, and talking about the day's teach-ins and other events, the clips of dialogue and opinion mixed with the views expressed by individuals in the room. Through choosing how and whether to participate in the

community art project and in what way to experience my sound and video installation, participants in the Books Not Bombs installation followed a personal model of interactivity, as I had implemented in *Weapons Inspections* and *Skating Ice Rink Resonator*.

In addition to preparing and presenting a sound and video installation during the Books Not Bombs student strike, I spent much of the week prior to the strike and most of my time during the day coordinating a project to record as many of the teach-ins, open classes, and rallies held on campus during the day as possible. My organizing for this event brought together eleven volunteers using three MiniDisc recorders and one DAT machine to produce eight MiniDiscs, four DATs, and one MiniDV cassette containing recordings of events.

This extension of the Books Not Bombs sound project will be instrumentalized in a variety of ways. After cleaning up the recordings and transferring them to computer, I will make the lectures and rally available as mp3 files and dub them to CD as the core of a new anti-war sound recordings archive hosted by *Hermes*, Wesleyan's 28-year-old magazine of leftist political, critical, and creative thought. The recordings will also be placed in the University Archives. The mp3 files will be available to download from a web site under construction by Wesleyan students and the material will be available for broadcast on WESU and for other purposes.

Even before all of the material had been reviewed and recorded to computer I made use of some of the new recordings in an edit of my sound collage for radio play

on R.A.T. during the 14 March show. I sampled sound from the rally at noon, and from a teach-in held by Professor Kelly Anthony, who had recently visited Iraq on a peace delegation, and incorporated this sound into the piece. The remaining material was a re-mixed compilation of sound from the first two channels of the 5 March student strike installation. I rearranged some sounds to improve the continuity of the 40-minute sound collage's structure. In order to improve the audibility of the views expressed in the piece, I also implemented a dynamics hierarchy that privileged rally and teach-in material and then the personal statement and account clusters. I also made adjustments to the order of sound files to improve the narrative structure of the sound collage for radio performance.

Presenting the collage on the radio meant performing to an audience that could extend beyond the Wesleyan community. Presented on 14 March, just three days before Bush's deadline for the UN, during which he set the 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam Hussein's departure from Iraq, I had timed my broadcast of the piece to coincide with the ramping up of pro-war pressure from the administration, in concert with the substantial swell of anti-war sentiment around the world. The anti-war message of the 14 March R.A.T. broadcast fit well with in the context of the reggae shows surrounding the radio show as well. The show following R.A.T. also featured an anti-war theme, with Wasine, the DJ, playing anti-war reggae and tape piece alleging that the Bush administration had hidden motivations for war.

As with *Channel Surfing*, I constructed the Books Not Bombs radio sound collage with attention to specific features of radio broadcast and reception. The anti-war protest atmosphere of the piece and the near constant chanting or brief personal

statements of opposition meant that even a three or five second exposure to the piece while searching for a station would expose a listener to an anti-war message. The sound collage also periodically played portions of speeches from the rally and the Anthony teach-in. Over the entire forty minutes of the sound collage, a poem by Dianne Da Prima read by Professor Elizabeth Willis unfolded stanza by stanza and was recapitulated in the piece's final minutes. The frequent recurrence of the repetitive language of the poem also enhanced the likelihood of finding meaning in a brief exposure to the collage. Along with the recurring clusters of personal statements and accounts, and the subtle changes in the sonic texture of the protest background, these inclusions from the student strike also represented an attempt to make the piece interesting to listeners in longer segments, and over the entire course of the forty-minute piece.

Crossing Signals

Crossing Signals is a radio artwork comprised of recordings of FM tunings of stations at the limits of their broadcast areas. Even when heard over a stable signal, the piece could be mistaken for a station out of range. The piece risks voiding out the station by documenting a common experience of traveling radio listeners.

Crossing Signals was also written with the confines and peculiarities of radio in mind. This piece was a ten-minute a sound collage comprised of recordings I made of FM tunings at the borders of station broadcast areas. Like *Channel Surfing*, *Crossing Signals* reflected on a feature of radio experience—the experience of listening to the radio while in a car and hearing stations break up, or intermix with other stations. By broadcasting an unprocessed recording of this sound material over

the radio, for some listeners, the piece may have simply voided out the station. While changing channels, for example, WESU would have sounded like a station just out of range. For people listening to radios in static locations, the changing balance of stations would have seemed out of place. For those listening closely, the large number of stations audible in the ‘broadcast area’ of the radio would have seemed unusual, and the switches between different tunings might have appeared coincidentally elegant. *Crossing Signals* was an effective piece of radio art, documenting a feature of radio peculiar to radio, and broadcasting that feature in a smart, ironic gesture.

Due to its resemblance to an out of range radio broadcast, however, the piece most likely was not even noticed by most listeners. The sonic material, a changing overlapping texture of music, talk radio, and different kinds of static, also may have been alienating, and could have caused listeners to change stations, effectively cutting out the station’s presence on the air. The piece, while explicitly engaging with radio as a site for composition, might have been alienating and inaccessible.

ChalkTalk

ChalkTalk comprises an “earwalk” and installation following the admissions tour route confronting the ‘moratorium’ on chalking. The walk-specific tape piece features interviews with students, alumni, and administrators, and attempts to explicate the meanings and value behind the practice of chalking.

ChalkTalk is the culmination of my work and interest in topical specificity and community organizing in sound projects. While much of the recording, editing, and conceptual work for *ChalkTalk* will be completed after the deadline for this thesis, planning for the event and coordination with other organizers in Wesleyan’s queer

community has been ongoing since the beginning of the spring semester. The project will feature an installation opening on 24 April, and an “earwalk” available for use during the surrounding WesFest weekend. The project has been developed and planned in consultation with Queer Awareness Days planners for April’s Peoples’ Awareness Month, and the installation will appear as an event on the Month’s calendar. Ideally, both the installation and “earwalk” will be advertised to prospective students visiting campus that weekend as part of the official WesFest events listing.

I worked through the year on developing an outdoor sound project to confront the indefinite ‘moratorium’ on chalking that President Bennet had imposed on Wesleyan students. I thought through a variety of approaches to chalking as a topical site for composition, before settling on an approach. In writing a piece in opposition to the ‘moratorium’ I initially considered some ideas that would have incorporated chalking-like content. Such a piece would play to the sentiments of radical chalking supporters and could have “energized my base,” evoking enthusiastic reactions from other chalking supporters and creating polarizing visibility around the issue. I also could have taken a journalistic approach, attempting to assume ‘neutrality’ through the representation of a variety of views in dialogue. Rather than declare allegiance with a specific side, such a piece could deny any specific claim to utility, hoping instead to document the variety of views on the topic.

Coming from a pro-chalking perspective, however, I did aspire to political goals in creating a piece around the issue. I hoped to influence the debate over chalking, and to push the administration toward rescinding the moratorium. In attempting to give my piece some political weight, I wanted to do more than

“energize my base,” however. I hoped to include people whose opinions the administration cared about as the audience for my piece. I even hoped to create a work that members of the administration could listen to open-mindedly. I did hope to accomplish some direct organizing through the sound project as well. Through including pro-chalking and queer communities in the composition and distribution of a chalking sound project, I wanted to mobilize chalking supporters and engage in community building, setting up achievable goals not contingent on the moratorium being lifted.

In the fall of 2002, I considered a number of approaches to creating a chalking piece, all of which proved unrealizable. The thought process involved helped lead me to the approach I am finally taking this April. I also was able to think about interactivity in socially motivated sound projects, as well as in outdoor settings and with video cameras and a computer to correlate sound with captured motion.

My first ideas involved the creation of an interactive sidewalk where previously gathered audio recordings of students’ chalkings would shout at passers-by as they traversed an area monitored by motion-sensing video cameras. I also thought about creating a musical texture including ‘audiochalkings’ to form the background to an interactive timeline where motion-sensing video cameras would trigger the playback of recordings describing the history of chalkings and homophobic incidents on campus.

These interactive approaches to utilizing the chalking-related material I had hoped to collect focused on the community building goals I had envisioned for a chalking piece. I would have relied on pro-chalking students to submit

‘audiochalkings’ and to provide retellings for the timeline of homophobic incidents at Wesleyan and attempts by the administration to shut down forms of dialogue used by students in an attempt to control the university’s image. In broadcasting explicit chalkings in public spaces around campus, these pieces would have been enthusiastically received by students in favor of unlimited chalking, but may have substantially affronted other passers-by. These pieces amounted to an even more assertive form of activism than chalking. Where one always has the ability to look up, avoiding contact with chalkings, ‘audiochalkings’ would have been more difficult to avoid.

Hoping to pair some effective political organizing with this base-mobilizing approach, I thought about setting up an “audiochalking” installation in front of the Campus Center. Pairing such a piece with a table staffed by volunteers suggesting actions to take and with a recording device to collect new ‘audiochalkings’ would encourage an exchange of ideas around chalking, providing a productive outlet for those angered by the installation’s content. Such an installation would also make better use of the enthusiasm with which some students might meet the display by channeling it into pro-chalking activism.

Still attempting to create a vehemently pro-chalking piece, but searching for a lower-tech solution, I retreated from my hopes of programmed video-linked interactivity and contemplated creating a CD of ‘audiochalkings’ for shuffle play. The difficulty of leaving equipment outdoors unsupervised led me to contemplate a day-long performance piece where the sound would be made portable with CDs distributed to people with boom-boxes willing to broadcast the ‘audiochalkings’ to

the rest of the campus while walking around the University grounds. Instead of centering on technically untenable video-triggered programmable interactivity, such a piece would focus on a social model of interactivity such as the element that entered into the Campus Center courtyard installation idea. Here, instead of simply providing an outlet for enthusiastic students, the piece was a form of community protest.

While all of my early ideas involved a community of students through the collection of ‘audiochalkings’ this new idea involved a community in the distribution of the project as well. In this sense, a technologically simple approach has its own advantages, aside from the simpler equipment needs. A work of this sort necessarily involves a number of people in its creation and realization, creating a core of organizers and a group capable of political action. Indeed, the realization of a piece such as this can unite with and even resemble political action, leading to victories on its own contributing directly to a movement’s achievement of political goals. Choosing a social solution, as opposed to a technological one seemed wise for such a socially motivated piece, increasing the flexibility of my approach, and better dovetailing with the political goals of the project.

In the fall, however, the task of organizing enough people with boom boxes to avoid the event being labeled a disaster seemed daunting. I did not feel sufficiently involved in organizing communities around the chalking moratorium to pull off the degree of organizing I believed would have been necessary to make the boom box project a success. I also felt out of place asking to record chalkings, having only infrequently participated in chalking myself. I also had uncertainty about my capacity to gather enough ‘audiochalkings’ given my limited involvement with organizing to

repeal the chalking ban. These ideas, which broadcast my support for unlimited chalking in an off-putting manner also seemed less than maximally effective. I ended up tabling my plans to compose a chalking piece until the idea for *ChalkTalk* emerged in the spring.

My ultimate ambition for *ChalkTalk* is to re-map the chalking debate on campus by bringing new forces into the arena to encourage the administration to rescind the moratorium. The plan is to feature discussions with alumni for whom chalking played an important role in their experiences at Wesleyan. I also plan to interview members of the administration and current students.

My goal is to explicate the issues surrounding the controversy without aggressively presenting a particular point of view. However, I expect that the piece will challenge the administration's assumptions in limiting chalking and imposing the moratorium by revealing the extent to which chalking is part of a discursive tradition on campus.

The ongoing process of finding and contacting alumni for whom chalking was important is a central element of the *ChalkTalk* project. I ask new contacts for further contacts, creating an expanding network of sympathetic alums. I've been put in contact with most alumni through informal networking with help from a variety of individuals, most notably Cari MacDermott, administrator of the WSA, and also Professor Henry Abelove, and former Wesleyan students Phil Gentry, and Brian Edwards-Tiekert, head of the Wesleyan Progressive Alumni Network. I have, and am continuing to work to flesh out this network by contacting individuals and asking

them for their recollections about chalking during their time at Wesleyan. I am attempting to bring alumni to campus for interviews on their experiences chalking and their recollections of the administration's attitude towards chalking and will also conduct interviews over the phone with alumni who cannot visit. Members of Wesleyan's current queer communities have volunteered to help create the piece, and are also interested in publicizing the project, participating in some capacity in the premier event, and helping to distribute the "earwalk" during WesFest and the 24 April installation.

In addition to being used in the creation of the "earwalk" and installation, the interviews will be put on CD and become archived in Wesleyan's Queer Resource Center (QRC) and the University Archives. In an attempt to better distribute the "earwalk" and interviews, the audio files will be made into mp3s, and, working with Admissions, will ideally be made available for download from their web-site or another site linked to the Admissions site. The form of the installation is still very much unclear, and may involve performers carrying boom boxes around campus as I had considered in the fall, or a stationary piece featuring segments of the interviews implementing a personal interactivity model such as that featured in *Weapons Inspections*.

I am writing and deploying the piece to focus physically around the Admissions Office and to track the admissions tour route, a location where the university attempts to project a certain image of the school that it sees as challenged by some of the sentiments expressed through chalking. In seeking to complicate this image *ChalkTalk* aims to affect the social topography of the campus, repositioning

the rhetorical roles of forces such as alumni and bringing this redistributed power matrix to bear on the university's treatment of the chalking issue. By refiguring Wesleyan's projected image, *ChalkTalk* thrives on the performance context it occupies while undermining it, and rearranging the lines of power in portraying Wesleyan.

Like *Artificial Space*, my "earwalk" version of *ChalkTalk* will superimpose one configuration of social forces upon another, here overlaying the false neutrality of a walk along the Admissions tour route with a matrix of voices commenting on the silencing of student perspectives in the context of the chalking debate. The specified walk around campus followed by the sound material in the *ChalkTalk* "earwalk" is the admissions tour route, a path around campus with an associated set of stories, views, and narratives, comprising an image of the university. The *ChalkTalk* campus tour would project itself in contrast to that image, through its presence and use instituting a redrawing of the social topographical forces at play in the university's appeal to prospective students.

The "earwalk" will be distributed by student volunteers at a table in front of the Admissions Office. *ChalkTalk* would transform the courtyard into a territory for conflicting views and critical reflection on a form of expression Wesleyan has attempted to prevent these prospective students from accessing. In introducing these new and questioning voices to the Admissions Office courtyard and the tour route, *ChalkTalk* would realign the power of forces in the space with constituencies opposed to the chalking moratorium seizing claims to Wesleyan's public image. *ChalkTalk* amounts to an extension of my interest in social topography to a non-inherently

musical situation. Sound projects can engage with power structures outside the music community, contributing to calls for change in real spheres of influence in the world, such as the Wesleyan administration.