ABSTRACT

CRiSAP (Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice) is a recent research initiative at University of the Arts, London. It has developed from the Sound Arts and Design Department at London College of Communication which is part of UAL. This paper introduces the wide range of research interests and activities at LCC and CRiSAP including the development of new creative tools, digital performance and sound and the environment.

BACKGROUND

The department of Sound Arts and Design at London College of Communication is unusual in that it is situated in a Media School along with disciplines such as photography, film and television, journalism, interactive multimedia and animation. LCC is the largest of the colleges of the University of the Arts, London which was recently selected as the best modern university in the UK (Sunday Times). UAL comprises six separate colleges1 specialising in art and design. The department of sound arts and design is the only ‘ear centred’ department in a highly visually dominated environment.

The department was established in 1998 and has expanded rapidly. In 2003 the School of Media moved into a new purpose built space at the Elephant and Castle, an area currently undergoing major transformation and regeneration in Central London. The College is walking distance from Tate Modern, National Film Theatre, Royal Festival Hall and other major cultural institutions and there is easy access to all other part of the capital.

The ethos of the department is to both conduct research and provide education in broad based creative and practice driven approaches to working with sound.

These include software instrument design, performance, cross media collaboration, laptop improvisation, electroacoustic composition, phonography and field recording, sound for film, interactive and installation work, studio production, radiophonic work, hardware hacking and audiovisual work. There are currently over a hundred undergraduate students enrolled on a BA (Hons) and foundation courses, a new MA in Sound Art will start in January 2008 and there are increasing numbers of research student applications.

The department comprises of:

- Two bookable multi-workstation sound rooms equipped with Mac G5 computers running ProTools, Peak, Cubase SX, and a mix of software from Live to Soundhack.
- A dedicated composition studio with Mac G5 computer, Yamaha 02R desk, Digidesign 002, eight channel loudspeaker set up. The composition studio can be used alone or connected to the adjoining
- Foley room, a sound booth suitable for foley work as well as a recording booth and dialogue replacement room.
- Film sound post-production studio with Mac G5 computer, Pro Control based Pro Tools system with full synchronisation, also connected to the foley booth.
- Performance Laboratory, a reconfigurable space for performance, screening work, experimental installation work, concerts, visiting speakers etc. The performance lab seats about fifty audience members and has a 24 track mixing desk and six speakers set up. The performance laboratory can also be used as a studio attached to the composition studio.
- In addition there is a large amount of portable field recording equipment including underwater, stereo and binaural microphones.

1 Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion, Wimbledon College of Art
There are many gallery spaces available within LCC for the exhibition of student and staff work.

All staff in the department are active in some area of sound arts and offer a wide range of specialisms and interests. Most staff are research active as defined by the university and the University of the Arts Research Unit, CRiSAP (Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice), was designated in 2005 in order to extend, expand and consolidate research activity in this area.

There is an active programme of visiting speakers and performers attended by students and staff from all parts of the university and outside. Recent guests have included sound filmmakers Semiconductor, artist and writer Brandon LaBelle, artist Vicki Bennett aka People Like Us, Professor Anthony Moore from the Academy of Arts and the Media in Cologne, composer Philip Neil Martin, singer and Bengali folk music researcher Moushumi Bhowmik, artist Janek Schaefer, performer and composer Kaffe Matthews, wildlife recordist and musician Chris Watson, composer Trevor Wishart and performance artist Hayley Newman.

RECENT PROJECTS AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY

1. Creative responses to the archive

One of CRiSAPs main areas of activity relates to creative work with different kinds of digital archives.

This ranges from:

• the acquisition of archive material relating to sound art performance
• the compositional use of archive material
• commissioning creative responses to archive material
• developing software tools to interrogate, reconfigure and data mine digitised archives of audio visual material and speech.

**Speechcutter**

The imperative for an application to data-mine archives of digitised spoken word material arose out Cathy Lane’s experience with spoken word composition. Works such as *Hidden Lives*\(^2\) (1998) *Scan*\(^3\) (2000) *Hidden Lives 2 The House of Memory*\(^4\) (2002) *The Memory Machine* (2002, 2003),\(^5\) *Hidden Voices* (2004, 2005)\(^6\) all used extensive manipulation of recorded speech, from pre-existing oral history archives or recorded specially for the work. The painstaking extraction and recombining of small sections of words led to a specification for a creative software tools that was able to search and extract specific features from digital speech archives according to user defined parameters and recombine or signal process them. The main purpose of the software was to identify, extract and process similar sounds, volumes, pitches or timbral envelopes within words spoken by different people, and use them to build new and different sonic objects and gestures. Dr Edward Kelly was employed as a research assistant to develop the application that has become **Speechcutter**.

**Speechcutter** is a standalone PD patch with two main operations, it divides speech up into various kinds of small segments and then recombines them in different ways defined by the used.

**Speechcutter** will be released as freeware through the CRiSAP website during the latter half of 2007. Prior to the launch CRiSAP have issued a call for works to be made using **Speechcutter** as part of an intensive beta test.

**ImmApp**

This software application is being developed by a CRiSAP research student, J. Milo Taylor. It will be used to both interrogate a large database of audio, visual and textual material pertaining to the practices of sound artists and from that to produce audio/visual performance material which can be presented, manipulated and processed in real time. It is hoped that the results will shed new understanding and reveal new relationships between themes, practices and ideas within sound arts.

**London Musicians Collective**

CRiSAP has been working with London Musicians Collective, a long standing organisation for experimental and improvised music to develop an online archive of material related to the history of both the LMC and its offshoot the London art radio station Resonance FM. At the time of over 3,000 items of paper based material related to the history of the LMC have been digitised and research is underway to decide potential uses and ways of approaching of such an archive. Future developments may include establishing an open and open community of users to update and contribute to the archive in terms material, comments

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2 Commissioned by Institut International de Musique Electroacoustique de Bourges and realised at their studios in France.
3 commissioned by Rosemary Butcher Dance Company.
4 Site specific installation Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, London Commissioned by Stoke Newington Festival, Hackney, UK
5 Site specific installation Cybersonica, The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
6 Dance Performance installation in collaboration with Rosemary Butcher. Later adapted as four short films broadcast as four Three Minute Wonders on Channel 4 television
and tags; commissioning work to be made in response to the archive; developing creative software tools to aid and enhance curatorial engagement with the material. Similar research is being undertaken with regard to specific radio programmes made for Resonance FM in the last three years.

2. Digital performance

There is a growing interest and emphasis on digital performance within the department and as a research area within CRiSAP.

David Toop, AHRC Research Fellow, has led undergraduate options in digital improvisation as part of his research. This has led to a number of students forming small performing groups before and after graduation and has recently developed to become

Unknown Devices the laptop orchestra, a large scale (usually 20-25) digital improvising group, often augmented by invited guests. Many of the members perform using laptop and self authored software patches, others use small electronic items and analogue equipment. Recent gigs have included the Tate Britain, and performances with members of the London Sinfonietta as part of an evening built around Benedict Mason’s Chaplin Operas. Unknown Devices has also performed as part of an event in collaboration with The UK Guild of Psychotherapists in order to begin to explore the links between digital improvisation and psychoanalytic practice. Plans for the development of Unknown Devices include continuing to working in collaboration with London Sinfonietta and commissioning composers from a variety of backgrounds to write work especially for the ensemble. Earlier this year the Sound Bodies symposium, placed laptop computer performance within the wider context of live electronic music, and examined the differences between digitally generated sound and other forms of sound production.

Thomas Gardener, electroacoustic composer, improviser. programmer and cellist and the most recent member of staff to join the department is interested in the combination of live performance with real time sound processing. We are hoping to develop this area both within the research group and within the pedagogic programme in the next few years.

3. Sound and the Environment

Exploring the dynamic relationships between sound and environment has been a long held research interest of all associated with Sound Arts and Design at LCC from staff to students. Areas of interest include electro-acoustic composition, radio programmes, phonography and site-specific installation, cross-disciplinary collaboration and textual responses.

Artists approaches to research in sound and the environment have been explored both through the Performance of Sound a one day symposium organized by CRiSAP in conjunction with the Tate Britain and in Autumn Leaves (2007) a new book and CD edited by Angus Carlyle for CRiSAP. Autumn Leaves combines traditional textual analyses, interviews, image-based works (both photography and graphic illustration) and ‘artist’s pages’ from a range of contributors exploring sound and the environment in artistic practice. Other members of CRiSAP’s practice based research interests in this area all of which are related to the documentation of specific places and environments.

Peter Cusack has had a long-standing interest in phonography and acoustic ecology. His Your Favorite London Sound project which aimed to find out what London noises are found appealing by people who live in London has been repeated in Chicago, Beijing and other cities. More recently Sounds From Dangerous Places is a project to collect sounds from sites which have sustained major environmental damage including Chernobyl, the Azerbaijan oil fields, and areas around controversial dams on the Tigris and Euphrates river systems in south east Turkey. Cathy Lane is interested in how sound relates to the past, our histories, environment and collective and individual memories. Her electroacoustic spoken word compositions use interviews, oral history, archive material and field recordings and is currently focused on how the past can

77 For details of Sound and Anthropology, a project developed in collaboration with the social anthropology department at St Andrews University see http://www.crisap.org/index.php?id=7,77,0,0,1,0
be investigated through sound with particular interest in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. She also writes and lectures on sound, history and memory. John Wynne is currently artist-in-residence for one year at Harefield Hospital in Middlesex, one of the world's leading facilities for lung and heart transplantation, where he has been working with photographer Tim Wainwright. He is working with staff and patients to collect recordings of voice, medical devices and environments such as the Intensive Treatment Unit for use in an installation due to be completed in 2007. Other recent work has explored endangered click-languages in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana. Both Angus Carlyle and Peter Cusack are involved in the Positive Soundscape, a multidisciplinary project exploring attitudes to the aural environment.

4. Exhibition and Curation

CRiSAP aims to promote dialogue, debate and creative activity in sound arts practice through the production of new creative work, exhibition and curation, publication and public debate and the formation of new collaborative relationships. Our first online exhibition Clickanywhere explores the internet as a space for the curation and exhibition of sound art. Curated by Salome Voegelin it includes work by Vikki Bennett, Richard Brautigan, David Mollin, Douglas Park, Alex Smalley, Clare Gasson, Rob Stone, Johannes Maier, Joerg Koeppl and Seth Price.

FUTURE PLANS

In 2008 our research focus will be on the intersections of Sound and Language. Our outputs will include new book and CD which will gather together and explore a range of artistic practices using recorded and performed spoken word material from electroacoustic composition to sound poetry, a new web based exhibition and a symposium.

This is just a flavour of developments, activities and research in Sound Arts and design at LCC further information about research, staff, events, student activity and the department can be found on the CRiSAP website at www.crisap.org and the LCC Sound Arts and Design website at www.soundarts.co.uk.

8 http://www.acoustics.salford.ac.uk/res/davies/soundscapes/
http://www.crisap.org/index.php?id=7,77,0,0,1,0