

A significant amount of Cath Robinson's work involves the interaction between the development and the delivery of (articulated) thoughts - in fact it focuses specifically on the 'spaces' between verbal expressions and maps the traces of sound which glue spoken thoughts together. The sounds made when pausing to generate or refine a thought prior to expression are in themselves expressive. She denotes this as 'Um' - a common sound expression indicating that thinking is in process, (in Ireland this sound is 'Em').

A prolonged exposure to Robinson's work heightens awareness of the significance of the unconscious cues which we constantly project and receive in conversation, akin in some ways to the enormous significance of body language, both of which are sent and responded to at the instinctual level, but are no less significant for that.

In his *Uhr Sonata*, Kurt Schwitters opened out a raw emotive state, achieved through not making sense, the sonic quality of the Sonata falls somewhere between music and language and seems to speak to both of these sensory forms. Despite a lack of meaning at the rational level, (and perhaps more so because of that), the apparently meaningless sounds and cadences of the Sonata actually did reduce people to tears and to deeply felt emotion. Robinson's sonic expressions also retain and amplify the character of the original sounds and make them not only more readily apprehended, but also more affective. They are made identifiable through their transformations.

Artwork involving language usually operates as purely formal elements, as in letterforms and text as compositional elements, or it employs language in its didactic or poetic usages. Robinson generally eschews the spoken or written parts of language, the conscious components of speech or linguistic communication, and zeroes in instead on what occurs between them, a more unconscious area, replete with the sonic notes, delays and rhythms which denote consideration – a space in which thought is generated and tuned into coherence. Spaces of, as she terms it; “vulnerable moments of reflection; ums, ahs, pauses and punctuation, the 'in between space' between the private processes of thought and the abstraction of language/art”.¹

“Vulnerable” moments - vulnerable to being unnoticed? Vulnerable to being uninfluential?

Or is the thinker vulnerable at this point? Perhaps so for whatever follows is required to fall into sense, is often forced into it. In becoming less vulnerable a thought becomes mediated into the constraints of the social, normalised.

This has included works such as, the pleasant conceit of merely eradicating everything except the um or ums out of words in her father's dictionary (*Um*, 2008) in which the remainder of the word is 'whited out' and the words are only partially revealed. *Um Chorus* 2009, originated in 33 interviews with artists discussing their inspiration, then edited to leave only the 'pause for thought noises' in real time. These are played simultaneously to create a chorus of interacting sounds. In *Chora Choruses* - 2010, 76 thought noises are translated to 76 keys on a digital keyboard, assigned a note value by virtue of their tones and can then be replayed individually or in 'chords' by those interacting with the work.

The connection between the vocal pause sound and its capacity to be carried into another sonic form or expression has guided the development of this body of work. At times the waveform of each vocal utterance is carried into a specifically musical context through its transformation into other sound-producing mechanisms. This is well expressed in the painstaking construction of *Thought noise / wave form preludes (if played simultaneously)* – 2009), in which the wave forms were printed onto polymer strips and hole-punched to be played through tiny wall-mounted music boxes. The private thought sounds are now musical structures, still retaining their pauses and individual patterns. Inevitably these works also contain a visual character which, until this point have been primarily a function of the mechanics of realising them as interactive experiences. Their 'aesthetic' is an open display of their construction and an honest, even aesthetically neutral reflection of the process of actualisation.

In *Thought Noise Resonator* - 2010, Robinson moves closer to a realisation which is visually engaging to the point where it may suggest that resulting 'visualisation' has to some extent subsumed the source. This is of course not the case as the source is always the dictating and modulating element, without which none of the striking visual activity can exist.

Robinson sees this work as; "an instrument, or appliance if you like, of thought noise resonance; reinforcing and prolonging thought sounds by vibration and reflection. The sound itself, the thought noises (stretched in time, boosted and frequency flung) become less part of the work than visible reflection; the wave forms in the water, the patterns arising, choosing their own path, coinciding with each other. Like a thought or idea arising in the mind, it's generated by the paths crossing, building up in waves and disintegrating in waves..."

That which is initiated intuitively is ultimately isolated and can become the generator. Art begins at a point where the unspoken, unnoticed or unbidden is brought to consciousness – investigated and identified (given identity), and then can 'exist', to be translatable and transferable, and able as such to accrue the function of a determinant in a place where it previously existed only subliminally. Nonetheless it is vital to Robinson that the artwork maintains the equivocation of the generating sounds and the equivocal space they emanate from. It must still contain the 'forming' aspect, it remains therefore inconclusive, even intangible - always 'opening out' in some way, however strongly it may appear to assert itself through the mechanism of a medium.

Seán Kelly, October 2010

1 From Artist's statement