



Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *The Speakers: body + voice = writing*, 2018. Photo by Elizabeth del Ángel, courtesy of the artist.

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## Entwined Voices

Dictionary offer us many meanings for the notion of “entwine.” The first are usually applied to the sciences and to architecture because they refer to a series of sheets or plates made of metal or other materials that cross over each other in a grid or lattice pattern and that therefore can be used to construct a shape capable of holding up a building. But “entwine” also refers to a series of ideas, actions, and voices that connect with and cross over each other in a text, creating a weave or plot.

Looking at it like that, it should seem incredible for us how even on an apparently smooth surface where a writ-

ten text appears, we are able to recognize in our reading a web or weave of multiple voices and perspectives, even beyond the possible textual markings like commas or hyphens that serve to identify at least the direct voices. And the weave becomes even more complicated when we think that a text can be put in an intertextual dialogue, through quotes or allusions of different kinds with other voices or texts external to the work.

Mexican writer and visual artist Verónica Gerber Bicecci was able to represent these kinds of situations in several of her works. Among them is her intervention on the interior walls of the Ex-Teresa Church Current Art Museum in 2018 for the “Ways of Listening” exhibit (2018-2019). As part of the “The Speakers” series that she has been developing for years, the title of the work, *The Speakers: body*

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+ voice = writing, suggests an equation to be untangled semiotically. On a large, 8 x 3 m surface, Gerber Bicecci created a black-and-white graphic image of apparently simple figures linked together in many ways, showing the different, and at the same time complex, relationships in that web of voices and bodies when we think of written communication.

Its components are a series of balloons of text (= voices) and one of triangles (= bodies); all are different sizes, and black (= silence) alternates in some cases with white (= noise). The entire image is in brackets (= writing). Following the instructions for understanding the web, included in the piece at the bottom of the image, the viewer can visualize an infinite number of variables. Among those are voices inside bodies, bodies inside voices, crossovers between voices, crossovers between bodies and voices, bodies inside voices inside bodies crossed by voices. . . And all this also reveals the contrast between conceptual noises and silences that, even in the visual-written, present themselves as potentially audible. Placed in a symbolic context of writing, this labyrinth exemplifies the richness and multiplicity of these communicational situations.

If, with these situations in mind, we move into another terrain of the arts, concretely sound installations, we can

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find several examples of pieces that experiment with these kinds of tangles of bodies and voices, from an audible and at the same time visual and spatial dimension. For example, in the same exhibition, next to Gerber Bicecci's mural-graphic, Mexican composer Antonio Fernández Ros presents the sound installation *The Shower* (2009). Made up of 24 loudspeakers hung at the same height, equidistant from each other in a kind of sound chessboard, this piece was shown in the Ex-Teresa's Chapel of Souls.

In this piece, the minimalism and precision of its spatial placement contrast with the sound experience it offers the visitor. If viewers stand directly under one of the loudspeakers, they can be drenched in sound or absorbed by the flow of voices, songs, and noises issuing from it; or, they can allow the sound web to brush by them or touch



Antonio Fernández Ros, *The Shower* in the Ex-Teresa's Chapel of Souls, 2009. Photo for the 2018 installation by Gerardo Sánchez, courtesy of Ex-Teresa Church Current Art Museum.

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them by standing between different loudspeakers. The intensity of the experience varies according to the distance from the speakers. They even form a different impression when they stand outside the installation, from where they can experience the fascinating, captivating body made up of the sum of all the sounds, the vocal, sound, and musical clusters. In any case, despite the fact that the recordings repeat in a continuous loop, the experience is never the same because it is always perceived from different angles. And if, to a large extent, it is made up of speaking voices, Fernández Ros is not trying to make us understand what is being said, but rather to have us experience the effect that this web has on us, in which each of the speakers is programmed to emit about 25 fragments of different recordings, many of them taken from radio broadcasts from the widest assortment of countries and the most varied of languages. When he deliberately includes certain identical tracks on the 24 channels, the artist at times also makes them coincide so we hear the unexpected chorus in unison. So, more than the voices dialoguing, they usually overlap, but they also find each other, with the same sound effect as tuning into a radio station, including the interferences, crossovers, and noises that brings with it. In addition to the apparent randomness, the artist also plays with contrasts, disparities, and the variety of forms of speech that are quite recognizable: voices reading the news, doing an interview, praying, singing, making a political speech, doing a literary reading, reciting a Dadaist poem, among many others. If you're lucky, you can identify documentary registers of well-known voices, some of people in politics, like Fidel Castro, Nelson Mandela, Salvador Allende, Evita Perón, or John F. Kennedy; artists like Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Marcel Duchamp, and Kurt Schwitters; or writers like William Burroughs, Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, Henry Miller, and Kurt Schwitters, to name a few. It is a selection that also makes the viewer think about what the piece brings into play ideologically and culturally from the point of view of listening.

The web of voices that Fernández Ros offers, as experienced in a space like a chapel, also takes on a particular

meaning, not only because of its resonance, but also because of what it symbolizes. *The Shower* clearly offers a different way forward for its voices, which in this space generates a conceptual counterpoint with prayers and murmurs evoking the practices that dominated this venue in times gone by.

The small drift proposed here by the networks of voices in different art forms makes it possible to exemplify the diversity of intersections and the different levels in which vocal material intertwines and weaves together, both conceptually and materially. This is given that, in literature, as in the visual and aural arts, a web of voices can constitute a theme, a medium, or a vehicle, or the discursive resource of a work, even combining in it in rich, intriguing ways. We can also recognize that the juxtapositions and contrasts derived from those webs have both aesthetic and ideological implications. These communicate not only because of what the voices say, but also because of their way of being present in a time and space, from where they can touch us and even penetrate us physically and emotionally.

For those who research these kinds of works, such as myself, thinking about them and approaching them from an intermedium perspective demand recognizing precisely that broad range of possibilities of webs that they erect based on verbal enunciation, but also in terms of their character as resonating material. Works like those mentioned here offer us the opportunity to understand and observe how networks of relationships are configured and woven, at the same time that they allow us to experience them as that complex, enveloping phenomenon that is part of that same experience, making us part of both their equation and their intention.

Even when the voice seems well-known and familiar to us—are we not always surrounded by voices?—it is always so malleable and adaptable that it leads us not only to imagine but also to construct hugely rich and complex polyphonic, multi-faceted works; works that can be perceived from multiple angles and interpreted in different ways, inviting us to return to them again and again, without ever fully unraveling them completely. Perhaps it is beginning with encountering these kinds of works that we should complement the meaning that dictionaries offer us for the concept of “entwine,” a fascinating concept, which from the fields of art reveals that these voices still have so much to say. ■■■