

Jenny's last rock

On Feb.21, 2012 I ventured out to Tweed, Ontario, equipped with field-recording gear, to record the Land O' the Lakes curling club. My contact there, Randy Kline, had invited me to record the senior citizens' curling meet. There, I was introduced to many impressive curlers, including Alice, who with her 87 years was one of the fittest curlers I had ever encountered.

While interviewing Randy about his experiences as a retiree and a curler, Randy recommended that I tune into the Women's championships on television. Later that week I discovered three recordings (from three different perspectives) on you-tube of a legendary shot made at the 2012 Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts by Canadian curling goddess Jennifer Jones¹.

Finally, I met with the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal, for whom I was planning on writing a piece, which would explore the sound world of curling in its varied facets- as amateur and professional sport, and from the perspective of the spectator. I worked with the ensemble on possible ways of transcribing the curling sounds (the stone sliding across the ice, the crashing of stones against one another, the sweeping, the yells, the cheers, etc.) and organised the sounds in an improvisation using games analogous to curling, led by a graphic score.

What ensued in the months to come out of this process is really a piece that explores transcription. The first attempts at transcribing the physical sound result of curling is used in the piece only as recordings played by cassette decks. I was curious as to what drew me to this sport, which was not only the sonic material of the sport, but also the rituals, the repetition, the timing and even more the relationship between this sport to the community which plays it and watches it.

Thus pitch and tempo curves (comparable to the path of a curling stone) actually are drawn from figures and graphs from Statistics Canada² regarding retirement. Sound material from the different sources (the interview with Randy Kline, the recordings off You-Tube of professional curlers, my field-recordings of the curling club in Tweed, and the session with the ensemble) are played in rhythm and the musicians interact with the tapes in imitative counterpoint.

Curling, like all sports, and like music, is composed of numerous singular irreversible and non-repeatable instants that occur inside a certain space designed for select individuals to be witnessed by numerous spectators and perceived as the exceptionally virtuosic movement of objects, humans and body-parts through time and space.³ What distinguishes music and the arts from sports is the practice of de-humanization of the athlete by the spectator; the gathering of statistics and predictions of success or failure of an athlete or team, which can be compared to a stock-market prognosis or weather forecast. The athlete is replaceable, serves a specific purpose. John Fiske describes⁴ this as a reversal of the role of the citizen and his/her government (in the sport arena the citizen plays the untouchable observer and collector of information about the athlete, he is now in the position that the government usually holds). In the arts, however, the spectators revel in the experience of the artist as an unique individual responsible for his or her own actions.

Both experiences empower the spectator, in the first instance by empowerment of the masses and in the second instance by allowing them to witness freedom of vision, action and expression.

Presently of great importance to both fields of entertainment are the modern technological developments that allow for documentation and mass reproduction and possession of these singular non-repeatable instants. The ownership of these recordings lends the spectator an illusion of power.

This piece challenges the role of the spectator, the athlete and the artist. I have transcribed recordings of the cheers of the spectators and concrete sounds from the game of curling employing selective perception and a multitude of transcription techniques. Now that I have treated it musically, I like to imagine that the sound-world of curling has been freed of its time, space and function. Three recordings from different audience perspectives allowed the voices and recording techniques of singular spectators to arise out of the masses. The interviews with Randy individualises the (albeit amateur) athlete and the relationships between curling and his highly particular life with many different interests (including playing the drums).

The sound sources are played back live in composed rhythms by the (much criticized) instrument that at one time went hand in hand with do-it-yourself technical reproduction... the cassette-player, operated by the musicians. Ironically, the musicians play with reproductions of themselves as well, recordings from a workshop done with the composer, in which the musicians attempt to imitate curling sounds, with critique and lob from the composer and conductor with the success of their imitations. The art of transcription can here be experienced as a sport, with the composer and conductor acting as referees.

The thematisation of reproduction leads to one central theme of this piece- confronting the inherent problems and possibilities of repetition and carbon-copies of material bound to a certain time and space.

1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etY7iO1fCm0>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qStj3AxZQvk> ; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnFJ5NEleLk&feature=related>

2 *Delayed retirement: A new trend?* Yves Carrière and Diane Galarneau, Oct.26, 2011.; Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-001-X, Perspectives on Labour and Income.

3 Music also is a result of musicians moving their hands upon instruments creating sound-waves that travel through the concert hall to our ear-drums

4 Fiske, John, *Sporting Spectacles: The Body Visible*; pp 81-93