Letter from the Guest Editors

by Patricia Alessandrini & Shelly Knotts

This issue of ICMA Array focusses on practice-based perspectives in electronic and computer music through the lens of intersectional feminism and a generally inclusive outlook. It features artists from six continents, as well as work which is not generally considered as the mainstream in academic computer music – such as electronica and DIY approaches – alongside some of the leading voices in the field.

In order to ensure the issue reflected current concerns among female computer musicians and other under-represented groups in the field, we sought to gather perspectives from those around us working on these issues in the UK prior in addition to distributing an international call. This involved attending events such as Sonic Cyberfeminisms in Lincoln [1] and participating in the organisation of Women in Sound/Women on Sound (WISWOS) – London [2] events at Goldsmiths and the Activating Inclusive Sound Spaces (AISS) symposium at Huddersfield [3]. We also ran a one-day symposium entitled Taking Space: Women in Electronic at Durham University bringing together a cross-section of female sound artists based in the north of the UK to discuss their work, practice and perspectives on the field. Instrumental in the direction of the issue was the roundtable discussion which took place at this event, where we discussed going beyond individual 'female role models' and 'pioneers' and considered structural changes needed to develop a gender-balanced field where the work of women is considered on equal standing to the work of men. We discussed how – as well as involving more women in organisational and managerial capacities – this may include expanding definitions and broadening the type of work which is accepted as the mainstream of computer music. Part of our approach here has been to directly address this, by seeking to represent the diversity of approaches to music-making explored by women, which may currently be underrepresented in the field.

In addressing the breadth of practice in the field we include writing in a number of formats. Nine artist statements emerged from the open call that we publicised internationally. Through this open call, we intended to highlight work created by women and gender non-binary artists, and work which addresses power relationships and gender-related oppression both within the field and in society at large. These statements address individual approaches to computer music and include live coding, electronica, radio transmission, installation work, and other genres. We also included three conversation transcripts using a non-hierarchical approach to interrogate diverse perspectives on working practices, in addition to features and reviews. The first of these is a tribute to Pauline Oliveros, to whom this issue of Array is dedicated, from two artists who worked closely with her, Maria Chavez and Seth Cluett.

At a point in time where the importance of inclusiveness in computer music is gradually being acknowledged, we hope this issue shines a light on the underrepresented voices; beyond this goal, we set out to challenge the field to progress in accepting more diverse perspectives on what it means to make music with digital technology. We set out a vision of the future of computer music, which as well as moving forwards, also expands outwards to people and practices at the fringes of the field, and re-centres and renews itself around and through these practices.

Patricia Alessandrini is a composer/sound artist creating compositions, installations, and performance situations which are for the most part multimedia and interactive. Through these works, she engages with questions of representation, interpretation, perception and memory. She performs research on embodied interaction, including instrument design for inclusive performance. She was recently appointed Associate Professor at Stanford University / the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA).

Shelly Knotts explores interaction with and through algorithms through projects involving live coding, computer networks and data sonification. Her work often has political motivations, exploring the shifting dynamics of collaboration when mediated by layers of computer technology and algorithmic process. In early 2017 she was Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at Newcastle University, School of Chemistry, and she is currently a Research Fellow at Monash University, Melbourne, working on the project 'Improvisational Interfaces'. Her music is available from Fractal Meat and Chordpunch labels.

[1] Sonic Cyberfeminisms was convened by Dr Marie Thompson, University Lincoln, & Annie Goh.

[2] WISWOS was founded by Dr Linda O'Keefe. Its London branch was coordinated by Dr Lisa Busby, 2015-17.

[3] The AISS symposium team was led by Dr Elizabeth Dobson, who is also the founder of the Yorkshire Sound Women Network