

The Listening Project

**Report to
ARC Cultural Research Network**

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prepared by
Tanja Dreher, Justine Lloyd & Cate Thill

**CRN Report on Listening Project Workshops
August 2008**

The Listening Project is now about half-way through our year-long program of events. The project is centred on 'listening' as a way of reframing debates in Media and Cultural Studies around media practices and interventions. The Project situates established and emerging Australian researchers within an increasing international focus on the practices, politics and ethics of listening. The Project convenors are drawing on their own expertise and ongoing research both to link with other scholars and establish a research agenda that engages scholarly research on these issues with practitioners in the field. The Project also significantly enhances the profile of the Cultural Literacies (and Technologies nodes), as well as the activities of the CRN.

In 2007, we proposed as the first steps towards these broad goals a program of events this year leading to a multi-authored publication around the theme of 'listening'. Two of these events have now been completed and we are preparing for the remaining three (see below).

Workshop One

The **Media, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Listening** workshop was an extremely successful CRN event in April 2008 that brought together media practitioners and community activists as well as established, ECR and postgraduate scholars working across this emerging field. Dr Tanja Dreher (CRN, UTS) and Prof. Gay Hawkins (CRN, UNSW) convened the workshop, which attracted CRN members (Mark Gibson, Justine Lloyd, Greg Noble and Catherine Thill), participants from SBS (including Amrita Cheema, presenter of World News Australia), the Auburn Poets and Writers Group (Alissar Chidiac), Information & Cultural Exchange (Lena Nahlous) and academics across the fields of media, communications, journalism and multiculturalism.

The innovative format of the workshop was particularly effective in opening a space for engagement between the diverse interests of participants involved. Prior to the workshop, the convenors circulated readings and a booklet that included framing questions for the discussion. Instead of beginning the workshop with a discussion of how individual people's research projects fitted with the workshop themes all participants were asked to prepare a two-to-three minute response to the framing questions. This enabled practitioners and researchers alike to participate.

One of the CRN participants commented particularly on the format and framing material as contributing to the success of the workshop:

Only two brief comments -- I think NOT having the 'show and tell' at the beginning was wise -- academics get too bogged down in talking about their research, so making us talk only in relation to the questions was terrific. The questions were great, by the way, especially given that we are engaging in very new stuff and so it is extremely hard to know what to ask and to direct

conversation (in comparison with areas we've researching in for years) (Greg Noble, UWS)

Additionally, the workshop was an opportunity for the project conveners — Tanja Dreher, Justine Lloyd and Penny O'Donnell — to begin a dialogue with CRN members and others interested in working across multiple strands of the Listening Project. The result is a shared research agenda that is being further developed through both the planning stage and discussion within subsequent workshops.

One of the initial outcomes of this workshop has been ongoing collaboration with Alissar Chidiac as part of Tanja Dreher's *Listening Across Difference* project (which has resulted in an UTS ECR grant application, supported by Stephen Muecke, Gay Hawkins and Graeme Turner as nominated advisers).

Workshop Two

Similarly, the **Technologies of Listening** workshop convened by Dr Justine Lloyd (CRN, Macquarie) and A/Prof. Kate Crawford (CRN, UNSW) incorporated sound artists Alex Davies, Caleb Kelly and Pierre Proske as well as academics working across the fields of technologies, new media and cultural histories. As part of both the CRN sponsored Listening Project and Jonathan Sterne Speaking Tour, the workshop featured papers by A/Prof. Jonathan Sterne, Dr David Goodman and Dr Ingrid Richardson (CRN, Murdoch) with response from Dr Zoë Sofoulis (CRN), Dr John Tebbutt (CRN, La Trobe), Dr Jean Burgess (CRN, QUT) and Prof. Stephen Muecke (CRN, UTS).

The crossover between these two CRN events meant that broad areas of shared research interest elaborated during the workshop could be further developed in other contexts such as the highly productive and intellectually generous 'Open Door Days' convened by Kate Crawford and held by Jonathan Sterne in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. In addition, the workshop format of distributing papers and framing questions beforehand was again very effective in generating sustained and engaged discussion throughout this daylong event.

Papers and compositions from workshop participants will be published in a special edition of the *Transforming Cultures eJournal* in 2009.

Evaluation of this workshop is currently underway as part of preparation for the publication.

Publication

More broadly, the project conveners Penny O'Donnell, Tanja Dreher & Justine Lloyd will publish an edited special issue of *Continuum*, 'Listening – New ways of engaging with media and culture,' in 2009. Prof Nick Couldry (Goldsmiths) and Prof Charles

Husband (Bradford) have agreed to contribute reflective pieces to the collection, which will also include interviews with practitioner-participants in Listening workshops. Contributing CRN authors include: Kate Crawford, Justine Lloyd, Gerard Goggin, Mark Gibson, Gay Hawkins, John Tebbutt, Tanja Dreher and Catherine Thill.

Prof Charles Husband (Bradford), author of 'The Right to be Understood' and an expert in Indigenous and multicultural media, has accepted an invitation to present a PG/ECR workshop and attend the Listening Publications workshop in November 2008.

Communication

The Listening project is documented in a website available at http://www.transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/news_events/Listening_project.html. The website is being developed as an archive of Listening Project events and outcomes, including details on participants, notes and reflections from workshops.

Mentoring ECRs, and enhancing Rural and Regional participation

ECR and postgraduate participation in both workshops has been very high. To date Aneta Podlicka (ECR, Swinburne) has demonstrated the most sustained engagement with the project as an invited participant in the first workshop and a self-funded participant in the Technologies workshop. Feedback from Aneta clearly articulates her experience with the aim to provide a space for ECRs to develop their research capacity:

it was a truly rewarding event, both in terms of the content, organisation and management! I do hope we can continue our discussions... It might be premature at this stage, but I certainly got inspired and therefore would like to express my interest in exploring further the questions of listening rather than production and speaking in constructing citizenship for the planned publication...

Other ECRs who have participated in workshops include USYD (Fiona Martin), UTS (Eurydice Aroney, Vicki Bamford, Barbie Bloch, Colin Chua, Greg Shapley, Catherine Thill), Macquarie (John Scannell), QUT (Jean Burgess), LaTrobe (John Tebbutt). Postgraduate participants have also attended from UWS (Christina Wolfhurst, Caleb Kelly), UCanberra (Julie Posetti), UNSW (Margie Borschke, Alex Davies), Wollongong (Gareth Jenkins), UNISA (Ruth Fazarkeley).

All workshops have included call outs for postgraduate and ECR participation facilitated by the CRN's ECR/Postgraduate node. This has resulted in expressions of interest for attendance at upcoming workshops from two postgraduates at rural and regional universities.

Future activities

The next Listening Project event is Mark Gibson's **Conflict, Democracy & Listening** workshop to be held at Monash University on the 26th September 2008.

The month following will be rather busy with two workshops planned in October: Penny O'Donnell and Juan Salazar will be convening a workshop on listening practices titled *Alternative Media, Dialogic Engagement & Social Change* at Sydney University and a workshop on *Disability, Democracy, Media & Listening* hosted by Gerard Goggin and Rosemary Kayess at UNSW.

Summary

At this stage of the project, we are very happy with progress, and particularly of the involvement of Cate Thill (a recently added CRN member) as our project officer, who has organised workshops and contributed greatly to the success of the overall objectives of the project. In addition to her formal duties as Project Officer, Cate has also made the most of the opportunities offered by the position, including developing a 'listening' component in her latest publication, in-depth discussions with Jonathan Sterne and plans for future research in the area.

For the project conveners, the opportunity to demonstrate research leadership at the ECR and middle-career researcher stage of our careers is also a significant and ongoing outcome of this project. The conversations and engagement around the issues have been exciting and inspiring, but it also a unique and much appreciated opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across institutions and at a similar stage of careers.

The project has provided a framework for ongoing evaluation of strategies and approaches to collaborative research and means of maintaining contact with a loose and informal network of researchers in related areas around some pressing contemporary issues. We look forward to sustaining this momentum for the rest of this year and beyond.

Other outcomes

- CSAA panel, UNISA, Adelaide December 2007
- Brown bag lunch seminar, UTS Broadway, August 2008
- Panel on Listening at the 4 R's Conference: Rights, Respect, Reconciliation & Responsibility, University of Technology, Sydney, in September.
- Participants in the Technologies of Listening workshop have joined the CRN-supported ARARA (Australian Radio and Audio Researchers Association) email list <<http://www.uq.edu.au/crn/projects/arara.html>>

- A bi-monthly reading group around listening research between UNSW, Sydney, UTS and Macquarie
- 'Listening' papers at ANZCA 2008, ACRAWSA 2008 and JEA 2008.