

A Space for Women as Women: Exploring a Gendered Feminine  
Percussion Practice through the work of Lucia Dlugoszewski.

“The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light.”

*A Room of One's Own* -Virginia Woolf (1929, p.1)

To take Woolf's ideals and apply it to musical practices, what does it mean to speak about women and music? How does one “lay bare the ideas, the prejudices” that lie behind the idea of discussing ‘women’ and their expertise in their chosen fields, for instance, how do we talk about women in music? (p.2) Feminist critique in music emerged following feminist movements in theory and criticism in the early 1990's. (Schloss, 1993, p.v) Early trail-blazers such as Susan McClary, Ellen Koskoff, Jane Bowers, Marcia Citron, Suzanne Cusick drew upon formidable feminist scholars such as Joan Scott, Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray to consider feminist musicology through various angles. Musicologist Susan McClary explores female or

feminine archetypes and attempts to deconstruct gender stereotypes with her book *Feminine Endings* (1991), the first of its kind using feminine metaphors to invoke or evoke images and ideals of the female body, while acknowledging that men and women alike have feminine and masculine images to draw from.

Given that men have dominated the category of composer, it is not surprising that the norms and conventions in western art music are male. (Macarthur, 2002, p.5) This underlying narrative of masculine and feminine has contributed to the fact that women in creative fields are compelled and expected to work within the framework of inherited male styles. (Macarthur, 2002, p.19) The 20<sup>th</sup> Century percussion canon, in particular, is one dominated by male discourse, male performers and composers.<sup>1</sup> The output contributed from the men of percussion during the formation of the percussion repertoire is undisputedly elemental, groundbreaking and further generations are forever indebted; however, why did this gender binary norm exist unequivocally for so long within this practice? Is this simply because male domination in contemporary music practices was so normalized?

Controversially, Julia Moore (1995) states, “Men composers demonstrate their socially-established ability to compel events, whereas women composers inject a more egalitarian perspective into patriarchal discourse.” (p.153) Although it is hard to substantiate Moore’s claim of the assertions and differences between male and female composers, it is a fact that there was an inequality of prominent female voices shaping

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<sup>1</sup> Percussionists Steven Schick (2006) and Jean-Charles Francois (1992) are the first practiced-based research contributors, and elemental in the formation of a percussion discourse.

percussion during its formation during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Over recent years, there has been a strong emergence of female and non-binary professors, academics, performer composers within the percussion practice, providing an alternative gender voice to the practice.

When commenting on the patriarchal paradigms of western classical music and its culture, it can be at times difficult to overcome the binary gender contracts that exist. Grosz (1989) comments, “The dominant patriarchal paradigms of our western culture are founded on hierarchies where it is almost inherently impossible to not inherently define and resolve gender into opposing terms”. However, Eva Rieger (1992) argues “that by striving to overcome binary contracts, women blur the past and present...furthermore creating music that is cyclical and thereby avoiding relationships in the music that are hierarchical”. (p. 147-149) So, how do we as percussionist’s take on the social and musical patriarchal hierarchies and engage in a feminist critique of a gendered masculine practice?

To quote Luce Irigaray (1994), “women must allow their bodies to speak through [their] space”. (p.151) One composer/performer who embodied this ideal was Lucia Dlugoszewski (1931- 2000) <sup>2</sup>. An alternate and missing voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century percussion narrative, Dlugoszewski was a composer, performer, inventor and largely forgotten voice of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century experimental music landscape. A Polish-American immigrant and critical thinker from an early age, Dlugoszewski relocated from Detroit to New York City in 1949, she studied piano with Grete Sultan and later composition with Edgard Varese. In addition to her career as a composer, she formed a long-lasting collaborative and personal

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<sup>2</sup> The date of her birth is disputed. It is published as 1931, but there is documentation to believe it is 1925.

relationship with dancer Erick Hawkins and was the Director of the dance company following Hawkins' Death in 1994. What perplexes me the most about Dlugoszewski's work, is that it is barely, if at all, mentioned in modern day discourse. This is perhaps due to her choice of having her compositions and academic writing being mostly unpublished, leaving her legacy widely unknown to the 21<sup>st</sup> century music community.

Dlugoszewski's output is hard to define comprehensibly as there were many facets to her creativity, with her not necessarily fitting into any of the boxes expected from a composer or performer. She exuded an unequivocally feminine approach to creating, heavily drawing on philosophy<sup>3</sup> and writers to accentuate what she called 'the feminine components missing in art'. (Dlugoszewski, *Is Music Sound?* 1962) Her use of language and ability to formulate it was extensive and exuded sophistication. She would create descriptive terms such as 'sensuous perception' and 'a tiny range of distinction on an indescribable spectrum', to describe concepts of timbres and devise composition titles that I believe were descriptive, stoic and feminine unlike any of her male counterparts of the time ( i.e. John Cage and Morton Feldman). She would never state feminine injustices explicitly in her writings, which is common for female composers of this period, but would indirectly comment on the effect of the work of many successful contemporary male composers from the period, such as Stockhausen, Schoenberg, Messiaen, Boulez. (Dlugoszewski, *Can Art be Necessary?*) Furthermore, I believe researching her work from a feminist historiography standpoint, is elemental to understanding her aesthetic and the influence she should have had on the practice of percussion had her work infiltrated the mainstream percussion culture.

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<sup>3</sup> Authors and philosophers such as F.S.C. Northrop, J.D. Salinger, James Joyce, Aristotle, Virginia Woolf.

To quote feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott, “Feminist history was never primarily concerned with documenting the experiences of women in the past...The point of looking to the past was to destabilize the present, to challenge patriarchal institutions and ways of thinking that legitimated themselves as natural” (Scott, 1996, p.21). Dlugoszewski’s music unassumingly challenges the patriarchal make-up of experimental music in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century; with her uniqueness in approach to sound and instrumentation provided a radical and predominantly feminine aesthetic to her sonic and philosophical explorations, highlighting her expertise as a performer, composer and inventor through not being confined by the conventional instruments presented to her. Having composed over 100 works in her lifetime, many of the compositions were designed to be performed for percussion instruments which she invented with collaborator Ralph Dorazio. To quote Dlugoszewski on her reasons why to choose to invent instruments rather than write for already existing forms, she states, “Traditional percussion instruments...so masculine in the wrong sense.” (Lewis, 2011, p.10) I believe this viewpoint of masculinity being inherent within percussion was a catalyst for her reinventing the way she played percussion, sonically and practically, through the invention of new instruments. As a self-taught percussionist, her work lived outside the institutions of contemporary percussion, taking on hybrid forms, incorporating new forms of sound exploration through expanding her already established work developing the ‘timbre piano’<sup>4</sup>. (Dlugoszewski, *Is Music Sound?* 1962)

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<sup>4</sup> Dlugoszewski coined her own unique term for playing the piano – the timbre piano, which I believe bears resemblance to cages work with ‘prepared piano’. Dlugoszewski wrote several works for timbre piano and would perform them herself. Most notable is, *Exacerbated Subtlety Concert* (1997)

By the time that Dlugoszewski began working with Varese during the early 1950's, she had already begun to develop her own sonic aesthetics, and was preoccupied with 'Everyday Sounds',<sup>5</sup> concepts of the banal, 'suchness', and focused on non-tonal explorations of timbre. Her work was heavily influenced by the work of authors such as James Joyce to philosophy from Aristotle and engaged in poetic and metaphorical titles infused with concepts taken from non-western culture (i.e. 'suchness') to develop a particular sonic and gestural aesthetic in her music. To quote Lewis' (2011) analysis of her 1949 work *Moving Space Theatre Piece for Everyday Sounds*,

“*Moving Space Theater Piece for Everyday Sounds* exploited the din of daily life – including bouncing balls, breaking glass, hammered nails, sounds made with water, the clattering of teacups, tapping on blocks of wood, pots and pans, the turning of a doorknob, matches being lit, a whistling teakettle, radio and typewriter, and ‘just about every sound possible with pieces of paper’”. (p.16)

The nature of this work bears resemblance and holds comparisons to John Cage's *Water Walk* (1960) which premiered over a decade later. Between 1950-1970, the practice of contemporary percussion cannon and the percussion soloist instrumentalist emerged, with pivotal and celebrated works of this canon<sup>6</sup> composed, However, there are minimal surviving recordings or scores of Lucia's percussion work during this period.

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<sup>5</sup> Dlugoszewski composed several works over a five-year period involving different variations on this title. For example, *Moving Space Theatre Piece for Everyday Sounds* (1949), *Everyday Sound for bright e.e. cummings*” (1950) *Orchestra structure for the Poetry of Everyday Sounds*” (1950).

<sup>6</sup> 1956: John Cage, *27'10.554” for a percussionist*. 1959: Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Zyklus*. 1964: Lucia Dlugoszewski, *Geography of Noon*. 1964: Morton Feldman, *The King of Denmark*. 1965-66: Helmut Lachenmann, *Interieur I*.

One work to draw attention to from this period is her 1964 collaborative work for invented percussion “*Geography of Noon*”. Created as an accompaniment for dancer Erick Hawkins, this work should hold a lot of weight for the percussion canon, as there are no other compositions composed for solo percussion by a woman during this time period, however, ‘*Geography of Noon*’ is missing from discussion of music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with no score or recordings existing today. Dlugoszewski’s descriptive and creative linguistics are an element of compositional design which I believe are absent in the percussion solo repertoire during this period. Also, a contributing factor to her absence during this time, is that she chose to not commodify her art through publication and self-promotion during her lifetime, one can also point to representation issues that arise as a female performer/composer during this period<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Comparison example of a female working within similar experimental fields with narrative erasure parameters is Maryanne Amarcher. (Cimini, 2017)



Figure 1. Erick Hawkins and Lucia Dlugoszewski performing “*Geography of Noon*”<sup>8</sup>

Dlugoszewski’s sonic and notational world was personalized and unique, her legacy not easily replicated and without the opportunity to be replicated. Additionally, her work prior to Hawkins’ death in 1994, was a heavily occupied as a collaborative musical process with Hawkins. She would even take on the role of choreographer at times, expanding on Hawkins unique choreography technique of ‘pulses, with later taking over as the artistic director of the Erick Hawkins dance company until her own death in 2000. (Lewis, 2011, p.39) Following Dlugoszewski’s death in 2000, Erick Hawkins work was given to the

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<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from, 5 Essays on the Dance of Erick Hawkins. (Dlugoszewski, 1973) Photography by Ted Yaple.



Smithsonian Institute for archival, and it was during this process that Dlugoszewski's work was also discovered. Musicologist and archivist, Dr. Kate Doyle, was employed to document and archive her work and additional to Kate Doyle, the work of percussionist Kevin Lewis in his 2011 dissertation provides a detailed histography of her work, being elemental in setting the groundwork for future research, promotion and sharing of her life.

Dlugoszewski's fascination with the thresholds of audibility and dynamic intensity, saw her couple textual nuances to choreography, and enriched her work with Hawkins. The Dynamic scale, as shown below in Figure 2, created by Dlugoszewski, was a way that she conceptualized a scale of intensity that correlated to the movement of the dancers through referential metaphors of intensity. (Lewis, 2011 p.40)

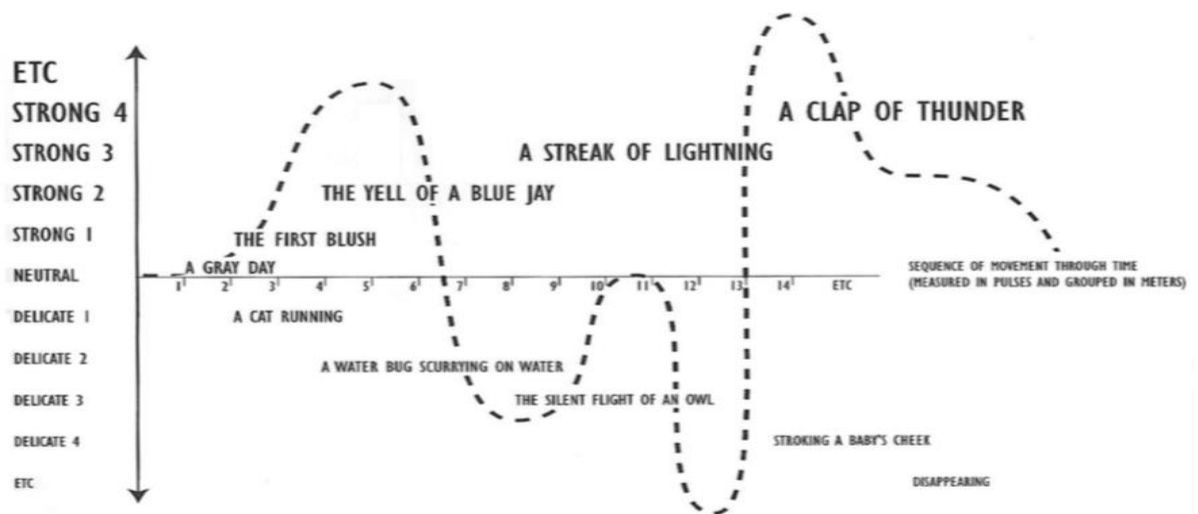


Figure 2. Lucia Dlugoszewski, Dynamic Scale.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sourced from Renata Celichowska (2000. P.75)

One of the characteristics which I believe engages with feminine nuances in creativity is Lucia's deliberate use of language. As seen in her Dynamic Scale, it can also be examined in her writings and personal philosophies as shown in Figure 3. In this example, Dlugoszewski unpacks ideas of dissonance and breaks down traditional compositional models through expanding conventional academic language surrounding atonal music theory. Incorporating words such as tender, violent, elegant as descriptors for dissonance, she uniquely redefines sensibilities of perception relating to timbre exploration.

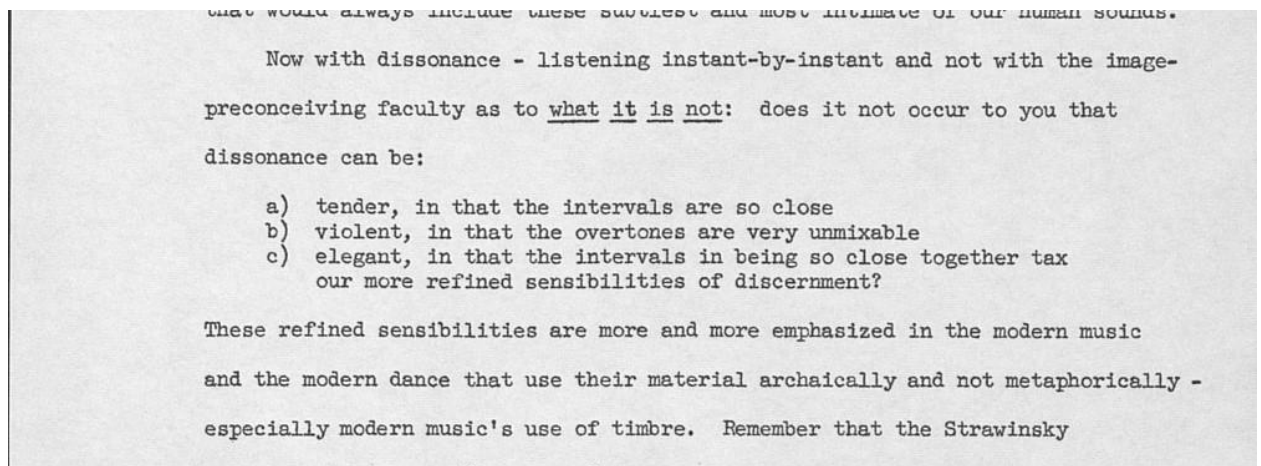


Figure 3. Dlugoszewski, L. (n.d.) entitled, NOTES: on modern music, on new music for the dance, on the archaic position in the performing arts.<sup>10</sup>

An additional line of enquiry and a somewhat ambiguity to her life relates to the consideration of her relationships with colleagues and prominent male figures of the time. Does her lack of recognition tie into to her unique approach to creating and performance, and how it possibly threatened the male dominated patriarchal contemporary music paradigm of the New

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from Ad Reinhart/ Betty Parsons archive, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.

York experimental scene? Long term friend and colleague Mike Silverton comments on this dynamic in an obituary for Dlugoszewski,

“Lucy surmised that Cage, Feldman and lesser lights judged her music’s metaphysics too distant from the compositional systems that in effect bonded the figures of the New York School’s music wing. It’s a question perhaps of irreconcilable differences. One only has to listen; Lucy’s art is as intuitive and constraint-free as her titles are hermetic.” (Silverton, 2000)

Although it is difficult to draw conclusions on such a topic without primary sources, there is documentation to quote Dlugoszewski on her initial interaction with John Cage,

“I remember going to John Cage, and I think he would have liked me to be his follower that way, but I just thought that whole chance direction wasn’t for me; I felt I saw flaws in it philosophically. And he wasn’t too happy about that. But I remember when he wanted to know who else I was going to see, and he said, “Oh, you’re not going to see Edgard Varèse! All he does is write wrong notes.” And when I went to Varèse, he said, “You’re not going to go to John Cage! He has no form.” (Gagne, 1993, p.9)

Additionally, in *The diaries of Judith Malina 1947-1957*, dated January 15, 1953, Malina speaks of an Erick Hawkins concert where he and Lucia were performing, and hints at an absence from that community surrounding Lucia,

“Lucia’s sounds challenge music. Surpassing its logic...John Cage and Merce Cunningham and Lou Harrison were not there. Who will love us if we do not love each other? “Where are John and Lou?” asks Lucia.” (1984, p.207-300)

The archive shows that Cage and Cunningham, Dlugoszewski and Hawkins were associated, moving in the same circles, creating similar work, shared the same friendships and attended the same musical happenings, but what bearing does all of this have on her legacy?

Looking forward, what if Dlugoszewski had the recognition and agency of John Cage, and what that would mean for post- WWII modernism in America? What would the percussion world look and sound like today if we referenced Dlugoszewski's work *Moving Space Theatre for Everyday Sounds* (1949), as opposed to John Cages *Water Walk* (1960) or adaptations of *Geography of Noon* were performed as opposed to *27'10.554" for solo percussionist*?

To focus on Dlugoszewski's work and to highlight feminine tendencies in women creating in percussion, let us consider the similarities in the rhetoric of percussion in the work of Dlugoszewski and Australian percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson. In Tomlinson's *the Banal, the Obvious, the Everyday* (2011), she describes her Artistic Research in similar ways to what Dlugoszewski does in her 1961 work *Manifestoes of 8 Clear Places*, focusing on elements of expanding the scope of oral perceptions through mundane and familiar sounds found in everyday life. Both women attempt to connect the gesture of the very basic 'doing' in life and manifest it into a musical aesthetic. To quote Tomlinson (2011),

“There are two parts to my practice which sit broadly under the title Music for the Banal, the Obvious, the Everyday; both centered around the idea of expanding our capacity to listen – homing in on what we can hear. Hearing is an unconscious act, but to listen and cognize sound is an extremely active process, difficult in a world already saturated with so many layers of sound. The first part of my practice is to learn to listen to my immediate environment, discerning layers of sound, the presence of sound, and listening to the effort taken to make a sound.... The second part of my practice is to collect objects around the site of my intended performance. This can include discarded and unwanted manmade objects (metals, glass, paper, plastic etc.) or natural objects (twigs, wood, leaves, water etc.).”

Here Tomlinson speaks of exploring raw materials as her ‘percussion’ instruments, through deep listening practices coined by other leading female performer composers, Pauline Oliveros and Annea Lockwood. Tomlinson blurs the lines between processes and performance, and similar aesthetics can also be seen through Dlugoszewski’s work. In *Manifestoes of 8 Clear Places (1961)* Dlugoszewski states,

“Suchness is personal, unique, vulnerable, bewildering, the hole in the wall, ultimately perception. Sensibility is cooperation with gravity. Sensibility is humility before an irreducible sound. The prime materials of art are attention and inattention. Form is how the ears listen.”

Comparing Tomlinson’s and Dlugoszewski’s work we find a uniquely feminine voice in a masculine dominated practice. This use of language and content in a commanding and engaging way isn’t defined by or reflective of male virtuosity; it extends vocabulary and opens doors for a personalized and stylized idea of what percussion ‘could be’ evoking the ideal of a feminine virtuosity. The complexity of the composer as performer relationship also highlights the way in which both Tomlinson and Dlugoszewski breakdown the patriarchal musical paradigm as spoken of by Macarthur (2002, p.5), with both women intellectually disassembling the musical hierarchies that have come before them through their discourse.

To summarize and return to the work of feminist author Luce Irigaray (1985), I believe Dlugoszewski creates, “a space for women as women... ‘woman’ is not one, is not an essence, but multiple fragmented, polyvocal”. Although the complexity of masculine and feminine tensions within the practice of percussion cannot be pin pointed or unpacked simply, further analysis of feminine percussion writing is needed. To facilitate a convergence of binary and non-binary gender ideals and create a performance practice that encompasses and celebrates all

gender aesthetics, not just the ideas of virtuosity which have been developed for mainstream percussion is in my opinion vital for the future of percussion culture. For future research, I see my role as a performer to attempt to recreate Dlugoszewski's works and to organize and study what is remaining of her percussion scores through her archive. Through celebrating and promoting the work of Dlugoszewski, I hope to impact on the culture of percussion playing, providing positive ideas of female virtuosity, and normalizing femininity into a mainstream rhetoric, so that this type of discourse and its meaning should not remain an invisible narrative.

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