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Ruth Eckland

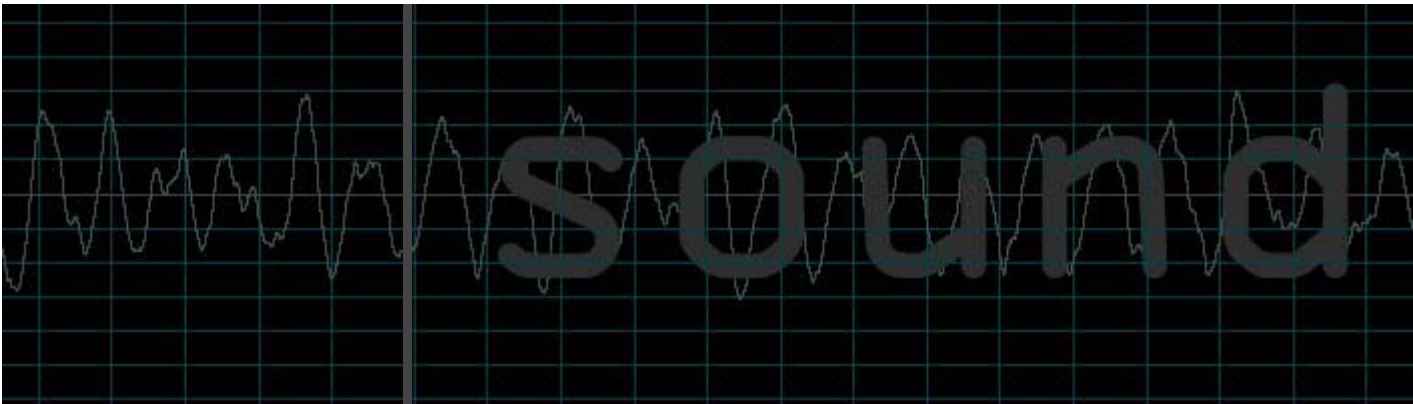
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Ruth Eckland on Jan 23 1989

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This article talks about "Parts of Speech", an art piece that demonstrates just how much can be transmitted with words, syllables, sounds are juxtaposed like notes or phrases in a musical composition than linear language.

If you watch TV your brain is gonna rot.

If you watch TV your brain is gonna rot.

If you watch TV your brain is gonna rot.

But I like TV! I like TV!

So chants the talking head of Pamela Z, replete with her famous crown of long skinny braids wound in odd configurations, speared and bound with a daunting arsenal of chop sticks, on her humorous and mesmerizing video short, & quot;TV." This was one of sixteen pieces in the performance, "Parts of Speech," performed at New Langton Arts as part of the Soundculture '96 Festival. The prelude to the show began in the lobby with the audience filling out forms, each with a different part of speech. "Please prepare a short list of adverbs," mine read. Slitheringly, witheringly, glibly I dutifully wrote. "What's a preposition?" someone demanded. We were already abuzz with the excitement of the game, part intellectual challenge, part ridiculousness with a generous dose of community spirit thrown in -- very Pamela.

Although Pamela Z has been doing solo performances in galleries, theaters and clubs in the Bay Area, New York, L.A. and Houston since 1984, she is also a consummate collaborator as a member of the brilliant Qube Chix performance ensemble which does everything from operas to hilarious songs like, "I Want a Bald Boyfriend," for which they select a man from the audience, bring him onstage and give him a very ratty head shave. She has worked with a prestigious, hand-picked group of other cutting edge musicians such as the kotoist Miya Masaoka, composer Donald Swearingen and The BodySynth inventor, Ed Severinghaus.

With her grace and enormous performance presence, Pamela is a master of the body synthesizer MIDI controller. With a shrug of her shoulder, a flick of her wrist she orchestrates feedback or previously recorded sounds, as an integral, finely tuned part of the piece. In fact, she is a grandmaster of feedback, setting up a loop of her pure, clear operatic sounds, her spoken text, her thought-provoking lyrics, and layering past

and present to create a rich texture of repetition and variation.

"Parts of Speech" plays with randomness and repetition, walks the line between sense and nonsense, making sense where there is no sense, and deconstructing the language of the mundane until it is meaningless. In one of the most amusing pieces, Pamela creates a "libretto" by singing excerpts from an Italian dictionary, sounding for all the world like a diva in the throes of a double suicide. It is reminiscent of the conversation that Henry Miller has with some Greek official in *The Colossus of Maroussi*. Since Miller doesn't speak Greek, and his companion speaks no English, they spontaneously begin communicating in their own versions of "Chinese." "Parts of Speech" successfully demonstrates just how much can be transmitted when words, syllables, sounds are juxtaposed more like notes or phrases in a musical composition than linear language.



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