

### **Track #1 – *Intimacies* (1992)**

The ad for the 1992 version of *Intimacies* ran: “When is close too close? Four artists are asking you to help them explore the natural desire for and the boundaries of intimacy. Call 265-5787, Wed.-Sat., noon to 5:30...”<sup>1</sup> The request appears sincere and direct, and presents the project as a collaborative exploration of emotional terrain. Hypothetically starting from ground zero, the artists were proposing to initiate relationships with strangers and to see how close they could get to a state of intimacy. Realistically, the group performance was fraught with confused intentions and relied upon a simplistic stereotypical definition.

Janet Cardiff was one of the four artists.<sup>2</sup> This performance puts a name on one of the predominant themes running through Cardiff’s works and collaborations and marks a beginning of her career-long investigation into the nature and workings of contemporary intimacy. It also marks a moment of synthesis where her multimedia excursions into sound became tightly focused on creating a relationship with the viewer. That same year in Banff, Cardiff chanced upon a technology called binaural recording and used it to create her first audio Walk. The audio Walk and its use of binaural recording has become

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<sup>1</sup> Nancey Tousley, “Feeling Intimate?” *Calgary Herald*. May 1, 1992, 11 as quoted in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller* (New York: P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002), 170.

<sup>2</sup> Performance with Charles Cousins, Nelson Henricks and Jon Winet for The New Gallery in Calgary, Alberta, May 7-9, 1992. The artists did a short version of the same project the previous year at the Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta.

her trademark signature, even though Cardiff and George Bures Miller<sup>3</sup> produce many works without binaural recording. Cardiff's use of binaural recording and other strategies has led to increasing perceived intimacy with the viewer/participant in her works. This thesis explores Cardiff's trajectory into intimacy from *Intimacies* (1992) to *The Paradise Institute* (2001). A contemporary definition of intimacy is excavated by exposing exactly how Cardiff and Miller create the appearance of intimacy in the later works, particularly in the audio Walk, *Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (1999), and the theater installation, *The Paradise Institute*.

For the group performance *Intimacies* in 1992, over fifty people responded to the newspaper ad and chose to come to a rented office building to spend twenty minutes with one of the artists. The premise was simple, Cardiff says: "We made appointments with people, and they came in and we talked about intimacy. People could come in and talk to me about anything. Sex, insecurities..."<sup>4</sup> While the subject of conversation was ostensibly "intimacy," the participants were welcome to speak on any topic. The implication was that intimacy was not merely to be the subject of conversation, but that a degree of closeness or familiarity with the participant was anticipated. The performance, *Intimacies*, was Cardiff's explicit attempt to make an "honest connection"<sup>5</sup> with the viewer.

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<sup>3</sup> George Bures Miller, fellow artist and Cardiff's husband, is credited with producing and engineering many of Cardiff's non-collaborative works. *The Paradise Institute* is authored by both Cardiff and Miller.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, "Conversations," interview by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, in *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller* (New York: P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, in Cardiff's own words, the project became, "a very weird experiment with intimacy."<sup>6</sup> Cardiff explained the problem, "[I]t became too much like therapy. It was too much like counseling." In the absence of familiarity, people are likely to resort to the closest familiar terrain they know. The private conversations with a stranger took on the attributes of a therapy or counseling context. Cardiff admitted being a little scared when "men [came] and [said] during the conversation that they had never talked intimately like that with anyone before..." Although she could see that people needed and wanted intimacy, she was not prepared to take on the burden and responsibility of having an intimate relationship with each of these participants. Cardiff basically found that she did not have the proper training to deal with the conversations. While the performances sprang out of a desire to deal with her "fear of intimacy,"<sup>7</sup> interacting personally with the participants, ironically, convinced Cardiff to create distance between herself and the viewer.

Although intimacy has remained a central theme in her works, the explicitly named *Intimacies* performance was the last time Cardiff was physically present and interacting with the viewer/participant. After this "weird experiment," Cardiff's work veered away from direct contact with the viewer but retained the same intent of making an "honest connection." At this time Cardiff's path made the proverbial fork: eschewing bodily engagement and performance, Cardiff instead began to experiment with creating intimacy with the viewer/participant without being physically present. Cardiff's first audio Walk, *Forest Walk* (1991), was made at the same time as *Intimacies* at the Banff Centre for the Arts and became the prototype for her most renowned works. With the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Walks, Cardiff discovered ways to be intimate with the viewer without having to be there or as Cardiff puts it, "...I could talk to someone very closely, yet I was still protected."<sup>8</sup>

In *The Paradise Institute*, Cardiff and Miller offer the experience of intimacy. Cardiff represents a contemporary definition of intimacy, one that does not rely upon the physical body; she absents her body and yet leaves the impression that her body has been there.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

**Track # 2 - *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (1999)**

*The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* begins as all of the audio Walks begin; you put on a headset and turn on the CD player in the carrying case. Immediately J's voice is palpably there, "I'm standing in the library with you." This voice intermittently directs and accompanies you through the library, out onto the London streets, winding you through an urban area called Spitalfields, and finally leaving you at Liverpool Street Station, to find your own way back to the Whitechapel Library, where the Walk began, to return your CD player.

*The Missing Voice* comes from Cardiff's initial intense exploration of the audio Walk between the years 1996 and 1999, when she produced sixteen Walks worldwide. Starting with the *Louisiana Walk #14* (1996) for the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, Walks have been commissioned throughout Europe (e.g., Britain, France, Sweden, Italy, and several in Germany where she resides), her native Canada and South America. In the United States, Walks have been created for SFMoMA; for the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and recently for Central Park, New York City, to name a few. Each Walk, being completely site-specific, is commissioned and funded before coming into existence. Typically, Walks exist only for the length of the exhibition. Furthermore, like an audio-guide they are intertwined with the physical space for which they are made,

and as an artwork they cannot exist apart from the site except as documentation. This makes the experience of a Walk elusive.<sup>9</sup>

Although Cardiff's art practice has ranged widely from printmaking, performance, multimedia installation, and Internet projects, there was a frenzy of attention over the audio Walks during those three years, resulting in a number of catalogs and considerable documentation. Many of the Walks made during this time were extensively documented (complete scripts, audio CD, color photographs, press, etc.) in a comprehensive monograph published in conjunction with Cardiff's mid-career survey of works and collaborations at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in 2002. The monograph and survey exhibition were organized and curated by then-P.S. 1 Senior Curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. More recent Walks have yet to be documented as thoroughly.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, due to their popularity, several Walks have been extended past their original exhibition dates, allowing for further investigation and documentation. *The Missing Voice* was commissioned and organized by Artangel in London, England as a solo exhibition to run from June 17 – November 27, 1999. Because Artangel is a non-profit art organization without a permanent space, Cardiff was given the freedom to start the Walk anywhere she liked - she chose to begin the Walk at the Whitechapel Library.

Because of continued high audience numbers and positive press, Artangel and the Whitechapel Library decided to continue the exhibition indefinitely. Later, in 2002, *The*

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<sup>9</sup> The survey catalog includes a CD recording of three of the site-specific Walks. Hypothetically a viewer could travel to the starting point and play the recording on his or her own CD player; however, he or she would miss the event of interacting with a gallery attendant and signing off to get a CD player; an experience that is oftentimes nearly as scripted as the audio recording itself.

<sup>10</sup> An artist's book entitled *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*, scheduled to appear in June 2005, has not yet been released.

*Missing Voice* was included in Cardiff and Miller's show of recent works at the Whitechapel Gallery, just a few doors down from the library. For several years afterwards, there continued to be wall text at the gallery directing viewers to the library for the audio Walk, which helped promote it. Six years past its original release date, *The Missing Voice* is still being offered, although the landmarks mentioned on the Walk have slowly changed, making the Walk gradually more difficult to navigate each year. Though the Walk could feasibly live on for years to come, it will close in August 2005 when its starting point in the Whitechapel Library is destroyed during the slated re-development.<sup>11</sup> Because of this extension, *The Missing Voice* has been much more accessible than prior Walks. A catalog, complete with compact disc, full transcript, and an essay by curator and critic Kitty Scott, was published in conjunction with the opening exhibition.

Two other versions of *The Missing Voice* transcript exist in the P.S. 1 survey catalog. One version is a photograph of a partial working script: four pieces of white paper taped together lengthwise; cut sections of type held on with bits of black tape; hastily drawn lines, boxes and arrows; jotted notations; all revealing the improvisational layering of the audio realities. There is also a straightforward complete script, which provides many of the cues lacking in the actual *The Missing Voice* catalog. The original catalog includes a transcript that is written in a stream-of-consciousness song lyric style, without any punctuation. The accessibility and ample documentation of *The Missing Voice*, added to my personal experience, made it a natural choice to investigate more thoroughly, although I will from time to time refer to other Walks.

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<sup>11</sup> Melanie Smith, Head of Production, Artangel, email to author, July 6, 2005.

*The Missing Voice* is the longest of the early Walks, lasting for 38 minutes. This is more than twice as long as any previous Walk.<sup>12</sup> It also takes place in the most challenging site; while many of the earlier Walks take place in quieter areas such as a garden or woods, *The Missing Voice* takes place on the crowded London streets, wandering through a predominantly Bangladeshi neighborhood, and must compete with the attending din of the city traffic and crowds.

Although the process has evolved over the years, the audio Walks are typically announced with wall text in an exhibition. You are directed to a booth/kiosk/desk where you exchange a piece of ID for a CD player and headphones. You put the headphones on and the Walk begins. It is primarily an auditory experience. Frequently, the Walk takes you outside the building itself, foregoing traditional art-viewing practices and spaces. Writer Scott Watson described *Drogan's Nightmare: The Walk* (1998), made for the Bienal de Sao Paulo, as "...penetrating not just the building envelope, but the security net that keeps ticket holders inside and non-ticket holders outside."<sup>13</sup>

While the audio Walk borrows the shape and structure of a museum audio-guide, "audio-guide" is not really an adequate description for the Walk experience. The auditory collage of fiction, and personal reminiscences spliced with snippets of dialogue from classic films (or at least appearing so), create a sensory and emotional barrage that envelops and surrounds you. You *are* wearing headphones, and there is a voice telling you where to go and what you'll see and how to think about what you see - but barely. The moments of overt direction are really only the barest fragments of linear sensibility

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<sup>12</sup> Cardiff's recent Walk, *Her Long Black Hair* (2004) in Central Park, New York is 35 minutes long.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Watson, "Ghosts: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller," *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Plug In Editions, 2001), 25.



to keep you from getting lost. The moments in which J tells you to keep up with the sound of her footsteps and when to turn, provide a slim skeleton for the rest of the work to hang on. Rather than a dry informative lecture, a Walk is more of a breathless, engaging experience that leaves you feeling like you have just had a rather intimate encounter with somebody.

The first Walk was created in 1991 while Cardiff was an Artist in Residence in the Summer Photography Program at the Banff Centre for the Arts. At this time Cardiff, coming from a printmaking background, had already been moving her concepts of visual layering into the realm of installation and audio in her multimedia installations. This year proved to be a significant one for Cardiff, due to two chance discoveries that came together in the production of her first audio Walk. Cardiff mounted a three-day exhibition, printed her own flyers, and about twenty people experienced *Forest Walk*. *Forest Walk* lasted thirteen minutes and meandered through the woods behind the Banff Centre. Characteristic of future Walks, *Forest Walk* was an auditory assemblage of curt directions, mysterious intrigue and intimate confessions.

The distinguishing trademark technology behind the extraordinary auditory realism is binaural recording. Binaural recording, which eerily mimics a real 3-D space, turned out to be the perfect vehicle for another accidental discovery: the effect of layering her recorded aural reality over the existing reality. While working on another installation, *Whispering Room* (1991), Cardiff took a break and walked through a cemetery. She was narrating her stroll into a tape player and as she passed each headstone, she read its inscription into the microphone. Cardiff explained, “I inadvertently pushed the rewind button and then pressed play to see where I was and in the headset I heard my footsteps

walking and my voice describing what was just in front of me. I started to walk with my own footsteps while listening to my voice...It was a really strange thing, walking in the footsteps of myself but seemingly another, and hearing the sounds of the reality around played back.”<sup>14</sup> Cardiff discovered that her recorded voice, played back in the same place in which it was recorded, created a strange presence. The combination of binaural recording with real-time playback later became the foundation of many of her future works – notably the audio Walks and the theater installations.

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<sup>14</sup> Kitty Scott, “I Want You to Walk with Me,” in *Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (London: Artangel Afterlives, 1999), 11.

### **Track #3 - “Trompe l’oreille”**

Cardiff uses binaural recording to create a “trompe l’oreille fiction.”<sup>15</sup> The ear, not the eye is tricked. Binaural recording neatly mimics the way the human head receives and perceives sound through bone and brain mass, creating recorded sounds that are so authentic that the recorded and the actual surrounding sounds are confounded. The startling result is the perception of a three-dimensional space.

We are habituated to gauging our environment more or less automatically through sound. Part nature and part nurture, most hearing humans can visualize a space by assessing the sounds of a space in which they find themselves. If a person were blindfolded he or she would be able to distinguish the sonic difference between a telephone booth and a cavernous theater. Cardiff takes advantage of this automatic impulse by recording the ambient sounds of different spaces to recreate those spaces for the listener. We feel like we are actually, physically in another world, the world being piped in. The sonic world has been reformatted, in a sense, to fit inside our head.

Brian O’Docherty once observed that “Space ... is not just where things happen; things make space happen.”<sup>16</sup> The “things” making the space happen in a binaural recording are sounds. In order for recorded sounds to create the illusion of space, the

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<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, “An Intimate Distance Riddled with Gaps: The Art of Janet Cardiff,” in *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller*, (New York: P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Brian O’Docherty, *Inside the White Cube*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976), 39.

recorded sounds must approach fidelity to the original sound. The binaural audio is an astonishingly authentic recording, which creates a “felt dimensionality,”<sup>17</sup> which was the original goal of stereo. The Greek prefix “stereo” means *solid, hard*. “Stereo” sound once seemed to create reality so tangibly that it was named for creating a “solid, hard” reality.

The ultimate objective in recording is fidelity. When a new sound system is advertised, the ideal is a replication of an experienced audio reality - a truly great sound system makes one feel like the orchestra is playing in the living room. Binaural recording goes beyond what typically passes for stereo.<sup>18</sup>

Aiming for the perception of more spatial depth, stereo recording typically has at least two separate tracks. The two recording microphones are placed in the recording studio in the way that produces the best sound: mimicking an empty room. The microphones are generally placed several feet apart. The separate tracks are then played back on separate speakers. The cheapest version of stereo may not even be recorded on two microphones; instead, two different tracks can be made by simply by increasing the volume on one of two identical tracks. This creates the perception of three-dimensional space to a lesser degree.

Binaural recording has been aptly described as the auditory equivalent to an old-fashioned 3-D stereograph. The stereograph is used to look at one image photographed twice with two separate lenses roughly the same distance apart as our eyes. The two pictures of the same image are then perceived through the stereograph as a single virtual three-dimensional image. In an analogous manner, two audio recordings imitate the

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<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Fisher, “Speeches of Display: The Museum Audioguides of Sophie Calle, Andrea Fraser and Janet Cardiff,” *Parachute Magazine* 94 (1999): 26.

<sup>18</sup> While binaural recording is technically considered stereo because it involves at least two tracks, it will be considered separately for the purposes of this thesis.

placement of the left and right ears; and thus, capture the way sound actually reverberates through the pinna, the fleshy external parts of the ear, and the head itself.

Binaural recording was invented in 1881, although the first well-documented use occurred about forty years later when a Connecticut radio station began broadcasting binaural shows. To do this, the station broadcasted the left and right channels on different frequencies. In order to achieve the full effect, listeners owned two radios – one radio for each ear. Today, the same effect is achieved with the use of headphones. Then, as today, the expense and inconvenience of both the recording production and mandatory headphones has held this technology in relative obscurity. While production and headphone costs have dropped enough for there to be a small contemporary resurgence in interest, this amounts mostly to audiophiles swapping CDs online. The sound experiences most suited for binaural recording - live orchestral performances, and ambient environmental recordings of city sounds and nature - typically have low market value and are unlikely to ever attract a broad audience. For these reasons, most viewers experiencing binaural recording are likely to be encountering it for the first time.

Binaural recording is basically a gross approximation of how the human brain hears sounds. It involves placing two omni-directional microphones in both ears of a dummy head (sometimes called the *Kunstkopf* or the “art head”). For instance, human ears are directional due to their shape and placement and, therefore, hear sounds from the front or side more clearly than sounds from the back. Noises coming from behind a person sound deeper than those from the front. There are also minuscule time lapses while the sound waves pass through the skull and brain mass. The dummy head, depending on its complexity, can be as simple as a Styrofoam ovoid to an alarmingly

realistic head with hair and heft. The closer the dummy head replicates a real human head, the more faithful the sound reproduction.

For optimal playback sound, a recording should be played back on speakers the same distance apart as the original recording microphones. For typical stereo sound, this distance is usually at least several feet. For binaural recording, this distance is about the width of a human head. In order for the listener to get the maximum illusory effect of authenticity, he or she would have to be wedged between speakers seven inches apart. For this reason, unlike a typical stereo recording, the binaural effect is completely contingent upon the use of headphones. It can be conceived of as a Dolby Surround Sound system shrunk down to fit a human head.

For most, this is an unprecedented level of sound fidelity; recorded sounds have never sounded more immediate and life-like. “The result is 3-D sound so spectacularly realistic, it is astounding. Everything is so present, you feel as if your brain were as big as the sonic world you walk through.”<sup>19</sup> The sounds are so completely realistic that the listener is actually drawn into perceiving the sounds as though they were coming from inside the listener. The result is an uncannily precise spatial location of sound.

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<sup>19</sup> Gary Michael Dault, “Janet Cardiff’s Wanas Walk,” *Canadian Art Magazine*, (Spring 1999) 44.

**Track #4 – The Paradise Institute (2001)**

*When the audio opens, the screen is still dark, intensifying your focus on your sense of hearing. The recording streaming into your ears is uncannily real. So real that you have to stifle an urge to swing your head around and see if the voices are coming from the other members of the audience. It sounds as if you are sitting in the middle of a group of friends at the cinema. Laughingly they ask, “Can you see her? Where is she? What are you doing? Who are you? And what do you do?” These questions are tossed merrily back and forth, above, around and through you, and because you can easily imagine where each person is speaking from, there is a sonic literalization of the recorded space. There is a soft cough and it is so distinct that you can almost put your hand on the spot where the coughing is coming from. Layered behind the voices are the recorded ambient sounds of a large cinema; in the mental architecture of the binaural audio you are clearly sitting in a large theater.*

In 2001, Cardiff and Miller were lauded at the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, not for an audio Walk but with the theater installation, *The Paradise Institute*. Commissioned and curated by The Power Plant’s director Wayne Baerwaldt, *The Paradise Institute* was awarded the special Jury Prize for the Canadian Pavilion. A burgundy velvet-covered catalog with several essays, an in-depth interview, film stills, and complete script, accompanied the exhibition. The following year *The Paradise Institute* was included in

the extensive P.S. 1 survey catalog.<sup>20</sup> The survey catalog, while drawing heavily from Baerwaldt's original catalog essay, includes a slightly modified version of the complete script and several full-page color photographs of the exterior and interior of the theater installation. Built in an edition of five, *The Paradise Institute* has been shown widely around the world. Challenging and developing the viewer/artwork relationship, *The Paradise Institute* remains one of Cardiff and Miller's most important artworks by intentionally creating an intimate one-to-one connection with the individual viewer.

*The Paradise Institute* is a large plywood structure made of two connecting rectangular rooms: the taller room has steps with a railing leading to a door; another smaller room with a sloping roof is attached – the overall shape recalls a boxy, oversized, homemade camera. The exterior is completely unmarked. The audience is invited to enter for the next “showing” and discovers that the interior is a surprisingly elaborate miniaturized theater. It seats sixteen viewers in a full-size balcony overlooking a hyper-perspectivalized model theater set. Headphones are provided for each viewer. The term “showing” turns out to be misleading. While the duration of the work is established by the 13-minute original black and white digital projection, it is not what is shown that makes an impression as much as the complexly layered soundtrack streaming through the headphones. *The Paradise Institute* feels like a natural progression of an audio Walk; the experience is largely auditory and relies heavily upon binaural technology.

The impact and role of the audio is different, however, because on a Walk only the audio is pre-determined. Each viewer on a Walk has a completely unique experience -

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<sup>20</sup> *The Paradise Institute* was included in the catalog as one of Cardiff and Miller's major works, but was not included in the survey show. It was shown in the United States for the first time shortly after the survey exhibition at Luhring Augustine Gallery, March 18 – April 27, 2002.



the constant motion of a Walk provides a steady stream of new visual information. Sometimes the audio may act like a movie soundtrack – as we walk along, whatever we see becomes imbued with significance. We imagine what we see to be as scripted as the audio, even though we know logically it is not. In contrast, in *The Paradise Institute*, the visuals *are* as scripted as the audio, because we all watch the same film in the same theater installation. Also, without the distraction of walking, the disorientation of the binaural audio can be magnified.

Despite being stationary, the viewer is deliberately made to feel the same feeling of participation and immersion as in the Walks. Rather than an audio Walk through another site, it is an audio “Walk” in one of Cardiff and Miller’s own constructions. Cardiff says,

“In the walks it’s very much about my voice leading a particular person down the road, and I find, because the binaural audio is recorded, it does create a connection immediately with someone because you can feel I am right there, walking with you. And we wanted that same sort of connection with the person in the theater because we are trying to make the person who is listening almost feel like they are participating in the plot that is going on.”<sup>21</sup>

Earlier attempts to achieve a similar degree of connection with the viewer through viewer participation and sensory immersion can be seen in Cardiff’s other multi-media installations, such as *Whispering Room* (1991), *To Touch* (1993), *The Playhouse* (1997), and *The Muriel Lake Incident* (1999). The first two of these installations used sixteen speakers (and corresponding separate audio tracks) to transform the space of a room with sound. *Whispering Room* is a darkened room populated by black speakers on tall metal stands. Walking into the darkened room triggers a multitude of voices and one brief video

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<sup>21</sup> Kolle, 15.

projection of a girl in a red dress tap dancing. As each voice murmurs its partial tale, “[t]he tall speakers take on the presence of bodies, each one whispering a different version of an elusive truth.”<sup>22</sup> The sum effect is to feel suspended in a wistful melodrama; we are eavesdropping on the anthropomorphized speakers, but we remain separate from the stories. The space is transformed around us – but it seems only incidental that the voices are triggered by our movements – some may miss that connection altogether.

*To Touch* takes more risks to engage the viewer, because the work must be activated intentionally. The wall label at the entrance of the room states, “The work is activated by moving your hands over the table.” The touch-sensitive triggers are localized in the surface of the massive wooden worktable in the center of the dimly lit room. Voices, music, and clips from old movies seemingly float off the walls where the speakers are mounted in the shadows.

While increasing viewer agency, Cardiff also challenges the viewer with oral descriptions of explicit scenes of S & M and voyeurism. Prefaced with a direct address, “Picture this image,” a man’s voice (Miller’s) begins to describe an obese man suspended in a leather harness from a tree in the forest, being watched by a formally dressed couple. Then without pause, a female voice (Cardiff’s) commands the viewer to picture another naked man, this time his arms bound to the headboard of a bed. A black leather mask covers his face with a zipper for his mouth and narrow slits for his eyes. A woman in black negligee is watching him obliquely through a mirror. When we conjure up these images as we are directed to, we are implicated by our own imagination.

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<sup>22</sup> Kate Taylor, “Art About,” *The Globe and Mail*, (Toronto, Ontario) July 17, 1992, C2.

*The Playhouse*, which explicitly invokes the interior space and mood of a large grand theater, marks Cardiff's initial foray into the theater installations. It was made shortly after Cardiff's first commissioned audio Walk, *Louisiana Walk #14*. As in the Walks, binaural recording creates the sensory engulfment and spatial reconstruction achieved by the multiple speakers in *Whispering Room* and *To Touch*.

Only one person can go in *The Playhouse* every five minutes, limiting the possible audience for the piece. The viewer approaches the draped room, dons the headphones, enters the piece, and sits down in front of a miniaturized opera house. Cardiff compresses the effects of her earlier multimedia installations into a smaller space; the sixteen tracks are now spliced together to create a more controlled reception of the audio. *The Playhouse* is also the first theater installation to physically separate the viewer from the gallery space. The viewer is enclosed in the pretend theater balcony in front of the tiny stage by red velvet curtains, allowing a more focused experience.

The next theater installation, *The Muriel Lake Incident*, authored by both Cardiff and Miller, was made the same year as the audio Walk, *The Missing Voice*, and bridges *The Playhouse* and *The Paradise Institute*. A freestanding construction standing on six metal legs, *The Muriel Lake Incident* prefigures *The Paradise Institute* in shape (foreshortened box) and materials (basic plywood and metal piping). Essentially a theater diorama, the viewers stand in front of a rectangular "window" looking into another illusionistic miniature theater. This time there are no curtains to enclose the viewer, but this work does begin to explore the possibility of binaural recording with a larger audience. With three sets of headphones hanging neatly from hooks in front, there is an incremental shift away from the one-to-one ratio of the audio Walks.

In *The Paradise Institute*, Cardiff and Miller paradoxically increase the level of intimacy, *and* increase the number of viewers. The sense of participation is increased, yet actual participation is less. *The Paradise Institute* is aptly named; it is an experimental test site, where the viewer needs only to step inside for the experience of intimacy.

### **Track #5 - Intimacy**

Intimacy - originally derived from the Late Latin, *intimare* means, “to put or bring in, publish, announce” and comes from the Latin *intimus*, which means “inmost, deepest.” *Intimus* describes a location, whereas *intimare* has a movement towards that inmost place, to put or bring in, from the outside to the inside. The adjective, intimate, is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary:

1. Marked by close acquaintance, association, or familiarity.
2. Pertaining to or indicative of one’s deepest nature.
3. Essential; innermost.
4. Characterized by informality and privacy.
5. Very personal; personal; secret.

It can be an experienced state, a zone or a threshold. Intimacy relies upon a subjective judgment of a degree of closeness. In terms of acquaintance, what one person deems “close” can be abysmally “far” to another.

While the dictionary definition is useful for considering different aspects of intimacy, a psychological attachment theory definition of intimacy puts it into one phrase: “intimacy [is] a state of relatedness ... characterized by participants experiencing the internalized state of each other.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John Viola, LCSW, conversation with author, June 11, 2004.

**Track #6 – Intimacy in *Intimacies***

To explore the *boundaries* of intimacy, it would seem logical to begin with an intimate situation. The group performance, *Intimacies*, started outside intimacy and consequently ended up marking the boundaries of something other than intimacy. This performance marked the boundaries of *conditions* for intimacy. It also revealed a myriad of obstacles. To reach intimacy, the guarding sentinels of emotional and physical space must be passed: personal space, defensive reactions, and ingrained habits.

What was the working definition of intimacy in *Intimacies*? This performance, beginning with the placement of the newspaper ads, presumed several characteristics of intimacy. First, the ad suggested that there is a “natural desire” for intimacy, not even “*a* natural desire” but “*the* natural desire” – the desire that we all know, experience and recognize. Not only did the artists desire intimacy, there was a presumed audience also desiring intimacy. The context of the ad too, highlighted the universal nature of desiring intimacy, for what are the personal columns, but a forum for people actively seeking to engage with another human being? Each of the artists met individually with participants in face-to-face, one-on-one, confidential, private meetings from 8 am - 3 pm for three days. Both the participant and the artist were present, that is, both of their bodies were in the room. They were free to talk about anything. There was an established length of time for each encounter.

Second, there was also the presumption that intimacy did not necessarily rely upon the body. Charles Cousins, one of the participating artists, admitted after the performance that it was heartening to discover that people didn't want to talk about sex, and that it was "almost a cliché to think that intimacy means sexual intimacy." Intimacy was measured, not by body contact or by sex talk, but by the content of the conversation, that is, by how private, personal or confidential the topics were and by the level of emotional closeness achieved.

On the other hand, the fact that the physical bodies of both the artists and participants were required reflects the cultural baggage of the word *intimacy*. The word *intimacy* is laden with connotations of physicality. Colloquial usage attaches this word to the physical body: "intimates" can stand for underwear (the fabric worn closest to the skin, private, not public) or for sex. The question, "Were you intimate with him?" means, "Did you have sex?" or even more specifically, "Was there penetration?" Intimacy is frequently associated with physicality, perhaps because skin is the body's most literal boundary with the outside world. The closest two people can get to each other's *physical* innermost would be penetration or contiguity between the most tender permeable areas of skin: mouth/mouth, tongue/tongue, mouth/vagina/penis, penis/vagina/anus, etc. *Intimacies* was not about sex, but sex was part of what made the inclusion of the body a liability in the performance. The complication of the body could have been avoided by interacting with the public through various other media: over the phone, through writing, through video interview, or even cybernetically, via instant chat or email. By including the body, the importance of the presence of the body was acknowledged, but it was not

accounted for. The strangeness of having two bodies meet for the first time proved to be a stumbling block for the performance.

The attempt to explore notions of intimacy and its boundaries with strangers solicited in the personal columns, is already a perverse inversion of intimacy; perverse, because this is a strangers-seeking-strangers arena for an exploration of a connection commonly characterized by lovers, family and close friends. The artists were hoping to collapse the conventional barriers to physical and emotional closeness.

*Intimacies* had to do with two people: their bodies in the same room, alone for twenty minutes. The awkward results are hardly surprising. The body has a set of memories that the rational mind may hardly be aware of (intuitive proof of that is the way we begin to behave upon entering our parents' house – there is a cellular, biological memory of behavior from our childhood and we might begin to behave in ways we thought we had forgotten or outgrown). The body's ingrained memory is invoked everyday, every moment, with everything we do. When two bodies meet for the first time, there is always the potential for discomfort and shyness. These two bodies have no patterns of involvement; there are no habits; there is no archived familiarity to fall back upon. When two strangers meet, the two personal spaces have to negotiate an entanglement without knowing what the rules might be. Establishing trust takes time; it takes time to learn to predict how another body will react to your own.

In spite of all these hurdles, there were still moments of intimacy experienced in the performance. Despite writer Nancey Tousley's claim, "*Intimacies* ... is about art, not body contact or bawdy talk," the body is what permitted some measure of emotional closeness in the performance. The presence of the artist's body established that the artist



was willing to take the same measure of risk and commitment as the participant. Starting with an explicit written appeal to the viewing public, the artists guaranteed they would be there. The artist and the participant were on a level playing ground that allowed, even momentarily, a “state of relatedness ... characterized by participants experiencing the internalized state of each other.”

**Track #7 – *The Paradise Institute* experience**

There is nothing shocking or surprising about the external appearance of *The Paradise Institute*. It is a substantial physical object: a large plywood construction sitting in the middle of the gallery. Outdoors, this construction might look like an unfinished storage shed; within the gallery context, the building appears finished, but skinless and unadorned. The plywood is a pale and unstained wood grain. There are two doors almost side-by-side, one just slightly higher than the other. Five steps lead up to the first of two doors – both the door and steps are also of plywood. The stairs are bounded by unpainted metal tube railings, recalling schoolyards and other institutional spaces dealing with high use. The sturdy appearance of the walls, the steps, the metal-hinged door arm, the doors and even the mix-and-match plumbing pipes and connectors, all anticipate public use.

Volunteer docents cheerfully invite me to climb the few stairs and await the next showing. The door opens and I can see the last group of visitors exiting the opposite side. The “theater” empties and then is filled again, this time with me, and other viewers.

I enter along one of two rows of plush theater seats. The interior is sumptuous; the walls, ceiling, doors and carpet are all the same deep theatrical wine maroon. It appears to be a part of a model of a classic old theater, with paneled walls and molded trim along the balconies that decorate both the left and right walls. The seats are large, cushioned and comfortable. I sink back, grateful to be off my feet after hours of art-viewing. Even the temperature is perfectly controlled (monitored from the same nether regions where the

DVD player and amp are hidden). I wonder who is the host or hostess here. It is as if I have wandered into an enchanted theater that has been waiting for me. I feel an immediate sense of gratitude and satisfaction. I am being treated well and the theater setting suggests entertainment and escapism.

I look over the balustrade to the rows and rows of miniature stylized theater seats below – there is a small stage and screen in front; everything is highly foreshortened to give the illusion of space and grandeur. The screen is white, illuminating the fake seats below. The theater setting, however diminutive - or perhaps more so because of the miniaturization - triggers a familiar movie-going experience. Not only is it really like a home theater, but I am also compelled to imagine a real theater.

Everything is laid out in such a way that I know what to do next. My path of movement is being carefully orchestrated; my expectations are anticipated. I notice that there are headphones for every visitor hanging conveniently on a hook between each chair. I pick them up and I can hear tinny noises coming from the earphones.

Without hesitation I put them on and begin to hear the recorded sounds of an illusionary audience settling in. As I adjust the headphones, these sounds of another audience, another space, another reality approaches until the headphones are in place - the overlay of the artists' reality is now complete. I have signaled my trust. From this point on, I have surrendered control. They have my ears through which to funnel in their audio impressions. My body is soothed and stilled by movie-going habit in the comfortable chair. I am used to sitting in a chair like this for one to two hours; I do it nearly every week.

In the swooping dark, my sight is suddenly gone, creating a vacuum in my sensory input that is quickly filled by my compensating ears. My eyes have barely begun to understand that they cannot see as my ears are flooded with the ambient noises of the recorded audience. I experience a flash of panic that subsides as quickly as it came. I am calmed by my intrigue: what is it that I hear? I cannot make sense of the sounds. I do not understand why I am so confused. I can hear an audience settling in, murmuring, jostling, and chairs creaking, but it is not the physical audience sitting quietly around me. That audience is shut out. My audience, the one I am physically a part of, is muffled by the foam cupped over my ears. I feel, in fact, quite alone, as alone as when I ride the subway with my iPod on, or as alone as when I am driving on the freeway surrounded by many others, but insulated from them.

Bat-like, my ears automatically gauge the spatial size of my imposed recorded environment. I understand that I am in a cavernous old theater, much larger than the one I have just entered. The invisible audience in my ears takes shape and already I feel more a part of them than the people actually sitting around me.

### **Track #8 – The contract of masochism**

From a sexual point of view, sadomasochism has to do with taking pleasure from being abused or from being abusive. In this context, the sadist, frequently portrayed as a female dominatrix, and the masochist, often male, are two halves of the whole. According to Karina,<sup>24</sup> an Orange County stripper, the most effective S & M dominatrix straddles a balance of being maternal or kind and being cruel. This often manifests in a rhythmic balance between petting and slapping or choking. In her experience, the victim must feel a bond with the dominatrix, which gives him a reason to ride through the pain. In other words, while the most striking characteristic of the sadomasochist relationship is the giving and receiving of abuse, there needs to be an underlying bond between the abuser and abused. This element of trust comes specifically from a history of masochism.

The word *masochism* is derived independently from *sadism*, from the name of the author of *Venus in Furs*: Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. The contemporary definition of *masochism* is directly related to the way the protagonist in *Venus in Furs* famously suffered both emotional and physical torture from his lover. While all the classic tropes of pain, sexual pleasure, bondage and humiliation exist in *Venus in Furs*, the fact that they exist only because of a contractual agreement between the lovers is often overlooked. The contract in *Venus in Furs* is literally a handwritten, signed document that

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<sup>24</sup> Conversation with “Karina” (stage name) on June 27, 2005. Her thoughts on the subject are informed by discussions with two working dominatrix, “Vivien” and Dita Von Teese.

formalizes and verbalizes the behavior of the partners. Gilles Deleuze in his essay “Coldness and Cruelty” proposes that the true definition of masochism has more to with this contract binding the partners, than with the amount of pain connected to the relationship. According to Deleuze, “[e]verything must be stated, promised, announced and carefully described before being accomplished.”<sup>25</sup> All behavior and interaction between the male victim and the female tyrant is totally regulated by the contract. The contract allows the masochistic victim to give up control and surrender both to the experience of the moment and the authority of another. The suffering can exist only because of a previously established contract; hence, a contract is ultimately the foundation of a masochistic relationship.

Despite the ubiquitous union of *sadism* and *masochism* into *S & M*, Deleuze refuses this “spurious sadomasochistic unity.” Deleuze splits the two terms apart, saying, “The sadist is in need of institutions, the masochist of contractual relations.” The victim, not the torturer, drives the masochistic relationship. The victim is in search of a torturer whom he can “educate, persuade and conclude an alliance ... to realize the strangest of schemes.”<sup>26</sup> The “contracted alliance” is the essence of this personal relationship: they are partners in crime. Masoch’s protagonist, Severin, must convince a reluctant Wanda to become his Venus in furs. On the other hand, a sadistic relationship is characterized by impersonal “institutionalized possession” and is directed by the authority of the torturer. The sadistic despot is looking to impose and inflict, not to educate or persuade.

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty” in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

The true sadistic torturer cannot be satisfied with a masochistic victim, because he is not interested in entering any kind of agreement. The very authority of a masochistic victim conflicts with the authority of a sadistic torturer. Likewise, the true masochistic torturer cannot be sadistic; she resembles a sadist in her actions, but she is in an alliance with her victim.

**Track #9 - Agreement between Mrs. Wanda von Dunajew and Mr. Severin von Kuziemski<sup>27</sup>**

Mr. Severin von Kuziemski ceases from this date to be the fiancé of Mrs. Wanda von Kuziemski and renounces all rights pertaining to this state; in return he undertakes, on his word as a man and a gentleman, to be the slave of this lady, until such time as she sets him at liberty.

As the slave of Mrs. von Dunajew, he will take the name of Gregor, and will undertake to satisfy all the wishes of his mistress, to obey all her orders, to submit to her, and to regard the slightest kindness on her part as an extraordinary favor.

Mrs. von Dunajew may not only chastise her slave for the slightest negligence or misdemeanor as and when she wishes, but she will also have the right to maltreat him according to her humor or even simply to amuse herself; she is also entitled to kill him if she so wishes; in short, he becomes her absolute property.

Should Mrs. von Dunajew ever set her slave at liberty, Mr. von Kuziemski agrees to forget everything he has experienced or undergone in his capacity as slave, and will not entertain, under any pretext or in any manner, the thought of vengeance or reprisal.

In return, Mrs. von Dunajew promises, in her capacity as his mistress, to appear as often as possible in furs, particularly when she is being cruel toward her slave.

Signed and Dated by Severin von Kuziemski

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<sup>27</sup> Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs in Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 220.



### **Track #10 – The unwritten contract**

*The nurse enters the hospital room at night as suspenseful Hitchcockian music builds. She leans close to Drogan's face and whispers, "I've heard about you." This moment of heightened tension is intercut with a snippet of binaural ambient sound: there is a rustling of clothing and slight breathing in the seat next to you as if somebody is getting uncomfortable... or excited. Then the nurse pulls down the white blanket, uncovering Drogan and revealing that he is tied down. And then, despite his terse, "Don't touch me," she deliberately grazes her fingertips along the inside of his forearm. Next, she pulls his white t-shirt up over his nipples, revealing his naked chest. Then she leans over and starts to kiss his chest roughly. He has goose pimples amid his erect nipples. There is piano music playing in crescendos and all the elements for an S & M sex scene. Then abruptly, the tension crashes when the binaural male voice behind you sniggers, "That's excellent nursing." The rest of the binaural audience around you laughs. The tension on the screen is unexpectedly transferred to your relationship with the binaural audience. The film is not the only thing scripted here; your viewing reality, your response is also anticipated and scripted.*

Scenarios suggesting S & M appear throughout *The Paradise Institute*, but Cardiff and Miller's real debt is not so much to contemporary S & M, as much as it is specifically to masochism. Borrowing from familiar, underlying contractual systems, such as renting audio-guides, Cardiff and Miller build an unstated contract with the viewer that begins to

resemble the contract of a masochistic relationship. The gallery context assures relative safety.

The contract of masochism is an apt comparison to the viewer's relationship with *The Paradise Institute* because it specifically relates control/release of control with pleasure. In an interview, critic Robert Enright remarks, "...critics talk about being held hostage and they bring up the idea of manipulation... there is a sense of being literally held inside the instructive nature of the piece."<sup>28</sup> Cardiff responds, "That's part of the point to the pieces. Have fun! It's very pleasurable to give up your power, to enter into something that you know is safe... There's an eroticism involved in it, sort of S & M stuff. But because you're in a safe environment, you can give up your power to someone else."<sup>29</sup> She compares the experience to being blindfolded in childhood games – how relinquishing control makes the game more fun. Cardiff and Miller appropriate the contract of masochism to intensify our connection to the experience of their works. The imposed structure of the contract provides a stable backdrop upon which more risky and passionate variables can play out.

The way Cardiff and Miller set up an (unwritten) pact with the viewer is similar to the original (written) *Venus in Furs* agreement between Wanda and Severin. The agreement between Mrs. Wanda von Dunajew and Mr. Severin von Kuziemski is an actual document presented to Severin by Wanda. Severin signs the contract, consenting to all of its terms. Severin's signature gives Wanda full authority over him, and she immediately takes away his passport and money. As severe as the conditions of his

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<sup>28</sup> Janet Cardiff, interview by Robert Enright and Meeka Walsh, "Pleasure Principals: The Art of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller," *Border Crossings* 20, no. 2 (May 2001): 22-35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

contract are, it is important to remember that it was Severin who sought out and initiated this relationship with Wanda.

The contract between the viewer and *The Paradise Institute* builds on the implicit agreement first established in the audio Walks. Because the Walks require so much in terms of time and participation, different contractual aspects evolved naturally as a way to engage the viewer. *The Missing Voice* is a good example because it is particularly long and demanding. Not only do we listen to the recording, but we follow directions and simultaneously negotiate our body through a library building. Then, we are directed to leave the relative safety, calm and quiet of the library for the London city streets, to be led over a mile away. There is an elevated sense of risk; we could get lost or even hurt if we do not pay enough attention. To take this step out of the library we must trust the authority of J's voice.

This trust depends, in part, on the beginnings of an implicit contract between the work and the viewer. In general, the contract with the viewer and the audio Walks mimics the barter a museum-goer makes with the museum to use an audio guide; the viewer leaves something of value, either a legal document or a major credit card, and payment in exchange for the electronic playing device. The audio Walks are free, in contrast, but require that we leave a major credit card, valid passport, or driver's license. For *The Missing Voice*, we must approach the library's front circulation desk and distinguish ourselves from the other library patrons. Then, we choose what we will leave as collateral. Next, we literally sign our name to the list at the front desk. This is the only document proving our connection to *The Missing Voice*. Our signature joins all the other names of people who have participated in the Walk. It also signals willingness on our

part, to participate and to be responsible for the recording device. Going through the process of borrowing the CD player engages us contractually. The more time and energy we put in, the less likely we are to pull out. Like Severin, we have signed and given up our passport - we expect the artists to give us something in return. The more we get involved, the more we are able to give ourselves over to the experience and release control.

The clerk retrieves the CD player from a plain unobtrusive wood cabinet built specifically for this purpose. As the clerk hands us the CD player, he will itemize a few of the changes on the Walk and point us over to the starting point in the crime section of the library stacks.

From there, the audio of *The Missing Voice* begins to impose conditions that are like Severin's contract with Wanda. The first condition is that Severin must give up his identity as Wanda's fiancé and become Gregor, Wanda's slave. In *The Missing Voice*, we also take on new roles, not chosen by us, but imposed by Cardiff, within the fictional audio narratives of the recording. As soon as J's voice says, "I'm standing in the library with you," we are drawn into fictional existence. We are established as J's companion by perceived proximity and by navigational need. This is the voice that will tell us where to go and what to do for the next forty minutes. J speaks in different tones, sometimes curt and sometimes confidentially, and each tone presumes a new role for us. At times it sounds like J is speaking to herself – at these moments we become J, herself. Writer Carol Peaker explains, "I am no longer fully myself. The voice in my head struggles a bit

with this new intruder, but then gives way.”<sup>30</sup> Once we have been lured into taking on another identity, our own identity is called into question.

In *The Paradise Institute*, we are pressed into roles that are even more fleshed out by the fictional narrative – almost as if we are included in the script. The viewer is addressed, not as a vague “you,” but as a specific person who is known by J. Recognition of our new role is triggered with aural cues. A few minutes into the film there is the recorded sound of somebody entering the theater from our right – this is already disorienting, since all the viewers entered from the left. This person sits down in the seat immediately to our right and begins talking:

*J (whispering beside you): Here’s your drink  
Did you want some of my popcorn? Sound of eating popcorn.*

We recognize instantly that we are J’s intimate friend in the theater. Throughout the film, J continues to carry on a whispered one-sided conversation, “I read about this film. It’s based on a true story about the experiments the military did in the 50’s ... Or maybe that was a different film,” and finally, “I’m too worried. I have to go home and check the stove. I’ll see you after the movie.” By addressing an assumed shared history, J draws us into accepting our new identity. By the time we hear the binaural sounds of J leaving, we have assumed our new role so fully that we feel slightly abandoned by her, but, there is no way to ask her to stay.

Later in the film, we assume the role of a character already existing in the story: the nurse. Just after J leaves in the binaural soundtrack, there is the sound of a large man coming into the theater. We hear his heavy steps and grunted, “Excuse me,” as he pushes

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<sup>30</sup> Carol Peaker, “The Voice of a Friend,” *National Post* (London, England) July 3, 1999, 111.

past invisible audience members in our row. Then, the character of the menacing doctor is whispering hoarsely in our ear, “Such a nice little hideout you have up here. You thought you were pretty smart, playing both sides. How long did you think it could last?”<sup>31</sup> Because it is fiction, the ominous tone in his voice is scary, but thrilling. We know who he thinks we are.

Later, we are also implicated in a relationship with the protagonist, Drogon. The screen fades to black, so our attention is refocused on the auditory portion of the story. We are effectively “blindfolded” in the darkness. We hear ambient binaural sound, which places us squarely in the middle of the binaural audience. The sense of eavesdropping and intrusion is high. Drogon addresses us, “Come here. Take off your dress.” Without an image, the words sound as if they are directed to us. A small hesitation later there is the sound of a zipper undressing. Then Drogon says, “Sing for me.” A woman behind us starts singing softly in German. We realize he *was* addressing the audience. The singing voice moves closer to us and then slowly fades away.

Another of Severin’s conditions is “... to satisfy all the wishes of his mistress, to obey all her orders...” Our contract is the same. We satisfy all the wishes of our “mistress,” J, and obey all her orders. For instance, in *The Missing Voice*, J directs us to do very specific tasks: to pick up Reginald Hill’s book *Dreaming of Darkness*, to stop and wait, and to turn left or right. Early on in the recording, J says as she does in nearly every Walk, “I want you to walk with me.” Outside the library, J continues, “Try to

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<sup>31</sup> The script from *The Paradise Institute* catalog is slightly different, “Don’t move. You thought you were pretty smart ... playing both sides. How long did you think it could last?”

follow the sound of my footsteps so that we can stay together.”<sup>32</sup> The oral directions are nearly impossible not to follow because as Deleuze suggests, “Words are at their most powerful when they compel the body to repeat the movements they suggest.”<sup>33</sup> Again, a child’s game, Simon Says, reflects the simple pleasure of following directions. While obeying orders does not necessarily constitute a masochistic relationship, following J’s directions over and over again draws us deeper into a developing pact.

In *The Paradise Institute*, however, we are seated and there is no need for oral navigation. Without the force of telling us where to go, Cardiff and Miller resort to establishing authority before we enter the installation. The contract is first brokered by the gallery attendant, who passes a tightly prescribed set of rules to the viewer, in a manner similar to an airline flight attendant giving a pre-flight safety talk. What was once created with viewer participation is replaced with increasing control and scripting to the point where “...the viewers move into and through enveloping, sequenced stages of illusion, and a series of experiences that the artists have edited like a film.”<sup>34</sup> The viewer is enticed to enter the space of the artwork rather than be moved through and out of the gallery space.

The experience of *The Paradise Institute* begins, in a sense, as soon as the viewer enters the gallery space. The gallery attendants (referred to by the artists as “ushers”) are directed to present the piece in a uniform manner, no matter the location, which results in an insidious penetration of the social dynamics of the gallery space. When *The Paradise*

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<sup>32</sup> Script of *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* in *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller*, (New York: P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002), 116-119.

<sup>33</sup> Deleuze, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Wayne Baerwaldt, “Phantoms of the Paradise” in *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Plug In Editions, 2001), 3.

*Institute* was exhibited at SITE Santa Fe, for example, the gallery attendants walked around the museum informing visitors when the next showing was about to begin, augmenting the line of people already waiting. The experience of viewing the other art works in the exhibit was interrupted by the presence of *The Paradise Institute*, which established a sort of authority over the other works in the show. Once in line, the viewers were subjected to a litany of instructions.

Gallery attendant Virginia Felix assured me that she had received the directions on how to present *The Paradise Institute* directly from the artists and that she had been responsible for training the rest of the attendants at the museum. Felix referred to her own notes in a small spiral notepad to be sure she relayed all the directions to me accurately. They are paraphrased as follows:<sup>35</sup>

1. Before the viewers enter the piece, tell the viewers that the film lasts thirteen minutes.
2. Tell the viewers that it is very important to turn off all cell phones. If anybody questions this rule, tell him it has to do with the electronic system.
3. If there is a large group of people, direct people to go to the ends of the rows, (just like a Disneyland attraction, like the old Michael Jackson 4-D show).<sup>36</sup>
4. Tell the viewers to watch out for cables by their feet.
5. Direct the viewers to sit down first, and then put headphones on.
6. After the show is done, wait 10 seconds after the finish light comes on and then open the exit door (which triggers the house lights). Ask viewers to place headset on the hooks under the chairs, to kick all wires under the chairs, to watch for cables and to exit through the rear doors.
7. Check that all headsets are put back and cables are pushed away.

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<sup>35</sup> Virginia Felix, Gallery Attendant, Site Santa Fe, conversation with the author, October 15, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Felix remarked that Cardiff used this example to communicate what effect she was trying to achieve.



Because the “usher” is directed to interact with the viewers, the experience of waiting in line becomes part of the whole experience of *The Paradise Institute*. Enough attention is directed to those waiting, that the viewer begins to enter the artists’ world, the artists’ domain, before ever setting foot inside the piece.

While gathering more viewers is not explicitly one of the directives, it is interesting to note that the “ushers” felt compelled to add this task to their responsibilities. Recruiting viewers is a natural extension of the dictates already in place and matches the role of an “usher”; it also serves the practical function of securing as many viewers as politely possible: a discreet method of self-promotion.

Ironically, the waiting-in-line part of *The Paradise Institute* was not originally conceived to play an important role, but was developed as a stratagem for dealing with the anticipated crowds at the Venice Biennale. The flow-through design of having the entrance and exit at opposite ends, the roped-off queue, and having sixteen seats were all designed with crowd control, safety and accessibility issues in mind. While the attention to the waiting viewers might have begun incidentally, the scripted presentation of *The Paradise Institute* has self-perpetuated and become formalized into an aspect of the work. Felix attested that she had never had any other artists be as specific as Cardiff and Miller about the presentation of their piece.

In an earlier version of *The Paradise Institute*, the viewer *was* given oral directions. The movie ended, the audio ended, the experience ended, but the viewer was still under contract. In this version, the doctor’s voice said, “Stand up. Now turn to the left. Slowly... walk towards the door.” In the current versions of the *Paradise Institute*,

the doctor's voice has been edited out. In any case, the intention is clear. Drogan's predicament is ours; he is not the only one being told what to do.

*The Missing Voice* and *The Paradise Institute* most recall the masochistic contract in the way the viewer becomes entangled in a relationship that oscillates between kindness and cruelty. Like an effective dominatrix, J's voice vacillates between welcoming gentleness and clipped orders in tone and word choice. The rhythm of the work follows suit, with overwhelming moments (slapping and choking) followed by moments of respite (petting).

Because of the overwhelming aspect of having to actively make sense of oral directions amid other fractured aural narratives in an audio Walk, Cardiff must never lose sight of the viewer's comfort level and physical safety. Doing so would be self-sabotage. Cardiff explains that she is careful to add more reassurances and directions whenever people doing the test Walk feel lost or uneasy. The farther the viewer is asked to travel away from the originating site of a Walk, the more control Cardiff needs to establish, in order to keep the viewer emotionally and physically safe.

In *The Paradise Institute*, the opposite is true. Inside the wooden structure of the theater installation, the viewer is literally sheltered from any outside threat. Even the need to interact with the other viewers is preempted by the insularity of the headphones. Because there is no risk of moving, or of misunderstanding directions or of getting lost – an atmosphere of anxiety must be produced. This is done with increased spatial dislocation, intensified crime thriller suspense, and the multiple splitting of the narratives and the viewer's identity.

The combined soundtrack of the film and the binaural soundtrack work, at times, to heighten the sense of trepidation, the way a typical soundtrack amplifies the affective qualities of a movie. The audio track begins with thunder and the crackling tension of a coming storm. This becomes a harbinger for other dramatic moments in the film and viewer experience. The sense of danger is also deliberately heightened by the action sequences in the film. There is the distant view of a van rushing away on a dirt road and then suddenly the crack of a gunshot and a man falling to the ground. At one point there is actually binaural sound (therefore, sound that is disturbingly real) of pounding and stomping all over the theater structure, as if somebody from the outside world is trying to break in.

Other examples of dissonance are intentionally planned from the onset to catch the viewer off-guard. For instance, as Felix stated, she asks all viewers to turn off cell phones before entering. If a viewer questions the cell phone policy, the attendant is specifically instructed to say that cell phones interfere with the electronic functioning of the piece. When the cell phone goes off early in the binaural world, the viewer's mind reflexively reacts with irritation at the supposed viewer who answers the phone and begins talking – keep in mind that the cell phone ring is so realistic that Felix often sees viewers scramble in their own handbags, frantically trying to answer the imaginary ringing, despite the earlier directive. Cardiff explains, "... a lot of the conceptual tricks I use are about placing the person out of themselves so that you establish a reality, and then all of a sudden pull the rug out from under it and be somewhere else."<sup>37</sup> Once the rug is pulled out, the viewer is reassured again.

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<sup>37</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, interview, 24.

The sonic narratives seem to split just before we are able to make sense of a narrative plot. Cardiff and Miller are open about using fractured bits of narrative to create a feel of a noirish thriller – the different scenes were never intended to come together in a linear, logical way. The opening visual image is a shot of the nurse’s face leaning over the camera with Drogan’s voice asking, “How long have I been here?” We are clearly in the position of the patient, and may even be in a similarly questioning frame of mind. Then in the next sequence, we are immediately split from Drogan and placed back in the audience by the sounds of the binaural audience. A cell phone rings behind us and we hear the rustling sounds of somebody going through their coat. Before we realize that it is a binaural cell phone, Drogan’s eyes open and gaze directly out at the audience as if he has heard the ringing as well. We are ejected from identifying with the film and propelled back into awareness of the binaural audience.

Not only does our identity shift constantly; but the characters within the narrative are not stable either. Our attention is never allowed to settle comfortably in one place; each time we settle into a passive movie-viewing mode, there is a disjunctive fissure. Or seen in reverse, every time we are jolted, we are also consoled. “This consolation of the participants is a crucial component in Cardiff’s walking pieces. Without it, her listeners would never obey the voice’s instructions,”<sup>38</sup> says writer Mirjam Schaub.

The realness of the binaural recording can provoke paranoia as well. Christov-Bakargiev relates, “In the Carnegie piece [*In Real Time* (1999)] ... I had that sensation of schizophrenia and multiple personality disorders... because I never knew how much you

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<sup>38</sup> Mirjam Schaub, ed. introduction to *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*, (Cologne: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary [T-B A21], yet unpublished), 18.

had modified the real space around me, and how much was just there in the soundscape.”<sup>39</sup>

*I love you like a strait-jacket*<sup>40</sup>

This line of poetry that Cardiff pieced together from words cut out of books came originally from a note her husband, Miller left for her. Written on a piece of paper within the installation *The Dark Pool* (1995), it reflects the playful, improvisational way that masochism has come to inflect the Walks and theater installations. It also exposes a written facet of Cardiff and Miller’s work. In the Walks and theater installations, writing seems to have disappeared, but in fact, the writing has just gone behind the scenes. All the Walks and theater installations depend heavily on scripts written by Cardiff: scripts written with the intention of communicating or relating to the viewer. A written document, a contract of sorts, lies beneath all the words we hear.

Cardiff’s scripts precisely articulate the work’s relationship to the viewer - at the same time they are highly improvisational and frequently revised. Conversationally, Cardiff fluidly reacts, interacts and changes the script as she hears the words spoken and in context. The documented scripts of the works provides access to the words – but during the experience of a piece, we only hear them – like song lyrics, the words are fleeting and impressionistic, not tied down to the writing they came from. In *To Touch*, the male voice tells us to picture “... an obese man suspended from a large tree. He is strapped into a leather harness attached to thick ropes, which support the weight of his

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<sup>39</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, interview, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Janet Cardiff, interview by Carolee Thea, “Inexplicable Symbiosis: A Conversation with Janet Cardiff,” *Sculpture* (Washington D.C.) 22, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 52-57.

enormous body. His soft flesh pushes out through the straps as he sways precariously above the ground.” *Written* like that, Cardiff is implicated and responsible for the image produced, but *spoken*, the only evidence is a blazoned image in the viewer’s mind’s eye.

It is the same for the unwritten contract of masochism. While Cardiff and Miller operate from a written document – and craft an experience, we are not aware of our alliance and only dimly aware of our consent before the experience. Unlike the contract of masochism, nothing is “stated, promised, announced and carefully described” in advance. Even in *The Missing Voice*, where there is a vestigial signature, nothing is openly stated or promised by either party.

Cardiff and Miller build a hidden contract with us. The contract is not articulated in advance, as in Severin and Wanda’s agreement, but rather the conditions of the contract emerge prior to and throughout the experience of *The Paradise Institute*. We accept, unintentionally or not, the contract and move further into entanglement with Cardiff’s persona, J. We may not be willing to die for the experience of *The Paradise Institute*, or care to be maltreated; however, with the caveat of safety, we are apparently willing to enter into a mild and playful version of a masochist’s contract.

**Track #11 – *Fahrenheit 451***

If I could have chosen to write about any Ray Bradbury book, *Fahrenheit 451*, part of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum, would have been my last choice. Recently, I have changed my mind. *Fahrenheit 451* is typically interpreted as a book about censorship, an important theme, but one which has always seemed to me to ignore the profound loneliness of the characters. Cardiff and Miller's *The Paradise Institute* reminded me of Bradbury's four-room televisor or TV parlor, so I started there and read in ever-widening circles. It turned out that the TV parlor has as much to with a contemporary cultural condition of loneliness as it does with a futuristic society where firemen light fires (to books), instead of extinguishing them.

My reference to *Fahrenheit 451* has nothing to do with censorship and everything to do with the model of escapism Bradbury creates for his characters to cope with the despairing impossibility of intimacy with another person. Ironically, Cardiff herself has used sound bites from François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) in her Walks to refer to book burning, but that is not surprising, considering that Cardiff's work is filled with references to science fiction. Sci-fi is the domain of futuristic solutions for mundane human problematic conditions and like Bradbury, Cardiff uses technology to mitigate loneliness.

Guy Montag, the book-burning fireman, meets young Clarisse whose empathetic companionship makes Montag feel heard, understood, and *alive*. She is the rare person,

Montag realizes, whose face mirrors his own and reveals to him his “own innermost trembling thought.”<sup>41</sup> Although they spend only a handful of minutes together, Montag is amazed at how he feels as though he has known her for years. Clarisse explains it simply: she likes him, she doesn’t want anything from him and they *know* each other. The “knowing” here describes an intimacy of understanding another’s emotional interior and acceptance without judgment. The understanding goes beyond surface stereotypes. Montag’s brief rapport with Clarisse is in direct contrast to his relationship with his wife, Mildred, who exemplifies the loneliness of being unknown, unnoticed and unloved. The chasm between Montag and his wife is so great that one night he describes being in the room with her as being “on a winter island separated by an empty sea.”<sup>42</sup> His body and her body are in the same room, but there is no connection whatsoever; she speaks to him for a long time, but he can only hear words, no meaning. Mildred is apparently incapable of intimacy. Any effort by her husband to express his feelings provokes panic and later betrayal.

Instead, Mildred abuses one escapist compulsion after another: the Seashell thimble radios, pills, and the TV parlor. These are all futuristic addictions that keep Mildred preoccupied and emotionally detached. Even though Mildred longs for something or someone to pierce through to her emotional layer, all her addictions only widen the space between her and Montag. Mildred’s first appearance in the story is announced by the dull clink of Montag’s foot kicking an empty bottle of sleeping pills across the floor. Mildred has attempted suicide. After all of Mildred’s blood has been sucked out and cleaned by two impersonal operators, Montag looks down at his

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<sup>41</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1953), 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



unconscious wife and thinks, “There are too many of us ... There are billions of us and that’s too many. Nobody knows anyone.”<sup>43</sup> The rough, unfeeling way the technicians deal with his unconscious wife makes Montag realize that he is surrounded by strangers, and that furthermore, this is the general condition of his life. Montag uses the word *know* the same way Clarisse does, to indicate intimacy. Montag knows the names and habits of the firemen he works with, but he does not *know* them; he does not know what they are thinking and feeling inside.

Mildred’s favorite obsession is what Montag calls her “family” in the TV parlor. The fictional characters, Bob, Ruth, Helen and others, the actors in the TV shows she watches, are Mildred’s only family. The TV parlor is a futuristic projection of how television might enter more and more deeply into our lives. There is a televisor projecting onto all four walls of a room around the viewer, creating an immersive environment. It is basically an inverted TV box. Instead of radiating one image outwards, the four television screens are all focused inwards, magnifying the effect of the TV. The viewer is inside the TV; completely surrounded and overwhelmed. The body of the viewer becomes subsumed in the experience of the television noise and images – the space in the TV parlor becomes almost virtual as the blasting television seizes the space in the room for its own. The “realness” of the televisor comes from how the viewer is engulfed in a totalizing environment: “... you’re playing some game or sitting in some room where you can’t argue with the four-wall televisor. Why? The televisor is ‘real.’ It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It must be right. It seems so

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<sup>43</sup> Bradbury, 16.

right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest..."<sup>44</sup>

The television dramas acted out in the TV parlor world are more real to Mildred than her own life. Mildred craves to be included, loved, and noticed, not by her husband Montag, her true family, but by her TV family. She even tries to join her TV family by sending enough cereal box tops to receive a script with one part missing. When it comes time for the missing lines, the television family on the wall-to-wall circuit turns and looks at Mildred expectantly, giving her time to say her lines. This gives Mildred a role in the television drama. It makes her feel included, as though she is participating, even though she is not interacting with real people.

*The Paradise Institute* is like a sophisticated TV parlor because the immersion goes beyond just sensory engulfment to include you in the script. Like the televisor, the sound of J's voice is real, inarguable, and immediately establishes us as her friend. Our body reacts to her tone before we logically process what she is saying. We don't need a script, because the context prompts us naturally. By making us feel involved in the experience to such a degree, we are made to feel something approximate to what Montag felt with Clarisse McClellan.

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<sup>44</sup> Bradbury, 84.

### **Track #12 - Resonance**

(Like a bad concert hall, affective space contains dead spots where the sound fails to circulate. – The perfect interlocutor, the friend, is he not the one who constructs around you the greatest possible resonance? Cannot friendship be defined as a space with total sonority?)<sup>45</sup>

There is a moment of resonance in *Fahrenheit 451* when Montag meets Clarisse for the first time: “The girl stopped and ... stood regarding Montag with eyes so dark and shining and alive that he felt he had said something quite wonderful. But he knew his mouth had only moved to say hello...”<sup>46</sup> Clarisse does not need to say anything; she is so receptive that Montag’s own sense of being is amplified. Without false flattery, Clarisse creates an attentive space between them, a space where Montag can speak (or not) and be heard and accepted. From the minute they meet there is a relationship of mutual understanding and trust.

The opposite of this would be an unfriendly or unsympathetic reception. Barthes’ analogy of friendship to resonance and sonority is written in the context of silence, which is when the lover speaks but does not get a reply. The lover longs for reciprocity. Without a response, the lover suffers; his existence is called into question. If Montag were to say the same hello to Clarisse and meet a stony silence, the quality of his own being would stumble, would be “muffled in an inert space.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, without a sympathetic reception,

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, trans. by Richard Howard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1978) originally published as *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977), 167.

<sup>46</sup> Bradbury, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Barthes, 167.

it could be said that Montag hardly exists, because nothing would be known of him; he would have made an effort toward communication, but without acknowledgment the words would fall flat and lose meaning. Barthes goes so far to say that a non-response is like talking “in the void”:

In those brief moments when I speak for nothing, it is as if I were dying. For the loved being becomes a leaden figure, a dream creature who does not speak, and silence, in dreams, is death. Or again: the gratifying Mother shows me the Mirror, the Image and says to me: “That’s you.” But the silent Mother does not tell me what I am: I am no longer established, I drift painfully, without existence.<sup>48</sup>

Lack of acknowledgment or recognition is akin to death. The opposite of silence and death is resonance and paradise. To be with a friend is to be in a space where your own “being” is recognized. Clarisse constructs the “greatest possible resonance” around Montag with her incredible sense of identification. *The Paradise Institute* does the same with an incredible sense of anticipation. The sense of anticipation makes us feel considered and acknowledged. *The Paradise Institute* makes us feel like we have a friend.

*The Paradise Institute* first takes notice of us standing in line. Film-maker Atom Egoyan remembers: “When I saw *The Paradise Institute* at the Venice Biennale, there was a huge line of people waiting to get inside. When you’re in the next group of 15 to get in, you’re put into a roped off ‘VIP’ section, where you get to feel that you’ve finally made it...”<sup>49</sup> Although Egoyan then goes on to remark that after he entered the piece he felt as though he had been seated in the worst seat of the house, the last row of the balcony; it is from the position of the balcony that we become aware that all the seats

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<sup>48</sup> Barthes, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Janet Cardiff, interview by Atom Egoyan, “Janet Cardiff,” *Bomb*. No. 79 (Spring 2002): 63.

below (albeit miniature seats) are empty. Clearly this is a special showing, not one available to the general public. Only fifteen people can come in at a time and they are ushered onto a balcony. The empty seats below reinforce the feeling of privilege.

The experience of *The Paradise Institute* is a sympathetic reception. It has been designed for ease of use. There is a simplified system for user access, user comfort and user immersion. One button starts the ride. Entrance and exit doors are clearly marked. The attendants are well-trained. Our “geek” flesh is being well-taken care of. There is a seamless unimpeded flow through the entire experience.

Like a special guest, we get to relax back in plush theater seats in a comfortably cool and darkened room. Sheltered in the dark, we are not asked to respond in any way to the experience. We get to participate without really participating. When J asks, “Wasn’t he in the movie we saw here last week ... the one with Dirk Bogarde?” we are addressed and included, but any impulse to take action is muted, because there is nobody to hear our reply. We are invited to exist without any demands but to sit and absorb. This is a moment of being, where we are completely accepted and included.

Furthermore, all the action in the recorded realities appears to be happening around us. We are not only in the center of the sonic reality but also part of the stories when we are addressed directly. Even the characters in the video projection look out directly at us, as if they hear noises in the audience. We are literally scripted to be the center of attention. This is as intentional as it feels. Miller explains, “Everyone listening to the headphones is at the centre of the recording, where the binaural head was placed

originally. Everyone feels like the action is happening around them.”<sup>50</sup> This creates an unconscious feeling of advantage that increases our sense of being.

Not only are we given the royal treatment as a viewer (at least we recognize the tropes, even if they are illusory indicators of privilege), but we also recognize the cues for friendship, just as Montag recognized them with Clarisse. We achieve a surprising level of intimacy with the character J. Through the binaural recording her voice achieves simulated proximity. Cardiff’s voice as the character, J, becomes the voice of our “perfect interlocutor,” and the character we empathize with. By allowing us to just “be,” by creating a space with total sonority, J becomes our intimate friend. Through J, Cardiff and Miller become our friends also. We are offered intimacy with no strings attached.

Cardiff and Miller literally equate friendship with total sonority in *The Paradise Institute*. In the created binaural space there are no dead spots where the sound fails to circulate. There is sound everywhere. Through our aural imagination we are inside a space that is literalized by the stereophonic reality of binaural recording. Although we are never called upon to say a word, our own sense of being is amplified – we internalize the way the piece anticipates us and recognizes us.

The way J makes us feel we know her by including us so matter-of-factly, is similar to how people think they know a movie star. Alanna Heiss, director of P.S. 1 says: “I am one of hundreds, maybe thousands, who feel they have achieved an intimate

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<sup>50</sup> Kolle, interview, 15.

relationship with Cardiff ... and Miller through simply slipping on a portable Discman or video camera.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Alanna Heiss, introduction to *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller* (New York: P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2002) 11.

### **Track #13 – Presence**

Intimacy - “feeling the internalized state of another” - implies a relationship between at least two people, like Montag and Clarisse, but in the case of *The Missing Voice* or *The Paradise Institute*, we experience intimacy without the presence of a second person. Cardiff’s body is not present in the way it was for *Intimacies*, but we do not notice its absence.

Cardiff and Miller rely heavily on the sensory immediacy of binaural recording to establish a sense of presence. When J enters the theater within the binaural reality, her sounds are so convincing and life-like that our instinctive reaction to her supersedes our focus on the film and on its accompanying soundtrack. In the hierarchy of story lines competing for our attention, the binaural track, and hence, J’s voice will come out on top every time. Cardiff’s works and collaborations riff heavily upon this gut reaction to the binaural effect.

The planet Neptune was not discovered because it was seen, but because Urbaine J.J. Leverrier predicted its existence by watching the behavior of nearby Uranus. Uranus was behaving as though it were under the influence of another planet’s gravitational force. There is the impression of a physical presence because our body reacts physically. Artist and writer Ian Carr-Harris says, “... Cardiff’s voice reaches us viscerally, even to the point of forcing us to suppress an urge to turn in her direction, to face her physical



presence...”<sup>52</sup> We feel as though we have been touched even though we have only heard a voice.

In *The Missing Voice*, J says, “I started these recordings as a way to remember, to make life seem more real. I can’t explain it, but then the voice became someone else, a separate person hovering in front of me like a ghost.”<sup>53</sup> The presence of the work is most noticeably announced as the voice of J. The voice is a unique marker for a person – an aural fingerprint. Cardiff inserts herself by using her voice, which allows the implication that we are actually getting to know the artist by becoming more familiar with the voice of J. J’s omnipresent voice takes on the palpability of a real person, and makes us feel included in some kind of relationship with her.

There is also the ante of Cardiff’s sultry whispering voice: “The dominant force of the work is manifest in the pull exerted on the listener by the artist’s voice. It is seemingly ageless, pleasantly deep, female voice that ranges from matter-of-fact to sexy to solicitous.” Cardiff uses her feminine, attractive voice to her advantage. J’s voice is feminine and erotic; it depends on the deepest of stereotypes. When J sits so close to us and matter-of-factly offers us “our” drink and popcorn, we are immediately befriended. This simple move is at once nurturing and beguiling. J gets away with being so close to us because she is not threatening.

J’s voice is presented to be “... like the friend you hope will be your friend, someone you can be confessional to ... you can talk about those innermost things and you feel there’s no sense of judgment.” Cardiff describes the effect she is aiming for, “I’m not Catholic but it is part of what I imagine it would be like to go to a confessional.

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Carr-Harris, “The Art of Travel,” *Canadian Art*, vol. 18 #3, (Fall 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Script of *The Missing Voice* (Case Study B).

Or vice versa, to be the priest on the other side listening to someone who is going to tell you the secrets of their soul, their life, their sins and transgressions. There's a sense that you will be told something you didn't know before. The possibility of a revelation that might change your life. It's the tone of her voice, that sense of secrets being shared."<sup>54</sup>

A presence without a body should feel like a ghost, but J's voice is not ghostly. Cardiff takes particular care to not spook the viewer with her voice. Realizing that a disembodied voice has the potential to alienate the viewer, Cardiff gets as close as possible without being threatening: "... the way I record makes it sound like it's almost coming out of their head – it's like it's coming from between their ears. Then if I talk very calmly, and talk as if I'm talking to myself and thinking to myself, it doesn't make it too creepy."<sup>55</sup> As we develop a connection to J and therefore, the artwork, the artwork begins to achieve a sense of being, or presence.

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<sup>54</sup> Janet Cardiff, interview with Gary Garrels (April 2004, Berlin) excerpted in *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Janet Cardiff, introduction to *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*, 12.

### **Track #14 – The paradox of engulfment**

*Either woe or well-being, sometimes I have a craving to be engulfed.*<sup>56</sup>

This sentiment from Goethe's *Werther* refers to the "craving to be engulfed" as an inescapable condition. No matter what one's frame of mind, one may suddenly have a "craving to be engulfed." To engulf is "to surround completely" or "to swallow up or overwhelm by or as if by overflowing and enclosing."<sup>57</sup> The sensation of engulfment rushes in to fill the space made by the absence of Cardiff's physical presence in the audio Walks and theater installations. It is through engulfment that the viewer overlooks Cardiff's absence or perhaps conversely, craves engulfment because of her absence.

The engulfment works as a contradiction, because there is the sense of losing oneself while simultaneously being made to feel that the sense of self is being reinforced. The engulfment comes largely from the binaural experience, which is, at the same time, transporting and embodying. When the engulfment is a sensation of being "swallowed up or overwhelmed," our sense of separateness disappears and our identity merges with the work or with the personality of a character in the work. In the sense of being "surrounded completely," our attention is drawn to a self-conscious awareness of our exterior.

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<sup>56</sup> Goethe's *Werther* quoted in Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "engulf."

Critic Scott Watson writes that Cardiff and Miller make an attempt “...to disembody the viewer by creating a situation of radical disassociation.”<sup>58</sup> We disassociate from our body because of sensory information overload, which is intensified by actual physical engulfment.

*The Paradise Institute* exceeds its sculptural container in opposite directions: outwards - by spilling over into the gallery space outside of itself, and inwards - by infiltrating our interiority, while we are sitting inside the piece itself. To experience *The Paradise Institute*, we must step inside a theatrical reconstruction of a post-World War II opulent cinema house. Once inside, the balustrade rises up in front of the two rows, giving the impression that we are further enclosed in a private balcony suspended above the rest of the theater. The seats below are miniaturized, causing us to become life-size giants inside the enclosed home theater. The extreme contrast in size perception intensifies the feeling of being enclosed. A discerning viewer recognizes that the seats below are miniatures; however, the space is realistically hyper-perspectivalized to the point where one viewer has exclaimed that she didn’t know what all the fuss was about as there were plenty of seats up front.<sup>59</sup> There is a large enough nod to realism for us to imagine ourselves in the miniaturized space, like a dollhouse: another engulfment.

Relaxing into the plush theater seat allows for us to let down guards, both physical and mental, because it recalls the movie-going experience. *The Paradise Institute* wastes no time making itself familiar to us. Cardiff says, “We’re trying to

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<sup>58</sup> Scott Watson, “Ghosts: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller,” in *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Plug In Editions, 2001), 25.

<sup>59</sup> Felix, conversation.

connect right away to the remembered experiences that your body knows...”<sup>60</sup> This works to “fluff” us – to prepare us for the next and most dramatic layer of overflowing engulfment, which operates from the inside out: the auditory component. The binaural recording surrounds and disorients us by immersing us in scenes of auditory familiarity.

The engulfment transports us into different spaces and different times. In a Walk, we literally transport ourselves by walking, but there is another kind of transport going on that is brought into relief with a stationary work like *The Paradise Institute*. The audio track is made up of sheer layers of sonic experiences. One layer may be the ambient surrounding sounds of the theater, where we can hear murmuring voices and other spectators settling in their seats. Then there are moments when we feel (“hear”) that we are suddenly in a house or room – where we can hear the pacing footsteps in an empty room with a wooden floor. Walking is no longer necessary for transportation. Our auditory perception allows us to easily imagine ourselves in these places. Miller explains that they “...use sound to simulate different layers of reality, so that people can be transported to different locations.”<sup>61</sup>

The binaural recording also layers the same space in two different times. When the CD recording of *The Missing Voice* begins, we can hear the immediate library sounds around us, and at the same time we can hear the library sounds at the time of the recording. Some of the recorded sounds are scripted and some are ambient noises. The amount of auditory information is overwhelming because our brain cannot parse real from recorded. One moment is superimposed on another in the same space.

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<sup>60</sup> Kolle, interview, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 11.

The binaural recording creates a space, which is simultaneously inside (the viewer's mind) and outside (surrounding the viewer). We are not used to being tricked by our ears, so it is difficult for us to reconcile that it sounds like we are inside the sonic space we comprehend, when it is the sonic space that is inside of us. The boundaries of experience are blurred. The unnerving realness of the sonic world transports us into that fictional sonic architecture, but not so much that we lose touch with the surrounding reality. We are called upon to use our imagination. The sounds represent a space and we have to imagine the dimensions of the space. It forces us to shape a space around ourselves. In fact, Christov-Bakargiev refers to Cardiff's work as being the "reverse of virtual reality," because "it's fiction coming into reality, not reality going back into the fiction."<sup>62</sup> The sensation of *The Paradise Institute* is one of total envelopment, not just Surround Sound, but *Surround World*.

We also experience the sensation of being swallowed up when we assume other identities in the narratives. Critic Kitty Scott says, "... as time passes, the closeness of the voices, especially Cardiff's, presumes an intimacy of a known companion and penetrates your body: her will and thoughts merge temporarily with your own."<sup>63</sup> The merging of identities is thorough. In one of the walks J expresses, "We're connected now, my breath a part of yours, my thoughts transferred to your mind."<sup>64</sup> Cardiff describes this melded state of mind as part imposed and part activated, "Just as our dreams sometimes infiltrate our waking reality, I think the walking pieces break down the barriers of what the listeners think of as their singular self. My surrogate body starts to infiltrate their

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<sup>62</sup>Christov-Bakargiev, interview, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Scott, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Script of *Louisiana Walk #14* (1996) in *Janet Cardiff: A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller*, 68-69.

consciousness while in reverse their remembered dreams, triggered by phrases and sounds, invade and add to the artwork. A melding of sorts.”<sup>65</sup>

At the same time that we feel completely overwhelmed, there is the strange contradiction that our sensory awareness is heightened. Being more connected to our sensory perception offers the viewer a “sense of authentic self,”<sup>66</sup> suggests Christov-Bakargiev. When J’s breathy voice is so close to our ear, we get goose pimples and the physical senses are tickled. Christov-Bakargiev says, “Listening becomes an erotic encounter.”<sup>67</sup> We are stimulated to be more alert, more receptive, and more absorbed in what is going on. Sometimes this has to do with the perceived proximity of the voices and other times by their inaudibility. Many times the characters in the audio narratives whisper, causing us to strain our ears to hear. Miller calls these effects, “MSG for the senses,”<sup>68</sup> and they are even more effective by targeting our sense of hearing. According to Deleuze, “... the sensations communicated by the ear are the most enjoyable and have the keenest impact.”<sup>69</sup>

Our sensory awareness is also amplified by the surprising reversal of the visual and auditory in the narrative. The insidious but ever-present rupture in the viewing experience comes from the weight placed on the auditory. The pressure of the headphones on our head asserts the dominance of the audio in *The Paradise Institute*, which is not typical for a movie-going experience. The binaural sound also works the opposite of a traditional movie soundtrack, because it tears us away from the visual

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<sup>65</sup> In conversation with Kitty Scott, August 17, 1999 and published in *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (London: Artangel afterlives, 1999), 15.

<sup>66</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, interview, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Kolle, interview, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze, 18.

image on the screen. When the binaural characters in the binaural audience interrupt the narrative sequence on the screen, the metaphoric seams between the musical score and the image become unglued.

We are also stimulated to be more alert, because we are slightly alarmed by the constant exchange of identities. The voices we hear, particularly J's, remind us of our own voice in our head – and listening to her becomes a habitation of her body (voyeurism) or the occupation of our own body by somebody else (schizophrenia). When J's voice addresses us, we are pulled into a conspiratorial voyeurism. She speaks to us in a husky whisper and because we do not know her, it feels like we are suddenly eavesdropping on somebody else's conversation. The pleasure of experiencing being somebody else is closely twinned with fear. In fact, the medical community has used binaural technology to simulate the real-life experience of a person with untreated schizophrenia. Psychologically speaking, having voices inside one's head allows one to approach a very different experience of reality than we are accustomed to, perhaps a reality closer to illness. The different roles we end up accepting make us start to lose hold on our own identity.

Christov-Bakargiev remarks, "What is most fearful in this work is the sense of loss of control over consciousness, as the primary narrative voice expressed a personality that verges on splitting continuously into various oneiric persons."<sup>70</sup> The characters shift roles, not so much within the "narrative" being played out on the screen but in particular with the auditory story. Binaural characters – that is, one voice, assumes several roles, at

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<sup>70</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, 17.



times easy intimacy and other times, threatening menace. The fragmentation is destabilizing.

There is also pleasure to be had from this bodily engagement. We are completely transported and yet, absorbed by our own body. “Every critic comments about a dislocation that leads to some extraordinarily intense perceptual pleasure.”<sup>71</sup> All the pictures of viewers doing a Walk (or inside *The Paradise Institute*) reflect this paradox: their posture is alert and their expression is focused and completely preoccupied. They lose self-consciousness and yet become conscious of themselves.

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<sup>71</sup> Enright and Walsh, interview.

### **Track # 15 – Inclusion**

*“Is it an accident ... that this technique involves an image of a disembodied head used to make an artificial sensorium?”<sup>72</sup>*

The most frequently asked question about *The Paradise Institute* is, “Does everybody have the same experience?”<sup>73</sup> This question reveals that we are made to feel as though our experience of *The Paradise Institute* is completely unique and individual, even though each set of headphones winds down to the same central “brain” underneath the theater seating and transmits an identical audio recording to each viewer. This has been observed in Cardiff’s audio Walks as well. We feel like we are individually and personally addressed in the work, because it feels as though we are emotionally and intimately connected to someone or something. *The Paradise Institute* seats sixteen, yet every one of us feels as though we are the center of attention. The experience is perceived to be singular, because of the level of inclusion we feel.

The ultimate escapist, completely immersive fantasy is enacted at the Rufus T. Riley’s Dreamweaver Headspa,<sup>74</sup> a holo-video parlor, in *The Minority Report* (2002). In a futuristic projection of a “headspa,” instead of a “bodyspa,” any conceivable fantasy can be holographically projected and realistically enacted around the customer. In the many chambers off the long corridor, we see one man lying back, getting an enthusiastic lap

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<sup>72</sup> Watson, 26-27.

<sup>73</sup> Felix, conversation.

<sup>74</sup> *The Minority Report* script from [http://home.online.no/~bhundlan/scripts/minorityreport\\_frank.txt](http://home.online.no/~bhundlan/scripts/minorityreport_frank.txt) (accessed July 28, 2005).

dance from a shimmering holographic beach babe; another man is thanking his applauding holographic audience. The customer is a participant in the fantasy, but the underlying fantasy, whether the customer wants to fly, kill his boss, or nearly die, is that the customer wants to *feel* the fantasy – to be included in it. *The Paradise Institute* expounds on this baseline fantasy of inclusion. Every aspect of *The Paradise Institute* is geared towards making us feel like we are a part of things, so that we *feel* like we are included. Like the holo-fantasies, the immersive environment of the theater installations, as Miller puts it, “... is total escapism and in a way escapism points out a little about reality.”<sup>75</sup> Our willingness to experience *The Paradise Institute* reveals, if not our desire for intimacy, then at least our familiarity with the kind of virtual intimacy that it produces.

Like the customer in the holo-video parlor, very little is required of us in *The Paradise Institute* – no action or decision-making. More participation is required in the Walks, but even then we only follow directions and we are encouraged to give ourselves up to the experience. Writer Monica Biagioli says of *The Missing Voice*, “It is difficult to know whether the listener assumes the role of participant in this work, because you are never quite in control of where you are going and are, therefore, not necessarily participating. Instead, it feels more like Cardiff has stage-managed all of reality and the world itself has become a huge theatrical production...”<sup>76</sup> This sensation of a “stage-managed reality” is carried over to the theater installations and crafted to engage the viewer even more deeply than before.

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<sup>75</sup> Kolle, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Biagioli.

The binaural recording works double duty to include us: the recorded voices work both to place us inside the aural narrative thread and also to situate us inside the aural fictional space. The story forms around us, sonically jumping off the screen and into the seat next to us. Like Mildred, we are explicitly included in the narrative of the piece. In *The Paradise Institute*, we are given a mute identity, where we are included, but not required to participate.

Another way Cardiff and Miller include the viewer is by creating a complicit community through jokes. The tension in *The Paradise Institute* is frequently dispersed with laughter and joking. For instance, the “That’s excellent nursing” joke induces intimacy by relying upon us to recognize the common sexual nurse fantasy. A joke creates “an implicit acknowledgment of a shared background;”<sup>77</sup> we become part of a community of those with this shared knowledge. Even though we may not share the same response, we are included in the binaural audience’s laughing by being aurally situated among the laughers. Like so many other of the strategies used in *The Paradise Institute*, the joke is a motif used on different levels of the work. For instance, the fact that we are told to turn off our cell phones and then have a cell phone ring inside the theater is a joke; Cardiff and Miller have a little laugh on us.

The viewer is included in the world of *The Paradise Institute*. It is a momentary antidote to the Bradbury’s cultural condition: “There are too many of us...Nobody knows anyone.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>78</sup> Bradbury, 16.

**Track #16 – Dummy**

My copy of Cardiff's survey catalog always falls open to the creepiest photograph in the book. It is a double-page spread, mostly in yellow tones. Cardiff is in some kind of large storage cave surrounded by taller-than-life statues – most of them missing limbs, heads, or breasts. Cardiff is standing in the center of the room with an intent look on her face. She is wearing headphones and has electronic recording equipment slung over her shoulder. She is holding something blue in her right hand, but the image of the object falls on the center crease of the catalog. There is long shadow stretched out on the wall behind her. The shadow makes it look like Cardiff is carrying ... a head. She is. Cardiff is holding up an alarmingly real, bright blue dummy head by its silver neck, in front of her.

This photo startles me into the same realization every time I see it – my relationship with Cardiff's voice is the reverse of Cardiff's relationship with the dummy head. For every Walk and installation using binaural recording, Cardiff had to be there first, carrying and whispering to a wigged head in her arms.

The dummy head is the intermediary between Cardiff and the viewer. For J's voice to come through to us intimately, it must first be spoken to the dummy head. If J sounds like she is the same height as us, then the dummy head must have been held at head height. If J sounds like she is breathing right by our ear, it is because Cardiff leaned close to the dummy head first. Cardiff had to pretend that the dummy head was her companion, the imaginary future viewer.

Cardiff's relationship with the dummy head is recorded as one of the layers of the soundtrack. All of the awkwardness of two people meeting for the first time is gone. Cardiff protects herself by having a relationship with the dummy, instead of with the viewer. Because the viewer as a dummy can never pose a threat, Cardiff as J, is able to be emotionally open, confessional and tender in a very real way.

Christov-Bakargiev suggests that Cardiff's practice "contribute[s] to a shift in the communicational structure of art from a one-sided confrontation between artwork and audience to an exploration of the conversational dimension – the quiet, private realm of talking-listening."<sup>79</sup> Listening to Cardiff's conversation with the dummy is what makes us feel like we are having a conversation, even though we are not doing any of the talking. Ironically, the work is perceived as moving away from "one-sided confrontation between artwork and audience," when actually it has become more one-sided. The last time there was true conversation was in the performance *Intimacies*, when there were two people talking and interacting.

When we put on the headphones, we take the dummy's place. We take over the center of attention. We are addressed, but there is no need or responsibility to answer. The headphones go on our ears and we become dummies to the world. Everything else is muted and a new "outside" world is created for us. Like the dummy, we are not in a position of power, but that of a speechless child. We are *dumb*.

The experience of *The Paradise Institute* is designed with the viewer in mind. This is one of its most appealing qualities, but, however much it appears to include the viewer, there is no room for the viewer to speak or to actually participate. As much as

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<sup>79</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, 14.

Cardiff and Miller invoke the contract of masochism to lure the viewer into deeper engagement, there is no true alliance because Cardiff and Miller control the relationship. The contract that develops is implicit and hidden from the viewer. If there was a written contract – where everything was ‘stated, promised, announced and carefully described before being accomplished,’<sup>80</sup> there would be entirely different relationship between the viewer and the artists – not to say that a contemporary dominatrix would have anything to do with a written formal contract – she does, however, probably have a specific set of rules or guidelines that is articulated up front.

*The Paradise Institute* does not even have this. In this light, the experience of *The Paradise Institute* begins to feel more like the institutional imposition of sadism, than the contracted alliance of masochism. A written or explicit agreement would tie the experience to the masochist side of the Deleuzian model, without it, the experience treads something between the two. In the end, the contract established between the viewer and the work allows for what curator Connie Butler has described as a “weird sort of violence, a soft violence.”<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, the implicit contract is substantial in its own right, allowing the viewer the pleasure of giving up control and surrendering to the experience. The play between masochism and sadism, danger and pleasure, control and release of control is titillating, allowing the artists to blast right through our personal space, bypass our defensive reactions and convince us to engage with a stranger. We allow J in, because it feels like she has allowed us in first. It is virtually involuntary ... and people seem to like it. After 38 minutes of *The Missing Voice*, Peaker says, “As the recording comes to an

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<sup>80</sup> Deleuze, 20.

<sup>81</sup> Connie Butler, conversation with author in Los Angeles, November 19, 2003.

end, I miss *The Missing Voice*, but I feel intensely happy.”<sup>82</sup> By just listening, we are able to experience an intimate relationship without the time, energy, and courage it normally requires. This is our “Venus in furs,” our prize and pleasure for our time and attention.

In *Something's Got to Give* (2003), Diane Keaton tells Jack Nicholson, “I don’t know how to be intimate but not intimate.” Cardiff and Miller do know how to be intimate, but not intimate; they have created a virtual intimacy. By treating and talking to the dummy head intimately, Cardiff *performs* intimacy. When we take the place of the dummy, we re-enact Cardiff’s performance. This allows Cardiff and Miller to build a relationship with the viewer that feels meaningful, without their presence. A bodiless intimacy reflects a more contemporary idea of intimacy in a world saturated with relationship “intermediaries:” phones, TVs, and computers.

Like Mildred’s four-wall televisor, the experience of *The Paradise Institute* provides a fictional intimacy. Scripted interaction with a television character is far from real intimacy, but it is better than being alone. *The Paradise Institute* strives for the same inclusion the firefighter’s wife hopes for in *Fahrenheit 451* and like Montag’s wife, it seems we long for inclusion, acceptance and love.

Unlike Mildred’s televisor though, the experience of The Paradise Institute is not numbing, but invigorating and provoking. Our sensory awareness is piqued and stimulated. Miller says, “I like the idea that we are building a simulated experience in the attempt to make people feel more connected to life.”<sup>83</sup> In Cardiff’s words, “I see the device of the walkman as a way to have surrogate relationships. I talk with someone intimately, create a relationship, but I am a safe distance. It is a coward’s way but I hope

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<sup>82</sup> Peaker, 111.

<sup>83</sup> Kollé, interview, 15.



that my pieces give people a sense of knowing someone a little, even if it is only with a unknown voice, a missing one.”<sup>84</sup>

How easily we are led by the lure of intimacy, but as poet Eliza Cook says in her poem, “Love On,” “Who would not rather trust and be deceived?”

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<sup>84</sup> Janet Cardiff, Artist’s Statement in *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, 66.

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