

# “Opinions” – Body Movements and Sound

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## **Abstract**

"Opinions" is a project that collects hand movements in conversations and turns them into sounds. Under the context of having a conversation, this project creates an experience that enables people to pay more attention and appreciation to hand movements through converting movements into sound. A website is then produced collecting all the conversation footages and sound recordings, forming a space for hands/arms “expressing” their own opinions and perspectives with sound outputs.

Many scholars and artists focus on the body as an instrument and the body as a support for expressing opinions. This proposal links these elements together and argues that body language/movements convey the same opinions for the mind and should be given as much attention as oral expressions, and this can be achieved by turning body languages to sound (which is the same form as oral expression – sound as output) based on the movements. Through this process, the audience will have more attention and appreciation towards their body movements. In the same way, this project may inspire one to think from another perspective and start to understand more about others’ perspectives.

## **Research**

### **Body Movements**

The importance of body movements can be illustrated from several aspects. Using the body to express opinions in protests is one of the strongest cases. It is studied that using body gestures and postures to express political views supports the articulation of moral intuitions. [1] The power of body expression is that it is visual; bodies in protests stand for political opinions and can greatly affect the surrounding

environments and represent solid opinions. The importance of the vulnerability of a body is also one of the reasons protests have always been a popular way of expressing opinions despite of its dangerousness. For example, during Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989, an autonomous man stood out using his single body and posture against the tanks. This body and its act was so powerful that it changed the whole consequence of the protest and has been spread as a historic moment. Demonstrating vulnerability of human bodies in a protest will inevitably trigger the self-reflections and rethinking of other bodies and parties in the protests. Parviainen calls such body behaviors as “resisting choreographies.” [1]

More specifically, we use our body to demonstrate opinions in daily life. It is studied that humans tend to use not only verbal expression but also “symbolic” expression, i.e. body languages such as hand gestures along with facial expressions, to deliver opinions and attitude towards the content of communication when having conversations. [2]

However, it is also argued that such expressions are often paid little attention in themselves. During a conversation people generally focus most on the idea and content that are being communicated, thus, there lacks awareness of the iconic facial expressions and hand gestures used in conversation. [2]

### **Body and sound**

A rising amount of applications that use the body as an instrument is emerging, especially in performance art. In the study of relations between body, instrument and technology, Schroeder emphasizes that in some interactive music technologies, movements by the body can be given back as sound. He suggests that the body serves as the most important role in a

performance environment, it moves and also can listen. [3] Brown argues that body in motion should be converted to sound and reconnected to the ears. [4] In addition, Iddon in his study about body/instrument relations blurred the boundaries between the body of the performer and body of the instrument, providing a new direction which proposes the integration of performer and instrument for a musical entity. He also tends to blur the distinctions between man and machines, which brings Haraway's cyborg model to the discussion. [5]

## Project Form

### Experience flow of participants

In an indoor environment, one visitor at a time is asked to have a conversation with the author. A monitor detects the hand movements, meanwhile the conversation is recorded in audio-visual form with participants' agreements (their voice and face are not published and only serve research and documentation purposes).

After the conversation, the recorded footage focusing on the hand and the sound generated is played back to the visitors. This material is then uploaded to the project website where people can visit to listen to sound being produced by the other participants on various topics.

<https://songyanbin1996.wixsite.com/opinions>

### Mechanism and setup

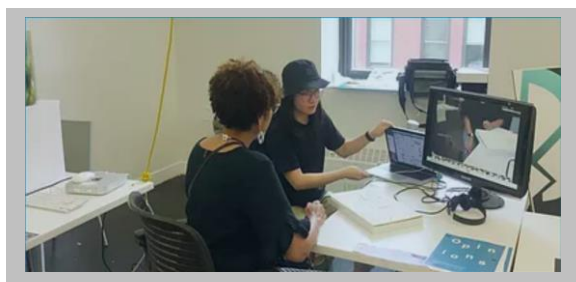


Fig 1. "Opinions", 2018, Yanbin Song, New Media Interactive Sound Art Project, Copyright Yanbin Song.

An Arduino board is set up with two photocell sensors that detect the amount of light being blocked by arms during a conversation. The

data collected by the two photocells is sent to the software Max msp. Max generates sound according to the movements that is played and recorded inside the laptop using extension software, Soundflower. The resulting sound output has a high quality and is in the meantime non-interruptive to the conversation. A larger monitor screen is also set up for visitors to watch the recordings.

Leap motion sensor replaces the Arduino set to serve as a sensor and to collect finger positions. Max msp is still used to generate the sound.

## References

1. J Parviainen, "Choreographing resistances: Spatial-kinaesthetic intelligence and bodily knowledge as political tools in activist work," *Mobilities*, 5, no.3 (2010): 311-329.
2. J. Allwood, "Bodily communication dimensions of expression and content." In *Multimodality in Language and Speech Systems* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2002), 7-26.
3. F. Schroeder, "Bodily instruments and instrumental bodies: critical views on the relation of body and instrument in technologically informed performance environments" (2006).
4. N. Brown, "The flux between sounding and sound: Towards a relational understanding of music as embodied action. *Contemporary Music Review*, 25, nos. 1-2 (2006): 37-46.
5. M. Iddon, " On the Entropy Circuit: Brian Ferneyhough's Time and Motion Study II," *Contemporary Music Review*, 25, nos 1-2 (2006): 93-105.

## Biography

Yanbin Song is a designer and an adventurer. She studied in London UCL for a bachelor's degree in Urban Planning, Design & Management, and is currently studying in New York, Parsons for the MFA program Design and Technology. Spending time in different cities and countries makes Yanbin a more global citizen and care more about lives and societies. She is attempting to make a social impact by bringing provoking thoughts through

her multi-media and interactive works.  
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