

Into the Middle of Things

Laura J Cameron / Matt Rogalsky 2017

The piece showcases the song of the white-throated sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) documented by the Canadian field recordist William WH Gunn in Algonquin Park (Ontario, 1954) and in the Adirondacks (New York State, 1954). Often heard as strongly symbolic of Canada, the white-throated sparrow is the first bird to sing on Gunn's best-selling 1955 LP, *A Day in Algonquin Park*. Its song is commonly described in mnemonics as 'Sweet, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada.' However, Neltje Blanchan, in her 1917 book *Canadian Birds Worth Knowing*, noted that New Englanders instead heard the distinct phrase "I-I-Pea-body, Pea-bod-y, Pea-bod-y-I, extolling the name of one of their first families." Many other variations exist, reflecting specific cultural, geographical and temporal positionalities.

When putting on our headphones, the listener is invited to take on the role of witness to these voices of long-deceased birds, asking questions such as: 'what do I hear?', but also: 'what happened here? And what is absent?' This piece references too the current plan for the A2A Trail, a corridor between the Algonquin and Adirondack Parks, which would pass through Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Territories and through Perth at its halfway point. Songs of white-throated sparrows from Algonquin Park (1954) are presented to your right ear and songs from the Adirondacks (1960) to your left. A microphone is also part of the piece, placing you in the middle of the sparrows' songs, perhaps also inviting your own performance. The cables emerging from the ground signal the role of past (and buried) geographies, as well as critical considerations of settler listening and perception, which may be essential to the project of imagining corridors, trails, and migration routes: connections and (re-)conciliations.

Matt Rogalsky's work in sonic arts focuses on live electroacoustic music performance and intermedia installations. His work has most recently been shown at Université de Laval Gallery (2016), the Asunción Biennial (2015), the Electric Eclectics Festival (2016 and 2014), Supercrawl (2015), and Mercer Union (2013). His academic background includes studies at Simon Fraser University (BA, Contemporary Arts), Wesleyan University (MA, Music) and City University London UK (PhD, Music), and he teaches at Queen's University where he is Director of the Sonic Arts Studio in the Dan School of Drama and Music.

Laura Cameron is an Associate Professor of historical geography at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. She is the author of *Openings: A Meditation on History, Method and Sumas Lake* (1997), co-editor of *Emotion, Place and Culture* (2009) and *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness* (2011), co-author of *Freud in Cambridge* (2017) and has published numerous papers on the history of fieldwork, psychoanalysis, ecology and sound. Ongoing research-creation with sound artist Matt Rogalsky addresses the life and work of field recordist WWH Gunn. Currently she is completing a book that centres on correspondence between Marie Stopes and CG Hewitt.



