

GREGORY WHITEHEAD is an internationally acclaimed audio artist, performer, radiomaker, playwright and media philosopher. He has created more than one hundred radio plays, essays and acoustic adventures for the BBC, Radio France, Deutschland Radio, Australia's ABC, NPR and other broadcasters. Often interweaving documentary and fictive materials into playfully unresolved narratives, Whitehead's aesthetic is distinguished by a deep philosophical commitment to radio as a medium for poetic navigation and free association. In his voice and text-sound works, he explores the tension between a continuous pulse and the eruption of sudden discontinuities, as well as linguistic entropy and decay.

At a 2012 panel celebrating the 100th issue of the performing arts journal PAJ, Whitehead said, "I embraced analog broadcast radio as my ideal creative home because the airwaves seemed to vibrate with the same qualities I sought to capture in my own plays, and in my own thinking: indeterminacy, fragility of signal, random access, tension between public and private, ambiguous borders, modulating rhythms, complex polyphony, and a pulse rate set by a wild heart." His plays have won numerous awards, including a Prix Italia for *Pressures of the Unspeakable*, a Prix Futura BBC Award for *Shake, Rattle, Roll* and a Sony Gold Academy Award for *The Loneliest Road*, which was described by the jury as "a master class in sound". His 2005 BBC production of Normi Noel's play *No Background Music*, featuring Sigourney Weaver, also received a Sony Gold Academy Award. *On the Shore Dimly Seen*, a "boneyard cantata" enquiry into no-touch torture, was short-listed for a 2015 Prix Italia.

Whitehead is a frequent performer in literary cabarets and mixed media theatre events, as well as a guest speaker at colleges, conferences such as Radio Without Boundaries and Radio Revolten, and at audio festivals throughout the US and Europe, often mixing spoken texts and audio excerpts into a montage of entangled voices and ideas.

He began experimenting with audiotape while an undergraduate at Haverford College, bouncing tracks between two Superscope cassette machines, often in an improvisation context, mixing voices and other instruments, including his own saxophones. Whitehead later received an MA in Media Studies at the New School for Social Research, which at the time had a strong focus on creative radio, with both Lou Giansante and Jay Allison members of the faculty. His thesis explored the work of Walter Ong regarding electronic aurality and phenomenological presence, as expressed through the voice. During these years, Whitehead became interested in the films and philosophies of Alexander Kluge and Chris Marker, regarding the fluid relationship between documentary evidence and imaginary counterpoint. He also created experimental voice performances and text-sound poetry through dialogue with Charles Amir Khanian and others.

In 1982-83, Whitehead collaborated with Susan Stone, both on specific audio art pieces and on a radio series at WBAI called Radio Schizophonia, which explored recorded experimental voice plays as well as conceptual talk shows and live performances. Their collaboration culminated in the production of two feature-length hybrid docu/fictive broadcasts, *House With A View* and *Dead Letters*, which were nationally distributed in 1985.

Whitehead's text-sound pieces produced throughout the 1980's centered around the "wounded" nature of the analog razor cut and in explorations of the wider technological woundscape, shaped in part by his own experience as a passenger in a near-fatal car accident at age sixteen.

These works circulated widely through cassette networks and broadcast. In 1987, Whitehead worked with Helen Thorington and Regine Beyer towards the incubation of an unprecedented three day “Festival for a New Radio” on WKCR FM in NYC; the three also worked on the genesis of New American Radio, a nationally distributed series of radio adventures in a wide range of genres.

In the mid-1980s, Whitehead joined choreographer Karen Bamonte and percussionist Toshi Makihara in the development of Text/Flesh performances in which texts, rhythms and bodies migrated through and across each other, creating narratives such as *The Confusion of Tongues* and *The Assassination*. He later collaborated with Zaven Paré, Mark Sussman and Allen S. Weiss on *Theater of the Ears*, based on a text by Valere Novarina, and performed at La Mama in NYC. He has also experimented with small-scale puppet and toy theaters, presented at PS 122 in NYC within cabaret evenings convened by Great Small Works. In 2004, he worked with Sussman and Weiss once again on the creation of *Danse Macabre*, featuring the dolls and voice of Michel Nedjar.

During the 1990s, he initiated two research initiatives: the Laboratory for Innovation and Acoustic Research (LIAR) and the International Institute for Screamscape Studies, with its vast global scream bank, most recently expanding into Switzerland. Other projects included semi-improvisatory collaborations with Christof Migone (*The Thing About Bugs*) Richard Busch (*Nothing But Fog*), and the experimental freely associative documentary, *Bewitched, Bothered, Bewildered*, featuring Nathaniel Philbrick, Chantal Thomas and Leandro Katz.

Beginning in the year 2000 with *The Marilyn Room*, in association with producer John Dryden, Whitehead wrote and directed a series of radio plays for the BBC, experimenting widely with hybrid documentary forms and techniques; fresh approaches to sound design pulses and musical settings; and exploring ways of working with actors that supported improvisation and invention, in the process of recording. These plays included an ambitious BBC triptych that mulls the American zeitgeist in the new millennium: *The Loneliest Road*, *The Club* and *The Day King Hammer Fell From The Sky*. His concerns with the darker mechanisms of the American Dream Machine have deepened in recent years, as expressed in plays such as *Crazy Horse One-Eight*, *On the Shore Dimly Seen* and *Nothing Like Us Ever Was*.

Whitehead has been represented in museum shows at the Wellcome Collection, Whitney Museum, Documenta, Mass MOCA, among others. In 2001, shortly before 9/11, he created a video installation at Location One gallery titled *Delivery System No. 1*, which sets the complicity of synchronized media heads within the rhythms of catastrophe. His 1996 imaginary radio documentation of a fictive *Bone Trade*, centered on the buying and selling of celebrity body parts, was made into a film directed by John Dryden, and later became the centerpiece of a multimedia installation at Mass MOCA.

Whitehead is co-editor with Douglas Kahn of the influential anthology of writings on the history of radio and audio art, *Wireless Imagination: sound radio and the avant-garde*, and the author of numerous performance texts and speculative fictions that explore the intricate aesthetics of radiophonic space, as well as critical essays relating to memory, violence and American identity. His writings have appeared in publications such as Ear, Public, Art & Text, PAJ, TDR,

Resonance and Cabinet, as well as in numerous anthologies and themed books, such as *The Politics of Everyday Fear*. In January 2012, he initiated an online writing project, *Desperado Philosophy*. While living on Nantucket Island in the late 1990s, Whitehead collaborated with Jay Allison and others towards the creation of a new public radio station for the Cape & Islands, WCAI. He also serves as an advisor for WGXC in the Hudson Valley, a station with a strong mission-based commitment to transmission arts.

As a vocalist, Whitehead has performed in a wide array of choirs and ensembles since his days as a boy soprano, and keeps an ear tuned for the world's varied traditions of choral singing. He plays a dozen instruments poorly, and soprano saxophone passably well. He lives in the Berkshires, not far from the farmhouse where Melville penned *Moby Dick*, and closer still to the Tanglewood of Hawthorne's tales. He is a long distance walker, sea kayaker and student of the ancient game of weiqi.