



Tour of UK network partners for the future of WISWOS

July 2016
Linda O Keeffe

First meeting June 29th with Lisa Busby, Steph Horak and a group of gaming and computer science women.

Second meeting on the 30th of June with Liz Dobson.

Notes

There are a number of groups and organisations which explore women's roles in technology, from gaming to development, on top of the various other gender reflective organisations that focus on feminism and sexism overall as an ongoing issue. The topics explored during the meeting highlighted both the abundance of material and of work created by these organisations and the lack of a centralised space for which information could be accessed. What WISWOS could be is a network of networks, a space for which information and ideas can be shared by those who have successfully shaped effective change. Meeting with Busby raised some concerns for WISWOS namely that of turning in to a conferencing organisation, which is something we do not want to become. While we feel the symposium format is an effective space for dialogue it can become just another part of the mainstream conferencing sector, which promotes those within the circle of knowledge. There are a lot of organisations, such as CRISAP, which create a space for the presentation of papers etc., by women and often about women in the sonic arts. This is a good space for that, it does not need copying. Perhaps it needs more highlighting as an event space for women.

The next topic raised in the Goldsmiths discussion was the internationalisation of WISWOS. It has been effective in attracting an international contingent. Which very much surprised us as we have had no real funds to support those travelling, and we understand all too well that generally women working in the sonic arts and technology are often on limited employment contracts or self employed. As a space WISWOS would like to highlight the activity of international groups, especially those, who by western standards, have had to deal with far more effective structures of suppression and exclusion, and yet have achieved significant changes in their communities of female composers, sound artists and music technologists. WISWOS does not want to become another patriarchal system which *patronises* the arts of the *other*. It wants to highlight any group that has achieved a significant impact and is willing to share their knowledge to those also trying to effect change.

Finally, impact. It is one of those key words, often frustrating to those seeking funding and finding it very difficult to pinpoint specific ideas of impact that fit within a funders definition. There are many ways to achieve an impact, but how to we create the circumstances for which significant impact occurs. Also, impact can be something that takes time, or a cause which others take up which then

causes impact. By supporting groups and providing a space of knowledge there may be a collective impact that can be difficult at an early stage to imagine. However, for funding, impact is a necessary thing to define. There are many types of impact to consider, primarily we can look at top down and bottom up impact. The structures that shape participation and representation, and communities. Communities can mean a variety of things from small groups of self directed artists, to art and technology spaces and organisations who promote or support those working on the ground in the sonic arts. The structures are often the hardest to affect impact, mostly because they tend to be quite rigid having operated in a certain way for many years, even dealing with the bureaucracies of large organisations can feel like trying to hit a moving target. Structures such as the department of education have so many layers and policies, which shape how they work and there can be vested interest in keeping the status quo that often it is only when something becomes media driven, such as the girl led social networking campaign to add women to the music curriculum, that any change comes in to effect. However, that should not put off any possibility of creating change. This comes back to what is impact. It does not have to be a radical change that happens straight away. But a push towards future momentum, future impact.

Octopus Collective

The focus of this discussion began with a tour of Barrow in Furness, a space stagnant of employment, with some severe social deprivation cited alongside beautiful architecture and wonderful scenery. Then we began by talking about the place of the arts in such areas. This seemed a key subject linking quite well to WISWOS, namely reframing certain aspects of gender exclusion that are situated within themes of class and exclusion. There are many ways in which exclusion arises and one of those is social class. In a world with severe economic poverty, access to things like education and the arts is lost to those with financial problems. We are increasingly encountering this in the UK where third level education has been privatised and the means to access it are based on one's ability to borrow or have parents pay for it. The working classes are always first hit by economic depression and the fallout has many side effects. While WISWOS does not seek to necessarily address larger social issues, when exploring gender exclusion it is important to reflect on access for women in technology in such climates. There is a recognition that globally women and girls have more difficulty accessing education (UNESCO 2012), but the focus of current research and girls education tends to be towards developing countries, with the idea that girls in developed cultures, generally have the same opportunities, access and rights as boys. However, gender disparity and exclusion take many forms and keep evolving new sets of criteria in many cultures, there is a constant sense of finding new ways to exclude women. Whether this is a conscious decision is hard to locate. But we do know that poverty plays a large role in forcing women out of the education system as they start to take on roles specific to their gender during

hard times. Taking low paying service jobs, having children at a young age, and alone, and working in the home, though this does not necessarily “lead to worse outcomes for children and family’s” (Cater and Coleman, 2006; Alexander et al., 2010). An artists collective in Ireland based at the Lab Gallery in Dublin has spent a number of years creating a working space for artists mothers, identifying how their role as mothers, especially lone parents, plays a role in their ability to access work in the arts (The Mothership Project). Next, when exploring issues of (ex)(in)clusion there are other concerns, for example non-white ethnicities. Even amongst WISWOS events it is clear that the overall majority of participants are white females in the UK. As a lecturer in the arts at a university I also witness this lack of ethnic diversity, though I have been told because my college is in the North of England, and in a small, predominantly white community, that this is a reason. I disagree, we have many students who travel from communities with large ethnic minorities, Birmingham, Huddersfield, Leeds, London etc., yet we do not have many for example, black students on campus. It is possible to continue with the many social reasons why being a certain type of person, regardless of your gender, will create exclusion. But WISWOS focuses on women because whatever the situation, class, colour, religion, women are always excluded. A combination of all three will most definitely see you out of the sonic arts space.

So where to tackle this problem, workshops, education initiatives in the school, education initiatives for parents and children (sometimes sexism begins at home), mentoring programs. All are valid responses to this problem and should be considered. It is important to look for examples where some of these practices have occurred and what benefits they produced for participants, long and short term. And it is very important that we consider a way to support both long and short term engagement for girls in the sonic arts and music technology.

Rebecca Louise Collins

Developing the network of networks

The conversation with Rebecca seemed like a natural segue into the practicalities of creating the next stage of WISWOS, its goals, outreach program, networking initiatives, etc. Collins wishes to work on a project in the National Library in London where there exists a catalogue of work created by female artists in sound. As a result of ageing technology there is a need to back this material up. However, from a much broader and more important perspective there is a need to re-examine the histories of women's participation in the sonic arts and music technology. History is defined by the winners, a term often used to explore the sometimes subjective nature of history's narrative. There is a moment right now in which the history of women's contribution to the sonic arts needs to be re-evaluated, re-assessed and added to the text books. This becomes an interesting starting point and contribution to the network of networks. As a space exploring how knowledge is created, who has access, who is allowed contribute, it is important to develop an historical framework for which

women can emplace themselves. It is also equally important to create a space in which this knowledge is made accessible. As the above writings have examined, there are different ways in which exclusion can occur. Educational access and attainment is not offered to all. The hallowed halls of our cultural spaces are not necessarily as open to the public as they would like to believe. There are different kinds of publics, there are different kinds of access. increasingly there is a move to open the door to the wider public to the knowledge created by academics and researchers. This move has evolved for several reasons, some of which are based on the fact that a number of research projects re funded from the public purse, yet that same public cannot access closed journals, expensive publications, conferences, colloquiums, symposiums, exhibitions, performances etc., etc.

WISWOS must be careful in the development of knowledge pools that limit access to those who already have some kind of privilege; we must not become an echo chamber. The development of a website that creatively explores ways to allow access to knowledge and networks is very important. But we must also find ways to engage both women: young girls, teenagers, and the top down structures: academic institutions, policy makers and other similar networks to this space.

Next stage

Develop grant application for AHRC networking fund.

Take on role of PI with Rebecca Collins as CI, the network then includes YSWN, Octopus Collective, Steph Horak, Goldsmiths (with Lisa Busby). Develop the bid to accommodate cost across the network for the development of multiple projects with output and impact. This includes workshops, mentoring programs, research and residency periods, exhibitions, performances, research days, international travel and presentation, development of WISWOS website. The goal is to support the development of the network and its research and practice output. We need to decide on key strategies which have short and long term impact, i.e., workshops and mentoring programs. We also need to work within the limitations of a small funding amount, the goal is to begin the process of the network, of collecting data and evidence of need. This allows for the next stage of funding, a much bigger pot, to develop more sustainable projects. So we should have ideally 5 goals.

1. Creating the network through meetings and travel and presentations.
2. More sustained research and workshop initiatives to collect data which supports the need for research into gender exclusion in the sonic arts and music technology.
3. The collecting of the history of women in sound.
4. The development of the website.
5. Establish international network.

Drawing the Network Together WISWOS symposiums, after periods of work, as above, we will create presentation and progress symposiums, possible travelling ones, over a period of two years.

Network Structure

