

One No Many Yeses

Amble Skuse*

Abstract: The piece *One No Many Yeses* was inspired by the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, and produced in collaboration with National Collective. In this contribution, the author discusses the working of the piece, situating herself as a pro-independence campaigner willing to mark this crucial moment in history, and as a disabled artist exploring the analogies between territorial and individual self-determination. The piece explores how a composer can give voice to non-composers and use real audio to create a representation of the conversations found online and in the real world.

Keywords: Scottish Independence, Soundscape, Activism, Disability, Composition.

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Resumo: A peça *One No Many Yeses* foi inspirada no Referendo sobre a independência da Escócia, celebrado em 2014, e produzida em colaboração com o National Collective. Neste artigo, a autora ilustra o processo de montagem da peça, situando-se como uma defensora da independência e querendo evidenciar este momento crucial da história escocesa. Ademais, enquanto artista com deficiência, ela pretendeu explorar as analogias entre autodeterminação territorial e individual. A peça explora as maneiras em que uma compositora pode dar voz aos não-compositores, usando o áudio real para criar uma representação das conversas encontradas online e no mundo real.

Palavras-chave: Independência da Escócia, Paisagem sonora, Ativismo, Deficiência, Composição.

Amble Skuse is a musician and artist, working with found sound, voices, electronic processing, and site specific locations. She works with oral history archives, interviews, community memories, radio interviews, found sounds and site specific compositions to explore myriad identities in myriad locations. She explores these ideas of identity and power through a lens of intersectional feminism. Her focus is on gender and disability, and she is currently studying for a PhD looking at ways in which a disabled composer / performer can utilise technology as a tool for composing, improvising and performing.

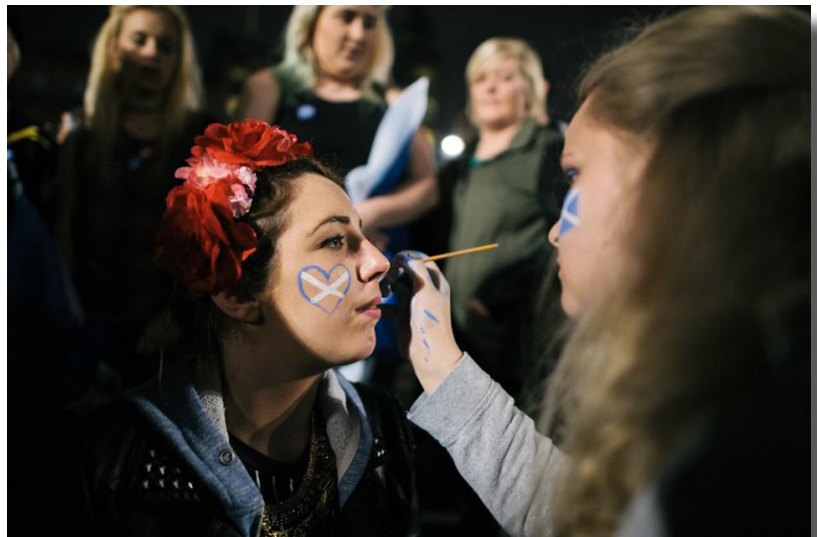
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The piece *One No Many Yeses* was created in response to the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, in collaboration with National Collective. Its vision was to bring the ideas and passions of the Yes voters to an audience, in order to establish a connection between the grassroots movements (and the many conversations being had), and a general public who may not have a connection with those groups.

I have long been interested in the ways in which a sound artist can work with groups to express various voices. For example, in my piece *Linda's Soundscape* I took interviews of Chinese “left behind” children (children whose parents had migrated to Beijing in search of work, and had been left behind with extended family in the countryside) and merged them into a sound piece for the Chinese community theatre group Hua Dan. I had also worked with the Tinderbox Collective on a soundscape of Haikus written by migrant children who had moved to Edinburgh. The haikus expressed what home meant to them and were performed as a part of The Journey of A Thousand Wings project.

One No Many Yeses came about as a result of a social media conversation with Mairi McFadyen of National Collective. National Collective was a cultural movement for Scottish independence during Scotland's Referendum from December 2011 to September 2014, and as a part of their work they convened with grassroots groups, campaigners and individuals who were intending to vote Yes to the question “Should Scotland Be An Independent Country?” in the referendum of 2014 (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Yes Voters preparing for an Independence march 2014.



Source: Amble Skuse's personal archive.

In the summer of 2014, they organised a mammoth 30 day national grassroots pro-independence festival that took place across Scotland during July. The Yestival tour showcased the grassroots cultural movement for Scottish Independence and included communities in the Scottish



Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, central Scotland, Western Isles, the Highlands, Orkney, Shetland, the North East, Angus, Perthshire and Fife as well as all of the country's seven cities.

As a part of this travelling exhibition, they were looking for someone to make a soundscape of the Yes movement which included people explaining their reasons for voting for independence, mixed alongside sounds from the Yes movement, such as snippets of speeches, clapping/cheering, news reporters reading out headlines, politicians speaking etc. Throughout their campaigning and outreach they interviewed people to collect their thoughts and reasons around voting Yes in the Scottish Independence referendum.

The voices for the soundscape were gathered by members of National Collective. They went to events, groups, meetings, rallies and marches with sound recorders, gathering sound to feed into the soundscape. The voices included in the piece range from The Indy Knitters – a group of women who come together to knit and talk about Independence for Scotland –, to major politicians, from journalists to playwrights, from architects to fishmongers. We wanted to represent a broad range of reasons for voting Yes, something which would resonate with different people for different reasons, and to show the strength of feeling and commitment they witnessed in their research.

As a Yes voter myself I was interested in developing a piece of work to mark this crucial moment in history, and as a disabled artist going through a difficult period of health issues, I was limited as to what I could do in terms of community outreach. The collaboration with National Collective meant that I was able to contribute something using their found and recorded materials, reducing my need for active engagement, and increasing the levels of partnership decision making in the work.

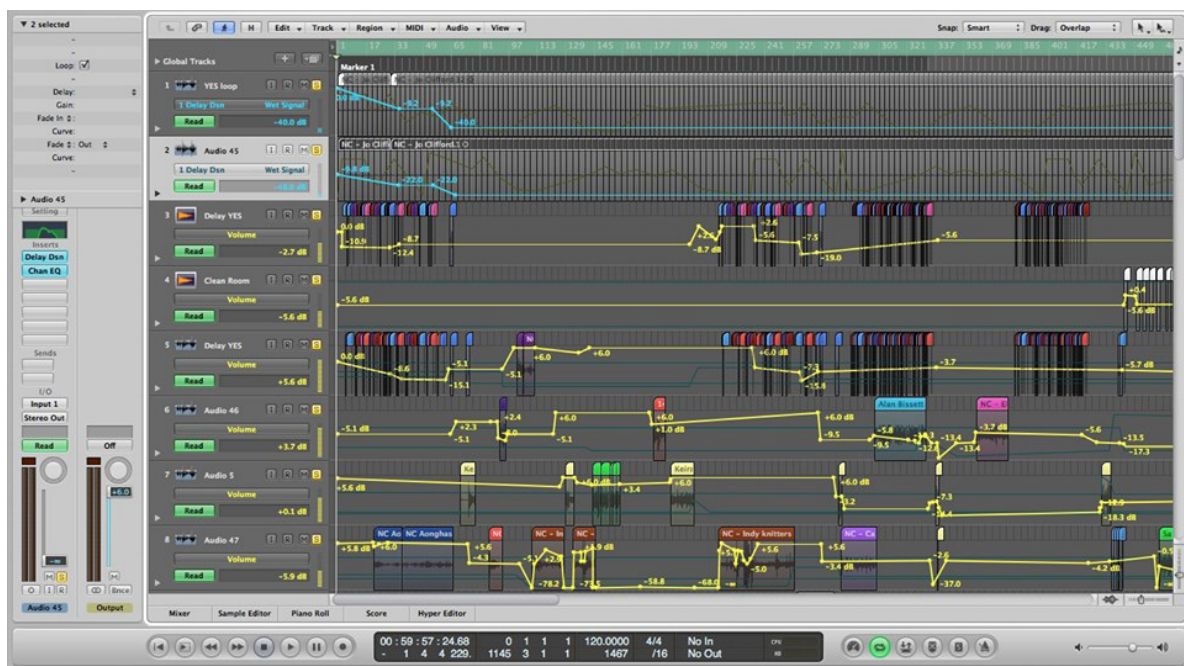
As a disabled person and composer I am interested in how power manifests itself, often through system design this relates both to the micro-systems of how we live our daily lives and the macro-systems of government. For me, creating systems which work for the people in them is more important than maintaining systems which support the most powerful. In this way we can think of disability justice in similar terms to self-determination. Because one is different it does not mean that one is wrong. And if one is different perhaps we need different ways of doing things. As Colin Barnes puts it, “this is about far more than simply ‘political correctness’. It’s about the

crucial issue of causality, the role of language, its normalising tendencies and the politicisation of the process of definition” (BARNES, 1999, 578).

Following on from the Social Model – which holds that disabled people are not *disabled* by their impairments, but by the way society is designed¹ –, I am interested in broadening design, relinquishing power and decision making and bring a group of voices together in the pieces I make.

This piece allowed me to take that role as a composer, putting together sounds which had been spoken by some people, recorded by others and then edited and selected for me by others (Fig. 2). In this way, the piece is a collection of decisions made by a group of people, some of whom knew each other and some of whom did not, but all of whom had a shared goal of independence. The power for decision-making in the piece is distributed amongst those involved. This takes my powerful role of composer, and distributes it amongst many voices, in a dismantling of hierarchy and centralised power.

Figure 2 : A snapshot of the editing process of the Yes soundscape.



Source: Amble Skuse personal archive.

1. On the social model, cf. the following quote by Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer: “The significance of disability theory and practice lies in its radical challenge to the medical or individual model of disability. The latter is based on the assumption that the individual is ‘disabled’ by their impairment, whereas the social model of disability reverses this causal chain to explore how socially constructed barriers (for example, in the design of buildings, modes of transport and communication, and discriminatory attitudes) have ‘disabled’ people with a perceived impairment” (BARNES; MERCER, 1997, p. 1).



I felt that this methodology reflected the sense of the independence movement in Scotland, which appeared to be a heterogeneous mass of grassroots movements, and political movements coming together with a shared intention. More recently this has been gathered semi-formally with the name All Under One Banner. This collection of different people, different visions, willing to work together with one project in mind is reflected in the title of my piece, *One No Many Yeses*. All those in the Yes campaign reject rule by Westminster in favour of independent Rule in Holyrood (Scotland's Parliament) but beyond that we have myriad visions of what the future may hold, how we would organise ourselves, what political direction we would take, which countries to align ourselves with, and how our votes would break down. We have one No and many Yeses. The title also reflects the many many people who told me Yes. Yes to a different future, Yes to a leap in the dark, Yes to working together, Yes to change, Yes to fairness, Yes to an independent country with control over its own laws and assets, Yes to Yes.

The piece explores how a composer can give voice to non-composers and use real audio to create a representation of the conversations found online and in the real world. *One No Many Yeses* weaves together ideas, passions, and encouragement from those people encountered in the Yes campaign; it is a demonstration of the grassroots energy of the Yes movement, and reflects a new way of doing business in Scotland's political world. A great shift has been made towards social media, speaking person to person rather than from the central campaign office downwards. I capture this in the piece by choosing to feature key politicians Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon² midway in the piece, once the sense of passion and hope has been expressed by other unnamed Yes voters.

The soundscape captures a moment in time, and voices which previously would have been lost to the wind are preserved, we hear the real voices of independence rather than those skewed by the national media, we share our thoughts, feelings and excitement for a better version of politics. The piece was made together, all contributing our own skills and visions, in the way that we would hope to build a new country, together.

2. It is important to note the way in which the independence movement has developed since this period in time. While Nicola Sturgeon has proven her credentials amongst the leaders of the world, Alex Salmond has been hit by many allegations of sexual harassment. How this will affect a second referendum is yet to be seen.

References

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