



photo by Laurie Amnderson,
page 47, opposite the title of
chapter 7: **Earshot**

So I built it and rigged it for sound. Inside the table were cassette decks and powerful drivers which compressed the pre-recorded sounds and and drove steel rods. The tip of the rods touched four knobs resembling pine knots embedded in the surface of the table. When you put your elbows on these plugs, the sound rose through your arms via bone conduction. When you put your hands on your ears, it was like on a pair of powerful stereo headphones.

So it was about our head becoming a speaker and, in a sense, an amplifier it is more like remembering sound that hearing it really because it's not out there in the air, you know, it's inside your head. I wanted to make songs that were more like remembering that listening. So it'd be more like you heard them somewhere before. And in the end the same physical gesture – the head in the hands – in it's invention as well as in its reception.

[...]

... I loved the symmetry. You heard the [sounds] using the same gesture involved in it's invention, closing the gesture your head in your hands, listening, listening through your bones.

Stories from the Nerve Bible (op cit), p. 48

selected illustrations from chap 7

Handphone Table, pp 46-49



"The Handphone Table," wood and electronics, 1978



Handphone Table is one of Anderson's earliest sculptural pieces. The work consists of a five-foot-long table incorporating a concealed sound-system which, in turn, emits low range vocal tones through one end of the structure and instrumental music at the other. Just like the sound-system that produces them, however, these sounds are hidden inside the work and are inaudible in the absence of a viewer. In order to access them the audience must not simply be present but actively engage with the sculpture by positioning his or her elbows onto two depressions on the tabletop and using their hands to cover their ears. Sharing wood's porous properties, the bones of the listener begin to serve as conductors which allow for the sound to travel through the arms to the ears and allow *Handphone Table*'s music and poetry to be heard. Anderson has said that the work was inspired by an experience she had whilst resting her head on her hands while using an electrical typewriter.

More than a sculpture, *Handphone Table* is an investigation into both sound and materials, informed by the artist's own musical training. But the work achieves also something else: it breaks with a tradition wherein the object of art is something to be *looked at*. In a manner similar to Anderson's later performances the body is made to function here "as a working part of the machine", as Erin Striff writes or, in this case, as a musical apparatus. "I tried to be as quirky as I

could," Anderson has said in relation to her early practice, elsewhere noting that, "at that time none of us thought we would ever be professional artists or that anyone would ever pay us for doing any of this. So it was this really crazy innocent moment". The work can therefore be said to represent the experimental scene and atmosphere in early 1970s New York, with precedents in the Dada movement, such as Marcel Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* from 1916.

MASS Moca, North Adams MA

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/anderson-laurie/artworks/>

Talking Pillows, p 49



Talking Pillows

Pillows with speakers inside
1977/1985

I'm lying in the dark now listening to a tape of gibberish recorded by a little girl who came over last week. She loved the "Talking Pillow" and wanted to make her own version. She recorded about an hour's worth and I'm hearing it all now but it's waking me up instead.



"What Burns" Talking Pillow, 1977

There's something very quiet going on in this pillow but it's buried under all the noise and I'm waiting here, just waiting, for something that, most likely has already happened.

from "Confessions of a Street Talker" 1975

Internet Reference:

<https://laurieanderson.com/>