3CR Binary Busting Broadcast
Sunday 21 March 2021, 4-4.30pm

*Inclusive Architecture*

 **Priya:** You're listening to the Binary Busting Broadcast on 3CR Community Radio 855 AM. This is an interview with Simona Castricum. Simona Castricum is an independent solo artist, one half of the duo SaD, and an underground DJ. She also runs the 100% independent record label Trans-Brunswick Express. As an educator and PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, her work explores queer intersections in architecture, music, the city, and public space. Simona is a community radio broadcaster at 3RRR Melbourne and an associate of Parlour: women, equity, architecture.

Thank you so much for joining me, Simona.

**Simona:** My pleasure, Priya. It's good to be with you.

**Priya:** Yes! I'm so keen for this discussion, because I think it is incredibly timely. So maybe before we jump into it, do you want to let listeners know a bit more about your own creative practice and your work?

**Simona:** Well, yeah, I guess I sort of – I'm trying to understand how music and architecture and gender are somewhat connected, in how I not only understand my own experience of space, and how I also formulate ideas and speculate, I guess, conditions within which to navigate space as a gender nonconforming person. So for me, like, there's this wonderful relationship between music and architecture that's always been ever-present for me. Music has this really fascinating way of articulating ideas about architecture and articulating ideas about gender that, you know, are sort of like outside the realm of what the academy wants you to do, or outside the realm of what neoliberal architecture wants me to do. You know, it's like I can articulate more about the experience of being gender nonconforming, or my experience of being gender nonconforming in the city, with a five minute-pop song at a show or at a festival, and that I can communicate that to so many more people. And I've had someone walk up to me after, like, Golden Plains and say exactly that, so the proof is sort of there for me.

But also, like, music connects to affective conditions in a way that words can't. And for me, I've always understood the experience of the city, and I guess speculations about space and the city, through the soundtrack and through cinema, and the relationship between sound and vision for me. So they've always just seemed, for me, to be very important methods of communication about architecture and space.

**Priya:** I'd be really interested if you could speak to the sort of trans production or experience of space, and the relationship between that and music.

**Simona:** Well, I mean, the first thing that I think of is, just as a musician, I occupy this space on a stage, and I think that within histories of gender nonconforming spatial production, if you like, a lot of it is around, like, performance, or it's around entertainment spaces. And so when I think about it in my own lifetime or my own context, you know, it is around performing. It is around releasing a record. It is around DJing. It is around also, like, dancing. So not only me, I guess, as the person on stage being the artist, but also the punter.

You know, but it's a space that we come together and we create community and we can enjoy, you know, art, and we listen to people's narratives. Those narratives are often a real window to the soul, but it's also where we pass down, I think, stories as well. And I think that tradition of being on stage, whether it be through drag or whether it be through cabaret or – and how gender nonconformity has really been such a huge part of that, I think, over the last, say, hundred years, in so many different cities around the world, and in so many different, you know, cultures as well.

But I guess, like, within my work I've been interested in how that informs, like, what we call in architecture and urban planning, I guess, like, urban morphology. And I'm interested in the evolution of the gender nonconforming city, and I'm interested in how cities give rise to a critical mass of gender nonconforming people and what conditions they experience. And the thing that I'm finding is that, you know, cities are a place of hostility for minorities across the board, and so from the perspective as a gender nonconforming person, I'm interested in how trans and gender diverse spatial production occurs within this relationship of risk and safety. And against that hostility, we still manage to find places of connections, of safety, of celebration, of protest, of resistance. And I'm looking at how – you know, how does that evolve over time? What is that sense of displacement? What is that sense of semi-permanence, or temporality? Like, how does temporality work within that?

But aside from that, I'm also looking at how architecture imposes hostility upon that as well. You know, if I look at architecture, I'm really looking at – I'm critiquing architecture and I'm interrogating architecture as this very neoliberal pursuit that imposes very strict conditions upon people.

**Priya:** You've been listening to an interview with Simona Castricum as part of 3CR's Binary Busting Broadcast. This is 'The Present' by Simona Castricum.

*['The Present' by Simona Castricum plays]*

**Priya:** And we're back on 3CR 855 AM, and as part of the Binary Busting Broadcast, I'm interviewing Simona Castricum. You just heard Simona's track 'The Present.'

**Simona:** You know, it's like on the weekend, like, I just went to LEFAG. You know, we occupied a basement and a loft of a four-storey building in the middle of the city, and our entry was off the rear laneway, which I think is an absolute fascinating way of occupying space and the interface that we have. It's like, a lot of people will malign what the city looks like from the street, say from its front door, but I almost feel like queer and trans spatial production is kind of like, we're always accessing space from the back door. You know what I mean?

**Priya:** Yeah.

**Simona:** You know, it's about how we sort of like – we're, like, trying to find the infill. We're occupying the basement. We're occupying the loft, the garage, all of these things. And you know, we'll make space in the gutter. We'll make space in the street. We'll make space in the park. All of these sorts of stuff, you know. And it's for seven hours over a night, a club will be a place that we can get together and hang out with each other and celebrate each other's music, celebrate our friendships. You know, Friday night was the first time so many of us, through lockdown, saw each other in a year. You know, it was completely overwhelming how many people I hadn't seen in so long, but that was the beauty of it as well. And, you know, I think if anything, lockdown just made me cherish those spaces so much, and just of how important they are.

You know, but they're also incredibly difficult spaces to be in. Like, they're not necessarily spaces for everybody, you know, I think, too. It's worth thinking about how clubs might be accessible for some people, but they're also not accessible for a lot of people as well. So I think there's still a way to go. I don't think that nightclubs, like, queer nightclubs are where everyone can meet. But I guess I am looking at how, at some point through our lives, we all get together, whether it be at the parade, or whether it be at the carnival in the park, and there is a whole different way that we can make these spaces accessible for our community. And I'm interested in how we can do that more as queer and trans people. You know, the whole ideas around 'safer space' and 'celebratory space' can – like, for who? For how many people, you know?

**Priya:** Yes, because I think especially when we think about mainstream discussions around producing safer spaces or what a safe space might look like, a lot of it comes down to just bare aesthetics – you know, chucking up a flag, putting up a slogan – but obviously it's so much more than that.

**Simona:** Yeah. Well, you know, a lot of people say to me, like, 'What's an example of a space that's safe for trans and gender diverse people?' Or they ask, like, 'What's queering architecture?' And I'm just like – it's not what it looks like. For me, it's like – how does this space feel? Do I feel included? Do I feel as if me or my cohort or the diversity within which my cohort sort of – how that is represented. Like, has that been considered? And so ideas of surface and texture and form and spatial considerations, I think they're a really privileged discussion in architecture, and they're not really discussions that I can even get to as an architect.

I'm sure I could contribute to them, you know, because obviously I'm more than my transness within architecture, but, you know, someone asked me a question a couple of weeks ago. Like, 'Why is this so important for you to speak about, around relationships of trans spatial production or queer spatial production?' And I'm like, 'Well, because we are excluded from space in no uncertain terms, and it's doing serious damage.' So yes, I might have the capacity to design a villa here or there, but I'm sort of not interested in that at the moment, because at the moment we've got just over 7 out of 10 trans and gender diverse people are having trouble accessing a bathroom, and that's not acceptable.

You know, most cis people will take 90 seconds to access a bathroom front door by the time their body tells them that they need to use a bathroom, and they will get to that bathroom, and there's a whole range of things that they won't have to consider. They won't have to consider their own safety. They won't have to consider whether they're gonna be kicked out. They won't have had to have changed the food or drink that they've consumed. All of these things that we have to consider as trans and gender diverse people that cis people don't have to consider for the most part. So, you know, that's 90 seconds. And if the trans tipping point was seven years ago, well, how long should it wait to use the bathroom without having to worry about any of those things? Like, the humanity in the conversation is just ridiculous.

**Priya:** Yeah. I feel like in the sort of institutional environments we have to navigate on a daily basis, just the ask of being able to take a piss in peace and to not have to go through that whole rigmarole of being like, 'Am I presenting in a way that will allow me to use this bathroom safely? Can I present in a way that will prevent people from interrogating me for using this space?', I think really speaks to the hostility of so much architecture in terms of the way that trans people are able to move through space, move through spaces that are physically coded for cis people.

**Simona:** Yeah, and that's the limitation of the conversation, that cis people only want to have that conversation, because that's the only context within which they could possibly understand trans and gender diverse rights. You know, if we're thinking before about the temporality – we were talking about that before – you know, there are words that I kind of bring my PhD back to, and it's safety, belonging, and permanence. So I guess 'safety' is, like, free to be without having our personal safety, you know, being a threat. 'Belonging' as in, like, do I belong here? But then also 'permanence', and the idea of permanence is that: are our rights permanent? You know, the fact that people think that our rights are still a debate, it only means that we're just constantly having to frame our existence and our rights, and constantly having to defend ourselves, and that those rights can be taken away from us at any point, because the political system is so polarised, and it's as if we're a partisan debate. And, you know, the rights that one regime can bring in can immediately be taken away from us at one point, and so there's so much anxiety and uncertainty that we live with as that exists around us.

**Priya:** Yeah, that really has me thinking about the notion of visibility, trans visibility, especially with the Trans Day of Visibility coming up, and yeah, thinking about the importance of having a trans-centred discussion on visibility and how we move through space.

**Simona:** As architects, we talk about spaces as, I guess, typologies. You know, like, the railway station has a certain iconography to it. It has a certain visual to it. It's a space that we – and the bathroom as well. So, you know, like, we know what a bathroom looks like. We know what a railway station looks or feels like, or even a sports stadium or a supermarket or an airport or any of these things. And so as we approach these spaces, we have our own archives of experience, and our visibility in those spaces has a direct effect upon our own experience of that.

You know, I mean, the airport is one that I really – that is a really important thing to talk about, as far as I'm concerned. A lot of people want to talk about bathrooms and I'm like, 'Let's talk about airports. Let's talk about being visible in an airport.' My goodness. Being trans and gender diverse and being visible in an airport, for me, is one of the most frightening experiences, because my body is contested. My identity is contested. The identification that informs all of that, that goes back to my own citizenship, is contested. And the spatial design, and the way that that goes back to everything from security, everything to surveillance, all of these things – like, visibility is a huge component of the airport.

That whole idea of visibility is completely determined by cisnormative heteronormative ideas of the compliant body. You know, what I'd give to, you know, queue up and check my baggage in and just be like, 'Oh, I'm just thinking about the tour.' You know, and just thinking about sitting on a beach somewhere and having a great time. It's like, no, I'm absolutely terrified about the experience of passing through a security checkpoint and what's possibly going to happen. And I've had some of the most, you know, frightening experiences. Our visibility in urban space and our visibility in architecture in the city, like, has a direct impact upon our capacity to enjoy space. So our fears and anxieties of architecture and space are critical to our relationship of visibility.

**Priya:** You're listening to the Binary Busting Broadcast on 3CR 855 AM. This is 'Panic/Desire' by Simona Castricum.

*['Panic/Desire' by Simona Castricum plays]*

And we're back on 3CR 855 AM's Binary Busting Broadcast. That was 'Panic/Desire' by Simona Castricum.

Just as we come to a close, could you let us know where listeners can find more of your work, where they can listen to your music, and also whether you have any shows coming up that people might want to attend?

**Simona:** Yeah, well, I'm playing at the Music Bowl in Melbourne, so Sidney Myer Music Bowl next Sunday 27 March with MESS live at the Bowl. And then rescheduled shows for Melbourne Music Week, which is going to be the performance of my PhD at the Capitol, and that's – I think it's the 12th of April, perhaps. And yeah, I mean, I'm on all the good streaming services, I guess, and, you know, bad streaming services. I don't know. I'm not sure if they're all evil, but yeah.

**Priya:** Thank you so, so much again. It's always lovely to speak with you.

**Simona:** Thanks, Priya.

**Priya:** That was an interview with Simona Castricum, who's an independent solo artist, one half of the duo SaD, and an underground DJ. She runs the 100% independent record label Trans-Brunswick Express, and is an educator and PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, exploring queer intersections in architecture, music, the city, and public space. Simona is a community radio broadcaster at 3RRR Melbourne, and is an associate of Parlour: women, equity, architecture.