

Gossip: a feminist sonic technology

This reader contains quotes, recommendations, and points to think about concerning gossip.

You will find here transcript of the track as well as web and book resources.

Voiceover

Did you hear that humans developed their language to be able to gossip? //

As the time passed gossip has proven itself to be a powerful tool for women to share their realities and struggles. /

From stories about abusive husbands to their general unhappiness.//

They could share and accumulate wisdom, and learn about the world together. //

Guess what came next... Capital accumulating, men needed their women tamed, tied to their kitchen, taking care of their kids. /

They had to destroy these emerging solidarity networks and turn women against each other. //

Isolate them in the confinement of the household//

So the witch hunts came/

and women who refused this deal, were burned.//

What worse could there be than women sitting in a pub or foraging in the woods, dreaming about brighter futures, building resilience, taking care of each other? //

To gossip became a vulgar act of the unsophisticated, the lowest form of talk. /

The saddest thing you know is that we are still taught that gossiping is a "problematic" and that most of the gossip is spread by women out of envy or boredom./

Can you imagine?! /

No matter how useful its insights or challenges, we keep it from public acknowledgment that gossip is a path to knowledge as well as a means of knowledge preservation. //

Hey but don't you think it's just women gossiping. /

We all gossip and we should be open about it. enjoy it. The whole society is build and running on gossip.//

We just have to think about how and why we do it./

While gossiping we create a liminal space in which the publicly unsay-able, or unthinkable, gets said or thought.//

We all add to a collective form of memory, a database based on intimacy we can be proud of. //

It allows us to ask for the help of the many so that we don't have to walk into unequal confrontations alone. //

So repeat after me:

gossip is a feminist sonic technology of collectiveness, communication, community building and care and I embrace it.///

#Gossip as feminist technology x invisible gossip as means to stay in power

#Represented as idle women talk x transformative tool x fake news/patriarchal tool

(as powerful men do gossip to keep their power but do it in a way that does not read as gossiping)

#Gossip as means of collective memory and intergenerational knowledge transmission

#Contemporary views on gossip in media/pop culture are blinded by the patriarchal/capitalist propaganda now

List of web resources

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gossip>

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/gossip-grrr/can-celebrity-gossip-ever-be-feminist>

<https://jezebel.com/>

<https://inthesetimes.com/article/the-subversive-feminist-power-of-gossip>

~ excerpt from Silvia Federici's book, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*.

<https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/gossip-and-feminist-solidarity/9036>

<http://www.kellereasterling.com/content/1-articles/47-rumor/rumor.pdf>

~ more of a critical design reading, Easterling doesn't put gossip vs rumor in context but views it as a tool of construing politics.

<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>

***Gossip, Epistemology, And Power, Knowledge Underground* by Karen Adkins**

~it elaborates deeply on the definition and kinds of gossip, it explores its history and its role in society as well as discusses "weaponized" gossip and its harmful consequences.

excerpts /notes

- Gossip can be a liminal space in which the publicly unsay-able, or unthinkable, gets said or thought—ideas can be tested in gossip.
- No matter how useful its insights or challenges, we keep it from public acknowledgment. Gossip is a path to knowledge
- We will see examples of empowered gossip repeated invisibly, because it circulates without the label of gossip: it is a report on a blog or anonymous sourcing in the New York Times. In other words, because gossip thrives at the nexus between public and private, and often criticizes or debunks power, it can function in very different ways for the powerless and the powerful.
- By contrast, we will see many examples of what I call "invisible gossip," where those who already have public authority and credibility use the tools of gossip to demean and diminish their critics, but what fits the rhetorical markers of gossip goes unrecognized as such, being instead labeled "news," "reports about the profession," or anonymous sourcing.
- As linguist Jennifer Coates notes in her thorough analysis of women friends' conversations (1996), conversation is more like a "jam session"; individual voices trade riffs, and melodies, and a voice of the group emerges over any single speaker
- Gossip, in its orality, is (or simulates) intimacy; it is not didactic or pedantic. The more conventional accounts of gossip as mere storytelling seem more appropriate to rumor, which works via anonymity
- That gossip's three subjects are "love, crime, and money," which on its surface suggests an utterly personal limitation. But money isn't simply about how much a person earns, or how one displays their wealth. Americans, in particular, spend a substantial part of their waking hours at work, and work forms a large part of American identity. Of course, we gossip at work, about work—it is a relevant professional tool. To ignore these kinds of episodes as irrelevant draws a circle around gossip that seems to ignore its own practice through history.
- Gossip can be generative and creative in its sharing (connecting ideas that we would otherwise see as disconnected, revealing perspectives that are too often diminished), and equally, gossip can be destructive (poisoning the well of speakers or positions, subtly undermining credibility or authority).
- The initial purpose of language, according to Robin Dunbar, is simply "checking in" with one another—small talk about how we are, where we are, that serves the same purposes grooming does, of intimacy, pleasure, closeness, location, and community (123). Dunbar's contention is basic; "language evolved to allow us to gossip"
- Talking too much, too freely, too extravagantly, too physically (too femininely) represents a moral danger.
- Virgil observes the same physicality and uncontrollability others see in gossip: rumor is the "swiftest of all the evils in the world," mixes fact and fable indiscriminately, and is a "sordid goddess," promiscuously infecting others with her manipulations
- Reflects its origins in intimacy; as something that operates from a space of privacy, secrecy, and vulnerability, it can nurture or damage relationships.
- The American colonies and much of Europe during the medieval era had elaborate legal or theological proce-

dures in place for both utilizing and disciplining gossip

- Gossip, as I've contended, isn't automatically positive or negative; it is the product of intimacy and trust. But gossip can become negative—can be an effective force for reputation destruction—in part because of the context in which it occurs. Excessive gossip, overly negative gossip, paranoid gossip are, I believe, inevitable consequences of avoidable features of our social world, such as excessive insularity, turbulent power structures, an absence of trust in official or reliable information. Recognizing these features, how they appear over and over again in episodes of toxic gossip, and what they signify, is a worthwhile task.
- One obvious marker of weaponized gossip is its spread; gossip can destroy reputations because it does not stay secret. But why does it spread so rapidly or so broadly? Recall that one of the useful functions gossip can provide is in context—it fleshes out stories of what happens and what it means, connects people's private acts to their public stands. By contrast, weaponized gossip often functions to eliminate or minimize context: one detail, fact, or story becomes all-consuming. If gossip is evaluative, intimate talk about someone or something, one of the markers of gossip in general is its looseness, its lack of order, its direction. {...} Weaponized gossip is more directly and consistently aimed at a single person or institution; in particular, at a single behavior (or set of behaviors)

***Gossip, Letters, Phones The Scandal Of Female Networks In Film And Literature*, Ned Schantz**

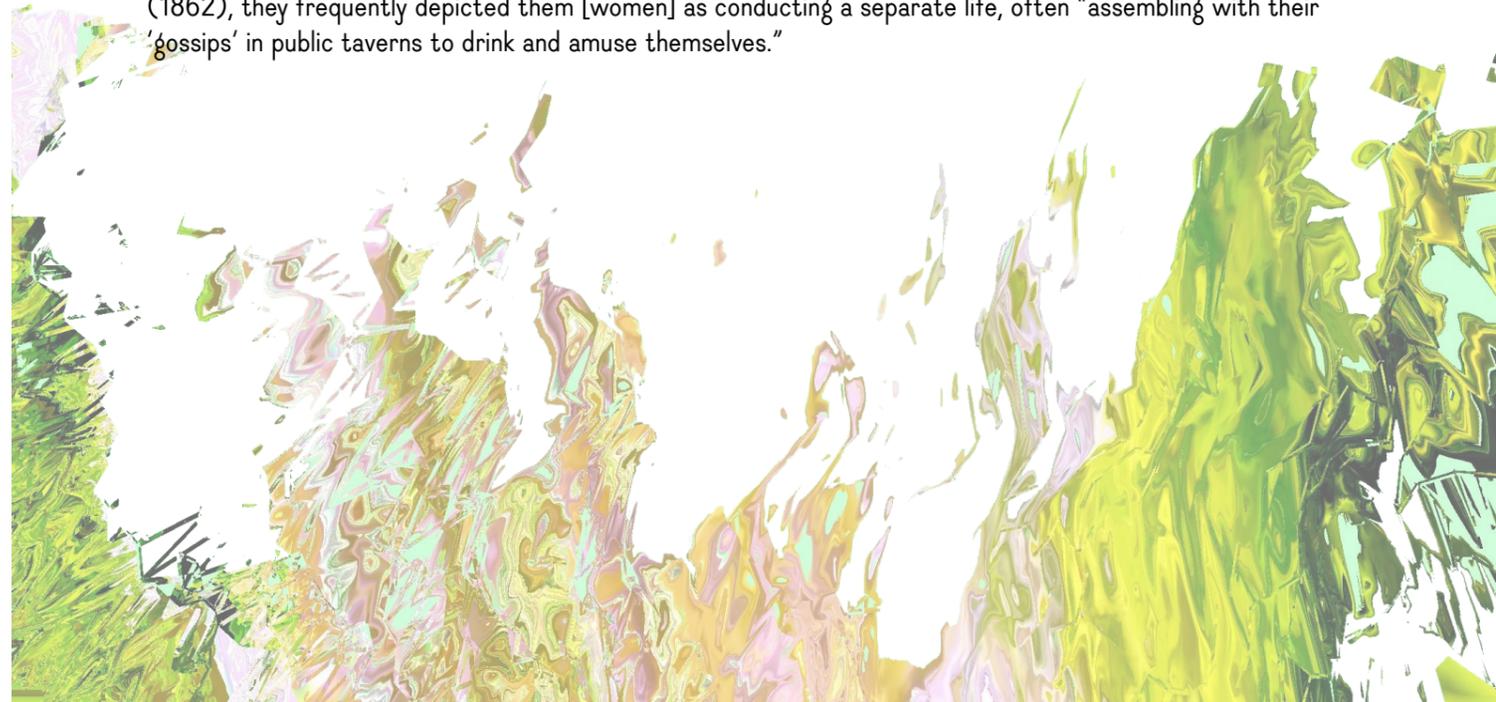
~Ned Schantz (cultural studies teacher) shows how female networks are depicted in pop culture

- Female networking appears in the strictest sense as a model of proto-feminist action.
- Culturally, it is an old trick, converting female networks from a source of strength into a point of vulnerability.

***Witches, Witch-Hunting, And Women* by Silvia Federici excerpts/notes:**

„This conception of 'gossip,' as we have seen, emerged in a particular historical context. Viewed from the perspective of other cultural traditions, this 'idle women's talk' would actually appear quite different. In many parts of the world, women have historically been seen as the weavers of memory—those who keep alive the voices of the past and the histories of the communities, who transmit them to the future generations and, in so doing, create a collective identity and profound sense of cohesion. They are also those who hand down acquired knowledges and wisdoms—concerning medical remedies, the problems of the heart, and the understanding of human behavior, starting with that of men. Labeling all this production of knowledge 'gossip' is part of the degradation of women—it is a continuation of the demonologists' construction of the stereotypical woman as prone to malignity, envious of other people's wealth and power, and ready to lend an ear to the Devil.”

- Thomas Wright reports in *A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England During the Middle Ages* (1862), they frequently depicted them [women] as conducting a separate life, often "assembling with their 'gossips' in public taverns to drink and amuse themselves."

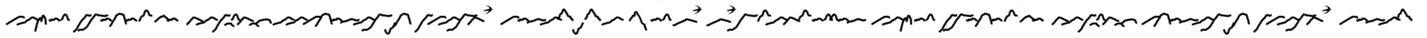


text i wrote for the Dedicated to my gossips piece

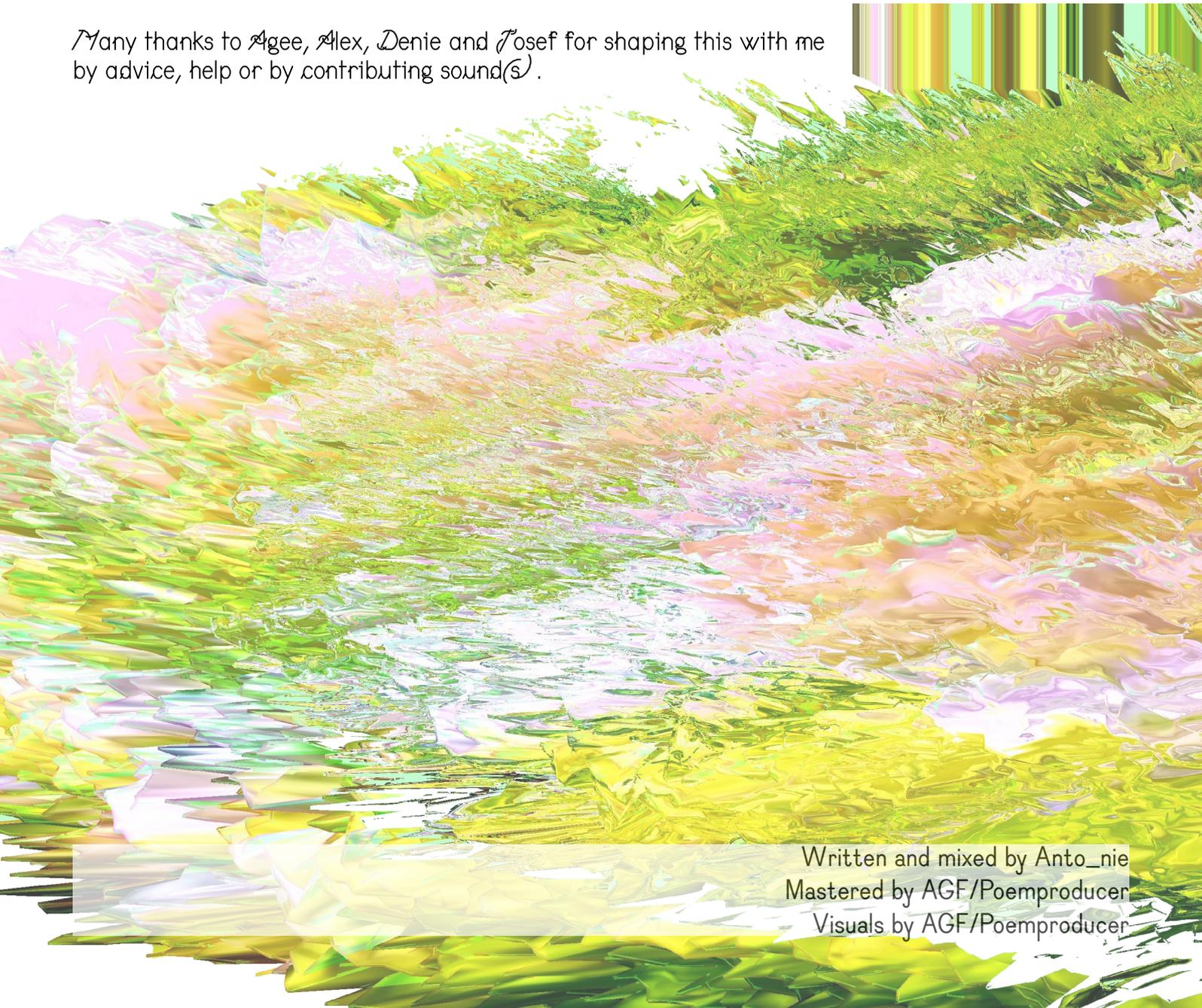
Same as fungi are interconnected via the complex web of mycelium, we circulate information in our non-physical webs. Everything you say or do comes back to you. Information flows through memories and causes reaction. Our individual experiences and knowledge form a collective form of memory, a database based on intimacy. They said that, but she advised this and now you add your experience to the mix. We connect on and offline. We have platforms for “is there anyone going from brno to prague?” and for “does anyone have a phone they don’t need right now?” or for “do you know someone in Munich? I need a place to sleep there.” And our web of contacts responds. We also have less public webs, those that spread through whispers from one to another. We share together our struggles and search for solutions as well as pleasure and joy. We care about each other in our thoughts, words, and actions.

In introduction to social science, I’ve learned a person can keep in touch and cultivate relationships with up to 100 people. In my webs of facebook acquaintances, instagram profiles and my closest intimate relationships I know people I’ve never seen. People from art world, people of importance to my close ones, acquaintances of my acquaintances whom I accidentally met or exes of exes of my friends.

In this work [dedicated to my gossips, 2020] I’ve conducted interviews with people I gossip with. As I was interested in finding what it actually means to us and what are the reasons behind spending time talking about others. Key frame for me was the work of Silvia Federici who conducted research into the origins of witch hunting which she finds among other aspects connected to the changes of meaning of the word gossip; originating as a word for a godparent, then for a close female friend until eventually gaining the meaning of “idle female talk” and being used as means of oppression.



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