

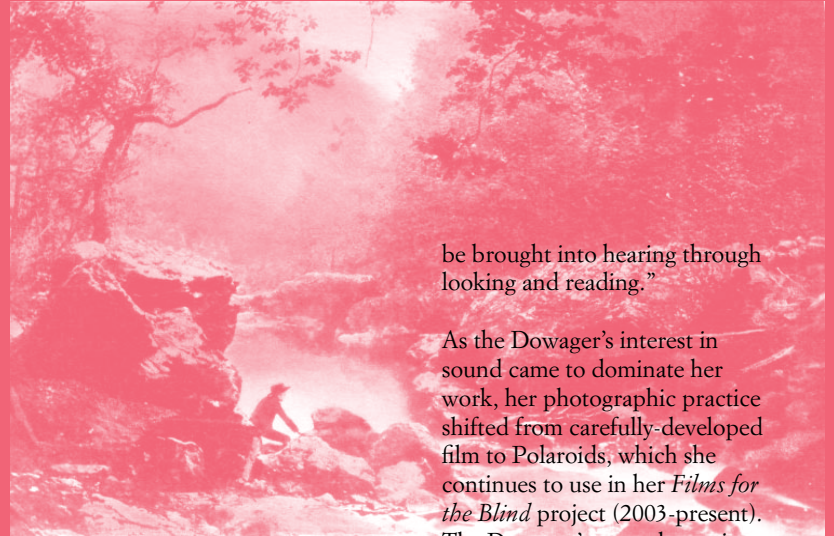
**The Dowager Marchylove**

The Dowager Marchylove “erupted full-grown from the forehead of Archbishop Jack Fox in 1997, blossoming into the world like a gleaming ivory flower and bringing with her a bad, bad love for all the dirty sounds.” One of the most successful alter egos used by the multimedia performance artist Niall Quinlan, the Dowager Marchylove promenades into the present as a sonic ecologist whose gowns are usually louder than the sounds surrounding her. She is an emissary from the nineteenth century, in appearance a female dandy—a *quaintrelle*—in practice a musical flâneur, a bearded diva whose leisurely practice of walking and listening helps us understand the city, a knowing provocateur for whom The Square shopping centre is the richest of arcades and the broadest of canvases.

The Dowager Marchylove’s artistic practice initially centred on photographs and text. *It’s Not You—It’s Me* (1997), for example, is a series of photographs of locations where individuals had been “unceremoniously dumped,” combined with related texts. Her approach toward the “excavation

of the everyday” continued in *I Want to Believe* (1998), a series of photographs of sites where UFOs had been spotted in South Dublin County, and *Oh! Tom Cruise!* (1999), which documents the places where several of the Dowager’s friends had lost their virginity. The Dowager’s practice of “the photography of absence and descriptive commemoration” expanded radically in 2001 as a result of two events: attending a Deep Listening retreat given by Pauline Oliveros and becoming friends with Grúpat members The Parks Service and O’Brien Industries.

After meeting The Parks Service, the Dowager radically reconsidered her practice. She had studied piano and violin as a child, and had written songs and music for her performance art and cabaret shows—building upon this, she now started using sound in her work, beginning with *A Child’s Album of Noise*, a piece for multiple child pianists. *A Child’s Album of Noise* was scored for eight of Flor Hartigan’s piano students, all of whom lived very close to each other in Tallaght. On



be brought into hearing through looking and reading.”

As the Dowager’s interest in sound came to dominate her work, her photographic practice shifted from carefully-developed film to Polaroids, which she continues to use in her *Films for the Blind* project (2003-present). The Dowager’s textual practice underwent a similar transformation: along with the haiku-like descriptions that she appends to the *Flâneur du Klang* Polaroids (“water mills itself into bubbling domes”), the Dowager began to write and collect short textual descriptions of sound. These texts are gathered in an index for *Films for the Blind* and have been drawn on for a variety of different projects, including *The Kennels* (2008), an installation created in collaboration with Bulletin M where the artists hid a geocache filled with The Dowager’s dice scores in the Dublin

the day of the performance, the children went to their individual homes, opened the windows of the rooms they practiced in, and played the piece precisely at 4pm. The Dowager describes the impact of this piece on her practice: “During the performance I walked around, listening, photographing the sound of those pianos floating delicately on the air. Up to that point I had focused on the memory of events, but *A Child’s Album of Noise* made me interested in the memory of sounds, an absence which could



16.—Lady's Veil in Net and Tatting.



mountains, then invited the public to find the cache and take a score.

The most important aspect of the Dowager's recent text work is her sound poetry, composed in response to specific walks in South Dublin. As the quintessential flâneur Baudelaire immortalised a brief encounter with a woman in the streets of Paris in *À une passante*, so do the Dowager's sound poems strive to seize and glorify the sounds she hears on her peregrinations. The Dowager's practice differs from that of the nineteenth-century flâneur, however. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes of the decline of the arcade and with it of flânerie, of how "the department store is the last promenade for the flâneur." For the Dowager, on the contrary, this is the beginning—her promenade extends throughout the streets of Dublin, through shopping centres to bus-stops and in and out of housing estates. In her 2008 suite *The Wasistas*

*of Thereswhere, That Blows in all the Vallums* and *Let's all Wake Brickfaced*, we see the Dowager treading a path through Tallaght to the Hellfire Club, walking north along the path of eskers, traversing Clondalkin to the Twelfth Lock of the Grand Canal; moving, being, listening, present in the moment and echoing that moment back in a continuously shifting blend of sound, text and image.



