
EDITORIAL

How can, or does, electroacoustic and sound-based music ‘rethink’ environmental aesthetics? Can sound-based music, and writing on it, contribute to the eco-critical debate? What is sonic ecology in art? These were the questions posed as suggested areas for discussion in the original call for contributions to this themed issue on *Sound, Listening and Place*.

With a nod also to literary theorist Timothy Morton’s critique of the ecocritical oeuvre – to his mind often guilty of reproducing the very ‘romanticisation’ of nature it purports to debate – one might ask some awkward questions of sonic art and music that engages with our listening responses to the environment. For instance, do ‘eco’ approaches to recorded sound and place purvey a kind of sonic tourism, risking a suspiciously colonialist premise? Are the tenets of acoustic ecology and ‘soundscape’ composition in danger of being, or having been, romanticised – emanations of a particular cadre of thinkers and makers, themselves a little mythologised by succeeding generations? How are we moving forwards, and perhaps more importantly outwards, building on and incorporating these valuable foundations? How are other disciplines informing sound-based music, and in turn being informed by the arts of ‘sonic organisation’?

These are just some of the many and various burning questions one might ask in relation to sound, listening and place, in the context of organised sound, and there are probably enough more to keep us in conversation for a very long time – at least I hope so. We have the opportunity and the means to nurture listening cultures, if we find a place to sit down together, and keep talking. And as these pages, and those of *Sound, Listening and Place II*, which is to be published in a year’s time, attest there is certainly no shortage of topics to discuss. When the enthusiastic (almost overwhelming) flood of responses to the call came in, it quickly became apparent that thinking among theorists, writers, scholars, composers and sonic artists is both diverse and informed by many different disciplines – an enormously encouraging situation, to my mind. It was also clear that there are common sub-themes, and not least of these is a passion for what sound, and listening to sound, can bring to both personal and community experience of the world.

I am very grateful to Leigh Landy and to Cambridge University Press, for generously allowing a collection of publication-worthy submissions, the number of which was much higher than expected, concerned with exploring and extending territories to spread out voraciously to encompass two issues. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all the reviewers, who so willingly gave up their time to provide astute and helpful readings and re-readings of all submissions, and of course to all those who submitted papers. It was truly the case that interesting papers with significant potential could not be accommodated this time, and some difficult decisions had to be made.

The title for this thematic issue of the journal, *Sound, Listening and Place* was a deliberate choice that placed ‘listening’ firmly between the means and interpretation. For though we may hear things, it is listening that helps to put the sensory experience into a comprehensible, bounded context – to place it. Listening, I can know where I am; and, even if I do not know, I know that I am somewhere. The particular emphasis in the original call was on listening in the context of environment and of more ‘ecologically’ aware creative investigations. Given the journal’s focus on electroacoustic and sound-based music it was to be expected that the majority of contributions came from those working in these areas. But no approach or discipline was excluded and it has been inspiring to encounter other adventures, appropriate to the remit to present original research of relevance to the journal.

The first part of this double-issue collection opens with two papers which, in differing ways, are concerned with listening responses to natural sound, and to recordings of them in and as aesthetic experience. David Michael takes Morton’s critique of ‘high fidelity’ recording as ‘inevitably ignor[ing] the subject’ as a starting point for a review of critiques of nature recording and, in turn, the responses to these critiques. Michael’s focus is on nature recordings as themselves a ‘framing’ of the natural world, and on the implications when – as in some of the work by artists such as Dunn and López – that frame is deliberately ‘flipped’ from the prevailing preoccupation with natural beauty to expose the more usually excluded and ‘ugly’ sounds. The ‘dark nature’ recording aesthetic proposed thus challenges the listener to attend to the more disquieting sounds of

environmental change. Michelle Nagai also considers 'nature recordings' but here as relevant to a close examination of two works, by Frances White and Annea Lockwood. Both works are concerned, interestingly, with rivers, themselves boundaries of place that often announce themselves through sound. Nagai's investigation examines bodily response to sound and listening, both specifically in relation to each artist's creative process, and as central in the composition of materials.

Seth Ayyaz Bhunnoo's contribution continues the themes of field recording and personal listening response, here underpinning a wide-ranging essay that tackles cultural 'expectations' of sound, recording and music. His reflections on the experience of collecting sounds for his work *The Bird Ghost at the Zaouia* are the starting point for consideration of some complex, interlocking ethical issues. Part field-recording 'diary', part cultural (and musical) analysis, part self-interrogation, this is one of several contributions that places listening beyond sound. Dan Scott's paper similarly approaches recorded sounds as meaningful 'ghosts' of time and place. But he inverts the norm with his description of an idiosyncratic installation project that traces a psycho-geographic journey between a 'past' London that no longer exists and the 'homogenous' greyness Scott sometimes perceives in recordings of urban city sounds. His account addresses the absence-presence of places that no longer exist and can only be imagined, and highlights the place of memory – another theme that recurs regularly throughout this collection. It is, for instance, especially evident in Iain Foreman's account of research undertaken in the abandoned villages of the Ara Valley, in Spain.

Matthew Burtner regards the topic of environmental sound through an ecocritical lens, here via an eloquent description of several site-based environmental art projects, and uses this practice-based research to theorise a philosophy of ecoacoustic sound art. He stresses 'in-person' engagement with the world, extending from an acknowledged influence of the work of Schafer and the World Soundscape Project's original work. Indeed, in-person listening relationships to sound and place are a constantly bubbling sub-theme in this and the companion issue, and the two papers that follow, by Solène Marry and Heikki Uiomonen respectively, each provide accounts of practical and theoretical research projects that track individual experience of the everyday 'soundscape'. Both build on previous work: in Marry, the examination of urban sonic environments in Southworth as well as Augoyard and Torgue's research on everyday listening; in Uiomonen, Schafer's acoustic ecology and in particular soundwalking as a listening practice. Concentrating on the ethics of the 'uses and abuses' of sound, and the way sound and listening to it affect the

way that individuals and communities construct their surroundings, Uiomonen makes a case for educating the general public into 'soundscape' listening as a means of social renewal. While Marry similarly values the concept of 'soundscape theory', she considers its roots in landscape theory in general. Drawing on parallel theories of spatial 'sonic space', she posits mind maps as a tool transferable to the sonic domain. In their contrasting approaches, the two authors separately consider community 'health', and how a tutored listening 'aestheticising' the sonic environment can be beneficial to individuals.

Definitions of 'soundscape' are somewhat hard to pin down, and there sometimes seems little consensus as to what exactly the word is intended to convey, or the field of study to encompass. There are those who find the word, and the field, somewhat restrictive, tending towards the opinion of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who in his polemic 'Against Soundscape' (2007) pleads for researchers to abandon the concept, for fear we might 'lose touch with sound in just the same way that visual studies have lost touch with light'. I tend to side somewhat with Ingold, although on the other hand we do need words to get along. My hope is that through sustained, truly multidisciplinary research our boundaries may continue to shift and extend, so enlarging the places where listening as art takes place. And as this happens shared vocabularies will strengthen and establish, and others may become no longer critical to discourse. We already have words for the preoccupations that drive the work: themes such as recording, memory, travel, community and social health are integral to this endeavour, not additional – just as listening is integral, and indivisible, from the rest of sensory immersion.

The final two papers in this issue each affirm this in their approach and subject matter, though they could not be more unlike. Both reference soundscape studies, yet swiftly strike out across broader terrain. Iain Foreman, an anthropologist, cultural theorist and musician, presents soundscape as 'testimony', here to lost communities and their lost sounds. His multidisciplinary travel is itself a literary feat, incorporating aspects of history and memoir, personal involvement and anthropological research. Paying homage to W.G. Sebald, he notes how the author's hybrid literary forms provided the means of exploiting 'memory work' to tell difficult and often fragmented stories of exile and loss. The final contribution to the first part of this two-part issue is by Freeman, DiSalvo, Nitsche and Garret, who take soundscape composition out of the domain of fixed recording and into that of mobile, locative media and means. Inspired not only by traditional acoustic ecology studies but by site-specific art, their account of their participatory work, *UrbanRemix*, propels listening and collaborative creativity to the fore, and in doing so also addresses just one direction we might take from here.

A good place to pause, ears wide open, in anticipation of further listening in *Sound, Listening and Place II*.

REFERENCE

Ingold, T. 2007. *Against Soundscape*. In Angus Carlyle (ed.) *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*. Paris: Double Entendre.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The response to the call for submissions for this issue of *Organised Sound* broke all previous records by quite some distance. Clearly Katharine Norman's call was extremely effective and the subject timely. After the various rounds of peer review, it has been

decided to distribute the content related to this theme over two issues, 16/3 and 17/3 (December 2012). The content of both will go online more or less simultaneously in 2011; the print version and the DVD media content of 17/3 will be published next year. The long delay between the two has to do with the fact that the calls for 17/1 *Networked Electroacoustic Music* and 17/2 *Composing Motion: A visual music retrospective* were distributed before the peer review process of 16/3 was completed. All authors in 17/3 are aware of the print delay and the early appearance of their articles on the journal's website. It is for this reason that we have called this issue *Sound, Listening and Place I* and the following one *Sound, Listening and Place II*. Thanks to Katharine for taking on a larger burden than most editors have had, to the many reviewers and to all who submitted their work.

Leigh Landy