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# Phonographies: Practical and Theoretical Explorations into Composing with Disembodied Sound

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University of Plymouth

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***Phonographies:***

**Practical and Theoretical Explorations into Composing with Disembodied Sound**

by

**John Levack Drever B.Mus, M.Mus**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
In partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Dartington College of Arts

**August 2001**

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# Abstract

**Candidate's Name:** John Levack Drever B.Mus, M.Mus

**Title of Thesis:** *Phonographies*: Practical and Theoretical Explorations into Composing with Disembodied Sound

This PhD submission is both practical and theoretical. The practical element consists of nine electroacoustic compositions. The dissertation acts as a discursive accompaniment to the compositions, addressing many of the contextual and philosophical issues that have arisen during the compositional process and the performance of the works. It charts out discourse surrounding the different genres of electroacoustic music that the works relate to as well as examining models of work in the respective genres (i.e. sonic art, text-sound, acousmatic composition, *musique concrète* and soundscape composition), and places them into a broader cultural and historical context.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the impact of the advent of, and subsequent rapid development of electroacoustically mediatized sound on society and the individual. It relates a diverse mix of conjectures on disembodied sound from different fields, practices and cultures, including sonic art.

Chapter 3 explores the emerging genre of soundscape composition. After dealing with the genre's lineage and accompanying discourse by composers of soundscape, it develops a relationship between the practice of soundscape composition and contemporary ethnographic practice and theory on ethnographic methodologies. The final section develops a soundscape compositional process with the practice of the *flâneur*.

Chapter 4 relates the aesthetics of acousmatic music to philosophical, physiological and spiritual notions of the sublime throughout the ages. It concludes that acousmatic music has a distinct role to play in imparting sublime experiences.

Chapter 5 documents and comments on those projects, which were undertaken with the following performers/ writers/ collaborators: Alaric Sumner, Alice Oswald and Tony Lopez. These projects demonstrate a number of different collaborative relationships between composer and writer and different configurations of acousmatic music and poetry.

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I dedicate this dissertation to the life and work of Alaric Sumner (1952-2000), a teacher, collaborator and friend, who has played an absolutely crucial role in the development of my thinking and making.

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

The study was financed in part by a part-time fee waiver for three years from Dartington College of Arts.

The composition *Soundings of Angel* (2000) was commissioned by the *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel - Groupe de Recherches Musicales*, Paris and was composed in part in their studios at *Maison de Radio France*, Paris.

Five of the nine compositions submitted in the portfolio of practical work are the result of interdisciplinary collaboration or contingent on dialogue and creative input with artists from other disciplines.

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- Presented at the *International Symposium on Electronic Arts 1998*, Revolution, John Moores University, Liverpool.

- Published in *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music Technology* Volume 4, Number 1, April 1999, Cambridge University Press.

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An early version of Chapter 4 of the thesis was published in the proceedings and presented at *Music Without Walls? Music Without Instruments?* De Montfort University, 2001, Leicester.

### **Selected Performances of Practical Work Submitted in Portfolio:**

*out of image (sandra blow):*

- *A Quality of Light Festival*, The New Millennium Gallery, St Ives, 1997

*Hippocampus:*

- *1st Sonic Arts Network Conference*, 1998, Birmingham University
- *SEAMUS Electro-Acoustic Music Week*, 1998, University of Florida
- *Sound Practice: the 1st UKISC conference on sound, culture and environments*, 2001, Dartington Hall & Dartington College of Arts, Dartington
- *Futura 99*, le Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, France
- *Naked Nave*, 2001, Gloucester Cathedral

*Crabfish:*

- *Some Small Sounds From Nowhere*, 1998 Sonic Arts Network Tour

*Hope:*

- *International Symposium of Electronic Arts 1998*, Revolution, John Moores University, Liverpool
- *3rd Annual Santa Fe International Festival of Electroacoustic Music*, 1999, Santa Fe
- *2nd Sonic Arts Network Conference/ Electric Spring*, 1999, Huddersfield University,

*Peregrinations:*

- *Resonance*, 1999, Dartington College of Arts, Dartington
- *Futura 99, le Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon*, France
- *3rd Sonic Arts Network Conference*, 2000, University of Newcastle, Newcastle

*Sound:*

- *Liverpool Biannual of Contemporary Art*, 2000, Liverpool
- *4th Annual Santa Fe International Festival of Electroacoustic Music*, 2000, Santa Fe
- *Sonic Residues 02*, 2000, Australian Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne

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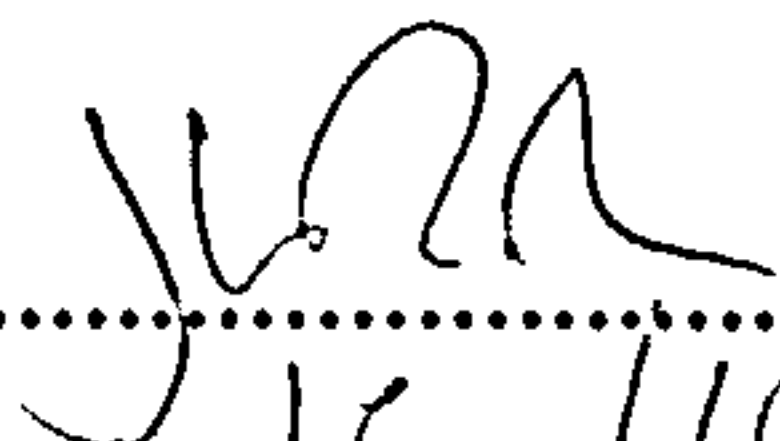
- *drift*, 1999, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow
- *Futura 2000*, Tour de Crest, Drome, France
- *4th Sonic Arts Network Conference/ Sonorities*, 2001, Queens University, Belfast
- *50 Festival Internacional de Música y Danza de Granada*, 2001, Planetario del Parque de las Ciencias, Granada

*Sounding of Angels:*

- *Multiphonies 2000*, Salle Olivier Messiaen, *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel - Groupe de Recherches Musicales*, Paris
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*Equal Signs:*

- *Sound Practice: the 1st UKISC conference on sound, culture and environments*, 2001, Dartington Hall & Dartington College of Arts, Dartington

Signed.....  
Date.....15/10/01

# Chapter 1

## Phonographies: An Introduction

The following dissertation acts as a discursive accompaniment to nine electroacoustic compositions submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, which have been composed during the period: September 1997 to February 2001. The following four chapters address many of the contextual and philosophical issues that have arisen during the compositional process and the performance of the works. It charts out pertinent discourse surrounding the different genres of electroacoustic music that the works relate to as well as examining models of work in the respective genres (i.e. sonic art, text-sound, acousmatic composition, *musique concrète* and soundscape composition), and places them into a broader cultural and historical context.

Chapter 2, *The Exploitation of Tangible Ghosts: conjectures on the recording of sound and its re-appropriation in sonic art* is concerned with the impact of the advent of, and subsequent rapid development of electroacoustically mediatized sound on society and the individual. It relates a diverse mix of conjectures on disembodied sound from different fields, practices and cultures. On considering those conjectures it questions the role of the contemporary sonic artist including my own practice.

Chapter 3, *Soundscape Composition: the convergence of ethnography and acousmatic music* explores the emerging genre of soundscape composition. After dealing with the genre's lineage and accompanying discourse by composers of soundscape, it develops a



relationship between the practice of soundscape composition and contemporary ethnographic practice and theory on ethnographic methodologies. The final section in this chapter discusses the opening movement of a soundscape composition of mine, *Phonographies of Glasgow* (1999), and develops the compositional process behind the work with the practice of the 19th century *flâneur* as commented on by Walter Benjamin.

Chapter 4, *The Sublime in Acousmatic Music: listening to the unrepresentable* attempts to articulate an aesthetic propensity in much of my work. It relates this aesthetic to philosophical, physiological and spiritual notions of the sublime throughout the ages. It concludes that acousmatic music has a distinct role to play in imparting sublime experiences.

Chapter 5, *Textual Collaborations* documents and comments on those projects, which were undertaken with the following performers/ writers/ collaborators: Alaric Sumner, Alice Oswald and Tony Lopez. These projects demonstrate a number of different collaborative relationships between composer and writer and different configurations of acousmatic music and poetry.

As can be observed by the diversity of terrain covered in the dissertation, a common goal with all the compositional projects undertaken is the serious attempt to extend the discipline(s) that I am working in as well as my own practice. By returning to the historical roots of the genres that I have engaged with over the past eight years, and by

interrogating the methodologies of other practices that I have found resonance with, I have established a greater comprehension of and integrity to my own practice.

## Chapter 2

### The Exploitation of Tangible Ghosts:

#### conjectures on the recording of sound and its re-appropriation in sonic art

Everyday the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. (Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* 1936)

If beautiful landscapes could be eaten they would be photographed much less often. (Michel Tournier, *The Ogre* 1970)

As if the (terrified) Photographer must exert himself to the utmost to keep the Photograph from becoming Death. But I, already an object, I do not fight. (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 1980)

Perhaps this is the ultimate way of playing with reality. (Jean Baudrillard interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Ecstasy of Photography* 1997)

### [2.1] Introduction

The issues tackled within this chapter have arisen out of my experience as a sonic artist whose working materials are frequently derived from recordings of sounds from everyday environments. Integral to this compositional procedure is the listening to and recording of the source sounds by the composer himself. Within this procedure resides many elements of chance, as the occurrence of any anticipated acoustic sound with a desired spectral and representational character is contingent on an infinite play of factors. Of course these chance elements can be desirable in themselves as the serendipitous sonic event may hold greater interest to the listener than the anticipated or the staged.<sup>i</sup> After a process of selection and rejection of the sounds collected, selected sounds will undergo further appropriations:<sup>ii</sup> e.g. editing, montage, interpolation, panning, alteration of pitch, amplitude and duration.



I find the procurance, employment and exchange of everyday sounds and the recordings of those sounds, prevalent within this genre of music, an ambivalent engagement, which is aesthetically rewarding yet upon further reflection morally unsettling. The aim of this paper then is to discuss why this ostensibly benign and increasingly common procedure, i.e. the routine of sound recording, editing and mixing may result in a durable confrontation with 'terror' accompanied with ethical compromise.

Illuminating this endeavour – to verbalise an intuitive response – this chapter will utilise the photograph as a counterpoint to the sonic record. We will re-examine the cultural ramifications of the birth and mass adoption of the devices of mechanical reproduction. Finally contemporary sonic art, including my own practice, will be scrutinised in the light of the issues raised. The chapter will take the form of a series of resonating conjectures.

## **[2.2] The Evolution of Sound Reproduction and Transmission**

### **Edison & Bell**

I shouted the word 'halloo! Halloo!' into the mouthpiece, ran the paper back over the steel point and heard a faint 'halloo! Halloo!' in return! (Edison in Dearling 1984:18)

These human utterances marked the genesis of mechanical sound reproduction, accredited to Thomas Alva Edison in 1870. He was later to be granted the patent for the phonograph on the 19th February 1878. In the same year Edison presented his wide-ranging vision for the application of the phonograph including: talking books for the blind, the teaching

of elocution, dictation, speaking clocks, documenting the voices of members of the family and great men and women of the day,<sup>iii</sup> speaking automata and of course the recording and playing back of music (Dearling 1984:21-5).

With the words "Mr Watson, come here; I want you!" the cultural underpinnings of sound were to undergo their second shift with Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone in 1876. Manifestations of proto-telephones centuries earlier had managed to transmit the human voice mechanically over a short range between two resonating boxes, however Bell's voice had been transformed from sound waves in air into an electrical analogue and subsequently back into sound waves at Watson's end.

Within a remarkably short period of time with the launch of the telephone with its facility for sound transmission and the phonograph for its facility of sound reproduction the ephemeral ontology of sound had been put under-question.<sup>iv</sup> The human voice could now be split from its original context both in time and space,<sup>v</sup> an idea that had previously been held only by mystics. For the first time in history people were able to hear beyond echo and reverberation their own voice sounding without being conducted through the bones of their own skull.<sup>vi</sup> Moreover physical space could be attenuated to enable an intimate voice to ear conversation spanning great distances. Sound could now be transposed 'into a material object, something you could hold in your hand, which could be bought and sold' (Chanan 1995:7). There were dissenters from this sonic revolution that was enmeshed into the rapidly expanding consumerist society - one such was Sir Arthur Sullivan who

pertinently "warned that the invention would perpetuate much musical rubbish" (Dearling 1984:21).

### *Musique Concrète*

Shortly after the end of the Second World War in Paris, Pierre Schaeffer pioneered a fundamentally different way of forming and organising sound using audio media, which marked a paradigm shift in Western Music theory and practice. In his *Traité des Objets Musicaux* (1966), as well as devising a typology and morphology of sound, he proposed a means of composing music with sounds themselves, rather than with abstract notation on a manuscript which represented the blueprint for sounds that were to be realised by a performer. He called this new kind of music *musique concrète*. With the agency of audio media Schaeffer and his colleagues at the GRM (*Groupe de Recherches Musicales*), recorded sounds and consequently divided them into distinct units called sound-objects (*objet sonore*), isolating them from the environmental context, or chain of events, from which they recorded them. A sound-object is a sound that can be perceived as a coherent whole, a *gestalt*, although it may be divided again into micro-events: in spoken language this could be regarded as the unit of a word or phoneme. The collection of sound-objects would form the building bricks that could be then used to create an assemblage (i.e. a musical composition). This technique shifted sound from a functional role to that of an aesthetic object. In order to achieve this Schaeffer devised an analytical mode of listening informed by the phenomenological work of Edmund Husserl earlier in the century, called reduced listening (*écoute réduite*).

Husserl's phenomenology is the study of essences of things in consciousness. The philosophy is concerned with lived experience as opposed to scientific and other kinds of abstract knowledge of the world an individual may have, in order to access "things themselves" (Husserl 1962:74). Drawing our attention to the assumptions we make in order to experience the real world, the method of phenomenological reduction or 'bracketing' (*époché*) as it is also known, inquired into how the World is apprehended to the naive observer, void of all presuppositions and culturally imposed expectations.

We fix our eyes steadily upon the sphere of Consciousness and study what it is that we find immanent in it. (Husserl 1962:102)

Reduced listening is a frame of mind in which we are required mentally to put history in brackets, and to read sound as a self-contained entity. We are asked to focus on "the shape and fabric of the object perceived" (Schaeffer 1998:65), to treat "sound purely for its own sake" (Schaeffer 1998:65), instead of as a mere vehicle. All that is intrinsic to a sound and the perception of that sound is of relevance. Sound becomes an autonomous object in its own right, liberated from the weight of association and psychic intensity, allowing us to listen to the familiar anew.<sup>vii</sup> Schaeffer was aware of the loss of information in the isolation of a sound-object from the other sounds that it was residing with before it was recorded:

An object, however, is always determined by the structures to which it belongs; a link is always inseparable from the chain (Schaeffer 1998:65).

However, Schaeffer and his team's emphasis was on developing systematic ways of analysing, describing and comparing all sounds in an empirical manner.

### **Contemporary Audio Media**

Today's audio media ( including easily portable inexpensive covert recorders, powerful amplifiers, telescopic microphones and hydrophones, radio wave scanners,<sup>viii</sup> communication satellites, high speed fibre optic cables, the World Wide Web, etc.) facilitate an unprecedented access to an impressive pool of sounds, spanning the microscopic to the cosmic:<sup>ix</sup> x "an acoustic palette as wide as the environment itself" (Emmerson 1986:18). Digitally mediated data has the potential to yield an unrivalled proximity to the object it represents, perfectly (i.e. without loss of generation<sup>xi</sup>), instantaneously and infinitely reproducing globally, rendering actuality a phantasmic contagion. Our predicament at this stage of technological development is that any corporeal sound that we produce may at any moment be solicited by transparent media - "there is always a camera hidden somewhere" (Baudrillard 1997:19). The transcription onto such media is open to interpolation as well as usurpation, and consequently may be projected to a multiplicity of locations; be that without our awareness or consent, in 'real time' or otherwise. These media are exceptionally empowering to me in my status as a sonic artist, confirming myself as 'monarch over all I survey'; whilst as an artist's subject, I am forced to relinquish the imprint or transference of my persona, and all its concomitant associations, onto that medium. Unfortunately for many and fortunate for few Michel Foucault was not erroneous when he presciently declared:



Our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance. (Foucault 1977:217)

### Today's Sonic Artist

I would claim that the prevailing attitude of the sonic artist to the sounds which he/she deals with, whether that be an algorithmic computer synthesis or a 'real world' recording of the most intimate human experience (e.g. the occasion of one's own death), is that of a playful commodity.<sup>xii</sup> Electroacoustically mediated sound may be valued for its verisimilitude, equally as an ingredient for the concoction of fantastical worlds where any sonic manifestations from whatever their origin may be spliced together. There is rarely an evident acknowledgement by the artist to any essential qualities pertaining to the sound-object, or to its history. Habitually there is little concern that the artist's play of appropriation may compromise their subject's sense of identity, moreover violate their subject's most cherished regions of privacy or render a personal or sacred object banal. An actuality – once digitally mediatized – becomes a vehicle for the artist's expression. The appropriation of another's persona rendered a ventriloquist's dummy functioning primarily to communicate the artist's message. The prevailing comprehension of digital sound is as mere illusion of the object represented – without substance – reduced to a series of binary digits, thus leaving the listener's conscience free of complicity in exploitation.

The above cultural *milieu* in the business of organising sounds was fuelled by Luigi Russolo, Edgard Varèse and John Cage's Modernist polemical call: 'Let all sounds be

equal!’ It may also be argued that Pierre Schaeffer’s compositional and analytical technique of reduced listening in the field of *musique concrète* is prophetic of such thinking.

### [2.3] The (Meta)Physics of Photography

#### The Camera as Mirror

Although retouching has been common practice since its inception,<sup>xiii</sup> the photograph has frequently been read and marketed as a frozen-in-time mirror image (a trace/an echo /an imprint) of the object it seeks to represent.

A photograph moves us towards the isolated moment. It arrests time. It exists in pure space. It emphasises individuality, private identity, and confers an element of permanence on that image. (Carpenter 1976:132)

Enterprisingly, Louis Daguerre, on advertising his new invention in 1839, claimed:

The daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw nature...[it] gives her the power to reproduce herself. (Tag 1988:41)

Rosalind Krauss, adopting Peirce’s semiotics, regards the photograph as having an indexical relationship to the world it represents, where the sign relates to its object in terms of causation, e.g. smoke with fire, spots with measles. Moreover because of that process of causation it can’t be read as a cultural system, unlike a book or a painting:

It is the order of the natural world that imprints itself on the photographic emulsion and subsequently on the photographic print. This quality of transfer or trace gives to the photograph its documentary status, its undeniable veracity. But

at the same time this veracity is beyond the reach of those possible internal adjustments which are the necessary property of language. The connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photograph is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system. (Batchen 1999:195)

As well as an indexical relationship, the photograph may also relate an iconic relationship to the object it represents, i.e. where the sign relates to its object in some resemblance with it. The ambiguity lies in how simultaneously, as an icon it resembles what it signifies, as an index it signifies its absence; in the same way that footprints in the snow signify the one-time presence of another creature. Thus on viewing a photograph we may tune into a nervous tension between the presence and the absence of the object represented.

### **Photography and Death**

The photograph's predecessor, the still life - the art of representing objects in painting drawn from life - is translated into French as *nature morte*. The photograph has often been aligned with notions of death, as it may resemble an actuality fixed, petrified, frozen, and fossilised with only the form remaining. In 1843 Elizabeth Barrett wrote on the Daguerreotype, in the light of her brother's recent death:

It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases - but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing... the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there forever! (Schwartz 1996:93)

Portraiture was initially the primary employment of the photographer, who was called in to commemorate social rituals such as marriage and birth, and most importantly death.



Post-mortem photography was common between 1840 and 1880 in the USA although by the 1900s the focus had shifted onto documenting the funeral party away from the corpse, as death was put out of sight behind the scenes.<sup>xiv</sup> "Photoportraits" the historian and millenarian Hillel Schwartz writes, "took on the properties of the miniature: repetitive, recursive, revisable, phantasmic" (Schwartz 1996:94). Families even had photographs taken of themselves holding the photographs of their dead loved ones - photographing photographs to preserve past generations, aligning them into continuity.

In Roland Barthes' meditation on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1980), he assumes the role of a photographer's muse. He postulates:

I... experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears (if only for commercial reasons) this death in which his gesture will embalm me. (Barthes 1982:14)

The photojournalist Don McCullin, who shot some of the key war photographs of the Twentieth Century, now in retirement deep in the English countryside, surrounded by his archive of negatives and prints, articulates this experience in the title of his book as *Sleeping with Ghosts: A Life's Work in Photography* (1993):

...with the memory of all those frightful images of human conflict while the negatives are neatly filed away in my study. (McCullin 1993:198)<sup>xv</sup>

As well as representing death, the photograph also points to our own death and the transience of life. Susan Sontag writes:

All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt. (Sontag 1984:15)

## Poaching Souls

Many have believed that the camera has the facility to steal from the human soul, quite literally, as well as metaphorically.

When they [the Highlanders of New Guinea] first see pictures of themselves or hear recordings of their voices... It's as if they had vomited up an organ; they cover their mouths, almost as a delayed reflex, trying to prevent this loss. (Carpenter 1976:114)

In contemporary Cyprus there is a living tradition of healing practised and realised through a photograph of the subject desiring to be healed. In Buddhist temples it is forbidden to take photographs of memorial photographs of the dead which can often be found on display, as it is believed that spirits concerning the subject represented may be interfered with. The pioneering documentary filmmaker John Grierson warns:

You may take a man's soul away by taking a picture of him. You may take a part of his privacy away. (Carpenter 1976:149)

Sontag relating the camera to the gun writes:

There is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to

photograph someone is a sublimated murder - a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time. (Sontag 1984:14-15)

Jean Baudrillard displaces notions of representation in photography further, articulating his experience as a practising photographer as well as a cultural theorist he remarks:

...it is a process of capturing things, because objects are themselves captivating. It's almost like trapping things - like trying to catch the primitive dimension of the object, as opposed to the secondary dimension of the subject and the whole domain of representation. It's the immanent presence of the object, rather than the representation of the subject. (1997:33)

### **Sympathetic Magic**

Reflect on this: "Throughout New Guinea", Edmund Carpenter the anthropologist writes, "it is commonly feared that if one's name or image falls into the hands of the enemy, he may use it mischievously. Sorcerers believe they can render even the mightiest helpless by naming, or injure another by introducing his likeness into an unpleasant situation. A sorcerer who possesses any part of his victim, anything once him – hair clippings, footprints, etc. – has him at his mercy" (Carpenter 1976:149).

What Carpenter had observed in his ethnographic fieldwork had been classified by the eminent Victorian writer Sir James Frazer in his classic 'armchair' research of religion, magic, superstition, mythology and primitive rituals in World's cultures *The Golden Bough: A Study in magic and Religion* (1922) as sympathetic magic. Frazer divides sympathetic magic (the Law of Sympathy) into two categories: contagious magic (the

Law of Contact) and homoeopathic<sup>xvi</sup> Magic (Law of Similarity). Contagious magic's principle is:

That things that have once been conjoined must remain ever afterwards, even when quite dissevered from each other, in such a sympathetic relation that whatever is done to one must similarly affect the other. (Frazer 1967:49)

Frazer notes that Contagious Magic could be achieved, it was believed, through severed parts of humans such as teeth, hair and placenta, and even accomplished through the impressions left by a body in sand or earth. He is proud to note that the superstition of 'injuring footprints you injure the feet that made them', was World wide and alive and well in Europe.

Homoeopathic Magic, in a sense part of the same continuum as Contagious Magic's tenet is when:

The magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it (Frazer 1967:14)... the most familiar application of the principle is that like produces like is that attempt which has been made by many peoples in many ages to injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him, in the belief that, just as the image suffers, so does the man, and that when it perishes he must die. (Frazer 1967:16)<sup>xvii</sup>

With the chemical constitution of photography, leaving one's shadow and a dimension of one's likeness behind, we can easily see manifold parallels with, according to Frazer, many of the world's culture's superstitions, which he assures us are alive and resonating.



## Possession: Magical and Imaginary

In Michel Tournier's dark novel *The Ogre* (1970) the protagonist Abel Tiffauges becomes obsessed with photographing the images and recording sounds of children. Tiffauges values such media for its capacity to hi-jack images both magically (i.e. sympathetic magic) and imaginary in order for him to possess those images (Tournier 2000:100).

For it is plain that photography is a kind of magic to bring about the possession of what is photographed. Anyone who is afraid of having his or her photograph 'taken' is only showing the most elementary common sense... One cannot avoid comparison with the painter, who works openly, patiently and patently laying down on the canvas, stroke by stroke, his own feelings and personality. The act of photography, on the other hand, is instantaneous and occult, like the wave of a magic wand transforming a pumpkin into a coach, or a maiden who is awake into one who is asleep. The artist is expansive, generous, centrifugal. The photographer is miserly, greedy, avid and centripetal. (Tournier 2000:93)

But for me, though I do not reject the power of magic, the object of the act of photography is something greater and higher. It consists in raising the real object to a new power - the *imaginary power*. A photographic image, which is indisputably an emanation of reality, is at the same time consubstantial with my fantasies and on a level with my imaginary universe. Photography promotes reality to the plane of dream... The lens is the narrow gate through which the elect, those called to become gods and heroes *possessed*, make their secret entry into my inner Pantheon. (Tournier 2000: 93-4)

## The Mechanical Nature of the Camera

Because of the camera's mechanical nature, the photograph is seen to have a greater independence from the 'author' compared to, for example, figurative painting or writing. Baudrillard is fascinated by the objective attributes of the photograph that he implies the painting does not possess:

The objective magic of the photograph – a quite different aesthetic form to that of painting – derives from the fact that the object has done all the work. (Baudrillard 1997:30)

He goes on to compare photography to writing:

By contrast, in writing, it is the subjective dimension which prevails, which guides interpretation, and so on, whereas in photography the objective dimension is presented in all its otherness, and imposes its otherness. (Baudrillard 1997:33)

Barthes links photography to the notion of resurrection. He speculates:

Photography has something to do with resurrection: might we not say of photography what the Byzantines said of the image of Christ which impregnated St. Veronica's napkin that it was not made by the hand of man? (Barthes 1988:82)

Through the imminently direct nature of the photographic medium, Barthes feels an intimate contact with the object photographed:

A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (Barthes 1988:81)

### **Magician / Surgeon and the Painter / Cameraman**

In Walter Benjamin's pivotal essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' written in 1936, he develops a relationship between the magician /surgeon and the painter /cameraman:

The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself ... The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes

the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body ... at the decisive moment [the surgeon] abstains from facing the patient man to man ... The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. (Benjamin 1992:226-27)

Due to the photograph's often realist interpretation, it is the proximity to the object it represents that is its 'pull' – what Benjamin refers to as the 'aura' of authenticity – however illusory that may in fact be. The more abstracted or de-realised the representation becomes for the reader, the less efficacy the photograph's 'pull'.

## **[2.4] The (Meta)Physics of Mediatized Sound**

### **The Sound Mirror**

The cited conjectures on and around photography as a cultural phenomenon above are pertinent, in fact in my opinion amplified, *vis-à-vis* recorded sound and its reappropriation in sonic art. The mechanical camera chemically fixes an impression of an instant of light rays onto a flat surface.<sup>xviii</sup> The viewing of a photograph is still dynamic as it is modulated by a medium in flux (i.e. light), however the shapes and contours of the image are frozen in time on a 2D plane. Whereas electroacoustically mediated sound's presence - although to the eye is dislocated from its original sounding body, spectrally compressed and spatially reduced through the media's recording and/ or transmission and playback process - is still a physically multi-dimensional haptic experience, as the fluctuating air pressure impacts on one's body; putting into play the notion of hearing as touching from a distance.<sup>xix</sup> Loudspeakers may be concealed to the eye, rendering a recording a semblance of the 'real', which may in turn penetrate deeply into the psyche.

There is a debate as to whether sound recording is a science of reproduction or an art of representation. The film theorist and semiotician Christian Metz points out:

Auditory aspects, providing that the recording is well done, undergo no appreciable loss in relation to the corresponding sound in the real world. (Metz 1980:29)

On the other hand in the film theorist Rick Altman's point of view:

The variable introduced by sound's material heterogeneity, along with the system constituted to record (that is, represent) it, lie at the very heart of film sound. Though they may constitute distortions for the sound engineer, the marks of the sound narrative and the recording process that appear as part of any sound record constitute the very text of the sound analyst, the fundamental signs of the sound semiotician, the basic facts of the sound historian. (Altman 1992:30)

In some sense all sound is an ecological phenomenon, in the sense that it is modulated by the acoustic (i.e. its medium) that it is projected into. Thus, every sound is unique and site-specific, not forgetting the variables of the listener. Sound recording of a physical event has even, like the photograph, been called in as credible evidence to the event in the 'real world'.<sup>xx</sup>

### **Audio Media and the Occult**

The phonograph and the telephone were both born out of and into a culture obsessed with the occult. Thomas Watson, Bell's assistant was an accomplished medium who regularly attended *séances* and claimed to have made contact with ghosts.<sup>xxi</sup> Science alone



could not fully explain their discovery to the Boston *hoi polloi* of the late 1870s, often they and others explained its mechanics by referring to the world of the metaphysical. Even the artifice of the *séance* was adopted in marketing demonstrations.<sup>xxii</sup> In a demonstration by the Edison Company in 1887 it was reported that:

Bells rung, drums beat, noises natural and unnatural were heard, a cabinet revolved and flashed fire, and a row of departed skulls came into view. (Davis 1999:64)

### **His Master's Voice**

In 1899 the Gramophone Company (the leading gramophone record making and distributing company) purchased a painting of a dog and a phonograph which became the 'His Master's Voice' or 'The Talking Dog' trademark. Nipper the dog depicted in the painting had lost its master, the landscape artist Mark Henry Barraud, and was being looked after by Francis Barraud. Francis, who painted the picture, imagined that the dog's attention had been captured by his dead master's voice emanating from the horn of the phonograph - there is also a speculation that the dog is even sitting on the master's coffin in the original picture. This image replaced The Gramophone Company's previous trademark of the Recording Angel: "an angel with a quill pen sitting on a disc and drawing a groove around himself" (Dearling 1984:50). The image of Nipper and the horn evokes "the naturalness of the mimetic faculty in a technological age" (Taussig 1993:210) and reinforces the magical ontology of the phonograph.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## **Silence and Dead**

Pointing back to our pre-industrial days, Walter Ong in his treatise on the impact of the development of speech, writing and print on culture, writes:

Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power. A hunter can see a buffalo, smell, taste, and touch a buffalo when the buffalo is completely inert, even dead, but if he hears a buffalo, he had better watch out: something is going on. In this sense, all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms is 'dynamic'. (Ong 1999:32)

It has become a preverbal thinking that if an object is emanating sound it is sufficient evidence to confirm that it is animate; no sound implies that the object is dead. We can observe this vestige of primitivism in product design today where sounds are intentionally introduced to denote the functioning of an appliance to the user, although the actual process of the appliance may not produce sound as a by-product. Product designers have found out through error that if for example a microwave oven becomes silent during a set programme it is often considered broken by the user and is consequently broken by the user as they force the appliance's door open.

## **Angels, Phantoms and the Uncanny**

The anthropologist Edmund Carpenter names the phenomenon of voices being "freed from flesh, capable of instant transportation anywhere" (Carpenter 1976:11) via electronic media, in particular radio, as 'Angelization'. From his field work observations from New Guinea he notes:

Elvis Presley's voice and face are popular in many parts of New Guinea, but neither he nor any of the other stars whose songs many of the young know by heart have ever set foot on this island. They are truly stars: pure spirits whose very purity makes them environmental and therefore immediately acceptable. (Carpenter 1976:151)

The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

If a phenomenon - for example a reflection or a breath of light wind - is only presented to one of my senses, it is a phantom, and it only gets close to a real existence if by chance, it became capable of speaking to my other senses, like the wind when it is made visible in the turbulence of the countryside. (Chion 1993: 50)<sup>xxiv</sup>

Thus, Merleau-Ponty posits that all acousmatic experience may be rationally perceived as a phantasmic experience: that is if you ignore the visual cues such as the vibrations on the membrane of the loudspeaker.

Sigmund Freud's investigations into the causes of the emotion that has been classified as 'the uncanny' (*unheimlich*), picks up on a range of examples. These include:

- "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive" (Freud 1998:157)
- "whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (Freud 1998:157)
- the idea of the double (*Der Doppelgänger*)
- familiarity yet simultaneously estrangement and irrationality

Combining these examples we arrive at an analogous point of the recognition of hearing one's own disembodied voice: 'the uncanny'.

### *Three Voices*

The American experimental composer Morton Feldman set up a particular relationship with 'living' and 'dead' voices in *Three Voices [for Joan La Barbara]* composed in 1982. The work is scored for two recorded sopranos and one live one. As a composer who wrote almost exclusively for live instrumentalists the appearance of two pre-recorded electroacoustic voices in this work is significant. In the original performance all voices were that of Joan La Barbara. The pre-recorded voices are untreated and all three voices in the live performance are balanced. Joan's three voices inhabit the acoustic space of the performance arena together, blending the living with the dead. The analogy is taken further as Feldman regards the two loud speakers as tomb stones for his recently departed friends: one for the artist Mark Rothko, the other for the poet Frank O'Hara (who wrote the text in *Three Voices*).

### *The Acousmètre*

At noon on the 15th August 1945, the voice of Emperor Hirohito, Emperor of Japan, was broadcast live on radio announcing Japan's surrender to the Japanese people. Unlike other state leaders of the day, this was the first time that Hirohito had broadcast his voice to his people using electronic media. The image of the divine leader was familiar to the people

but not his spoken voice. With this initial mass dissemination of his voice he was personified, made man - the first step towards Japan's reinvention.<sup>xxv</sup>

This historic event is in sharp contrast to the Nazi's use of electronic media and sound in The 3rd Reich. Hitler unequivocally states:

We should not have conquered Germany without... the loudspeaker. (Schafer 1994:91)

It was the "reproduced voice, rather than the voice itself, that convey[ed] the archaic values demanded by so-called antimodernist fascist rhetoric" (Kaplan 1986:134). His propaganda team understood and put to work the power of, what the film theorist and *musique concrète* composer Michel Chion has termed, the *acousmêtre* (which could be roughly translated as 'invisible sound being'). On studying the relationships between what we see and what we hear in cinema, Chion noted the recurring technique of disembodied voices in films that possess mystical qualities, for example the voice of Hall in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). We can hear the voice of a 'being' but can not see it, consequently endowing the originator of the voice with the power to see all, the power of omniscience, omnipotence and ubiquity (Chion 1994: 129- 130). When a voice is de-acousmatized on the other hand, for example when we look behind the screen in Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and see a frail old man, all the *acousmêtre* properties are diminished.



The concept underling the *acousmètre* was exploited in Gothic Cathedrals (e.g. Chartres Cathedral in France), where the celebrant was not on view to the public yet his voice was modulated by the acoustics of the cathedral. His voice was spatially transformed making it appear that wherever you were placed in the cathedral, his voice originated at the same distant place, "detached from the immediate scene, floating somewhere where the point of view has become the entire space" (Viola 1991:155).<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **Voice and Identity**

Consider for example the complex correspondence of an individual's perceived identity to recognising his/her own disembodied voice electroacoustically generated. The composer, acoustic communication and acoustic ecology specialist Barry Truax writes:

For acoustic communication, the significance of the voice is that, first of all, its production is a reflection of the whole person, and that secondly, sound making is a primary means of communication by which the person's concept of self and relationships to others, including the environment, are established. (1984:28)

Steven Connor in his extensive study of ventriloquism and the disembodied voice writes:

Giving voice is the process which simultaneously produces articulate sound, and produces myself, as a self-producing being. (Connor 2000:3)

### **William Burroughs**

The Beat writer and pioneer of audiotape cut/ups William Burroughs, feeding off the public paranoia caused by covert surveillance techniques used in the Watergate Affair of 1972 writes:<sup>xxvii</sup>

By playing back my recordings ... when I want and with any changes I wish to make in recordings, I become God for this locale. I affect them. They cannot affect me. (Burroughs in Odier 1989:19)

Tuning into the notion of Sympathetic Magic from first hand experience he goes on to write:

I have frequently observed that this simple operation - making recordings and taking pictures of some location you wish to discommode or destroy, then playing recordings back and taking more pictures - will result in accidents, fires, removals, especially the last'. (Burroughs in Odier 1989:18)

### **Sonic Artist as Vivisectionist**

We may hold the projection of recorded sound as an act of reanimation and transplantation. Sound born and born-again into fresh time and space, experienced anew at the moment of reception. The sonic artist regarded not as taxidermist master of slight-of-hand illusion, rather vivisectionist master over life and death, time and space.

When sound is electroacoustically dislocated from its autochthonal habitat – no longer *in situ* – transported to alien locations, it is recontextualised, physically and semiotically transformed, creating different dialogues between itself and its surrounding resonating and signifying environment. The authority of the artist stipulating what will and will not be included, filtering through, and/ or imposing, the artist's own inherent or adopted ideologies and systems of representation over the soundscape. The artist inscribes herself/

himself deeply into the 'web' of the soundscape, and analogous to Benjamin's model, "abstains from facing the patient man to man" (Benjamin 1992:226-27).

### Television as the Cultural Context

This imperialistic paradigm must surely have deep ramifications on a culture whose "real is read through representation, and representation is read through the real" (Phelan 1993:1). In a "cultural economy [that] privileges the mediatized and marginalises the live" (Auslander 1997:51). Where "it is indeed no longer a question of thinking about television in various cultural contexts but seeing it as *the* cultural context" (Auslander 1999:2).

Put in yet another way, in the words of Carpenter:

Pure spirit now takes the precedence over spirit in flesh. (1976:11)

Examples of two of Carpenter's pertinent anecdotes to demonstrate this point go as follows:

- Some years ago in New Jersey, a mad sniper killed thirteen people then barricaded himself in a house while he shot it out with the police. An enterprising reporter found out the phone number of the house and called. The killer put down his rifle and answered the phone. 'What is it?' he asked. 'I'm busy. (Carpenter 1976:12)
- Among the Ojibwa Indians, young people eagerly listen to tape recordings of their grandparents' stories, though they don't want to listen to their grandparents telling the same stories in person. (Carpenter 1976:12)



These distant yet surprisingly familiar examples demonstrate the somewhat irrational, fetishistic status that we accord electronically mediated spoken voice, and the extraordinary power it has over our minds.

## **[2.5] The Re-appropriation of Sound in Sonic Art**

### ***Sooner or Later***

Bob Ostertag's sonic work *Sooner or Later* (1991) draws from two sources of sound material: Fred Frith on guitar and a field recording of a young boy from El Salvador mourning the death of his Father who had been killed by the National Guard. It is a highly emotive, classic sonic work. Let's consider this work, in light of the issues already covered in this paper. A recording of the boy's extrinsic manifestation of pain is rendered a sound object that functions as a vehicle for Ostertag's aesthetics and politics. Does this work impact on the emotions so effectively through the listener's reading of the original field recording as verisimilitude? Does Ostertag force the boy's spirit to stereophonically relive his pain every time the work is broadcast or performed? Is this a case of Ostertag transforming documentary into fiction: trivialising, banalising, capitalising? Is our ethical quandary relieved if we find out that the boy, Ostertag's subject, is open to Ostertag's appropriations? In fact is the boy speaking out to a greater audience through Ostertag's agency? Does Ostertag misrepresent that actuality by digitally manipulating and interpolating it with the velvety tones of Frith? Does a psychic usurpation equal in complicity the dissemination of an external one in an artwork? Does the boy's anonymity in the work imply an allegorical suffering rather than a personal one, springing from the

specific to the universal? Is this moment of suffering a private moment for the boy to endure alone or a public moment justifiably exposed globally? What constitutes private? What constitutes public?

Steven Feld, who has produced a commercial CD, *Voices of the Rainforest* (1991), of the songs, voices and environment of Papua New Guinea asks similar questions:

Once you record something, do you imagine that you have an inalienable right to do whatever you want with it forever without consultation? Or if you paid somebody a few bucks to record them at one point in time, do you own their voice for all time? What's the nature of your moral, legal, aesthetic, and political responsibility to them over the course of time? (Feld 1999:18)

### **My Practice**

Akin to the Law of Contagion, I am in the trade of the manipulation of human's imprint, rendered ventriloquist dummy, imperialistically inscribing upon it my ideologies, and system of representation. In my practice I am not concerned with truth telling; yet my goal is not to misrepresent.

The electroacoustic soundscape work of mine that instigated in me this line of discourse, *Hippocampus* (1997) takes primary sound source from an environmental recording I took of children playing in a public swimming pool. That sonic surveillance, if you like, is presented linearly through fluctuating modes of transformation, projecting an intense dream-like meditation. Not until completion of the work did I become aware of the spectre like quality of the soundscape that I had fabricated through the agency of the

media. For me the potency of the soundscape evoked "tangible ghosts" (Auster 1988:10). The voices that I was hearing were no longer present, yet I was still able to physically feel their energy emanating through the loudspeakers, what I was audibly recognising as the same energy that I had heard when I first made the recording by the pool.

My subsequent feelings were of disgust, questioning is exploitation coupled with misrepresentation of others the root of my artistic endeavours? The children in the swimming pool had become my ventriloquist dummies, who I was now speaking through. I had aestheticised that original recording, imperialistically inscribing upon it my ideologies with the intention of communicating my narrative on meditation and spectral morphology. I soon realised that as a maker of culture I was lacking in a number of key critical questions. Those questions were: 'Why was I representing?' 'How was I representing?' 'Who was I representing?' 'For whom was I representing?'

## **[2.6] Conclusion**

I personally find it hard to reconcile my artistic practice with the vestiges of my inherited essentialist readings of reproduced sound;<sup>xxviii</sup> sympathising with Barthes as he writes: "I see only the referent, the desired object" (Barthes 1988:7). In response to my questioning I have been prompted by artist and theoreticians, retorting: 'What is it to compose, if it is not to appropriate and interpolate objects, concrete and conceptual, from our world', moreover, 'has not the musician throughout history, and transculturally been grouped with the thief?' Perhaps with the proliferation of digital media those essentialist vestiges in me

will decline and I will acknowledge a semantic as well as etymological relationship between 'phony' and 'phoney'.

Although some of the conjectures I have referred to reside far from my personal position and every day experience, I do strongly adhere to Michael Taussig's evaluation of mimesis, which draws from Frazer's Laws of Sympathy. That is:

The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power. (Taussig 1993:xiii)

Where I was feeling the weight of some kind of cultural responsibility on my shoulders others were seeing electronic media as liberating themselves and society in general from the shackles of semiotic fixity, augmenting the field of play. Baudrillard writes:

I'm interested in seeing technology as an instrument of magic or of allusion - an illusion of the world, but also a positive kind of illusion or play of illusion. Perhaps this is the ultimate way of playing with reality. (Baudrillard in Zurbrugg 1997:38)

In an attempt at a summing up in his cultural critique *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (1996) Hillel Schwartz writes:

Some may say that the twins, the Doppelgänger, the self-portraits, the Second Nature, the seeing double, the copying, and the reenactments are the best evidence we have of the playfulness of human beings. I would agree, and strongly recommend the virtues of companionship, joyful imposture, irreverent ventriloquism, communion with animals, hide-go-seek, the uninhibited spread of art and ideas, the doing of history. (Schwartz 1996:378)



The French new wave film director Jean-Luc Godard offers us another way of looking at it, when asked at which pole, from fiction to documentary, he started in his filmmaking process, he answered:

...from documentary, I think, in order to give it the truth of fiction... (Godard 1986:181)

Generally speaking, reportage is interesting only when placed in a fictional context, but fiction is interesting only if it is validated by a documentary context. (Godard 1986:192)

At this point in time, however naïve and simplistic it may sound, my call is for the sonic artist to recognise a responsibility and sensitivity to the material that he/she is dealing with; constantly reminding oneself that, no one lives in a cultural vacuum, art is not self contained, and does feedback onto society. We must strive for the utmost awareness of our actions' ramifications on society, with our ears to the ground, and to respond appropriately to that awareness. Often there is a need to give something back to an environment; a reciprocal relationship, not only a one-way plunder. Alan Read mirrors my sentiments and offers a solution as he writes:

It's not a fair exchange of consciousness at all and that I feel very uncomfortable with. I don't mind them photographing me as long as I've got access to photograph them. (Read 1997:86)

Of course, it is important to remember that the artist does not have the facility to dictate exactly how the listener will interpret a sonic work. In the words of Cage:



Composition, performance, and audition or observation are really different things. They have next to nothing to do with one another. (Cage 1987:6)

However this does not relieve the digital artist from any social responsibility or accountability.

I believe the exciting challenge - not burden - for the sonic artist is to be capable of dealing critically and innovatively with all sounds, hand-in-hand with a profuse sense of responsibility for the social and environmental implications their work may impact.

Finishing off this series of conjectures, here are the words of Bengt Holmstrand and Henrik Karlsson of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, taken from their invitation to Hör upp! Stockholm Hey Listen!, an international conference on acoustic ecology:

Our point of departure in this endeavour is that sounds are primarily to be regarded not as a problem area but as a positive resource to be used in the best possible way. This makes it natural to work for a rapprochement between the technological, humanistic, humanitarian and artistic aspects of sound and the acoustic environment. The sounds around us should be regarded in the holistic perspective in which ordinary people experience them and should be ascribed the same essential importance as air, light and water. (Holmstrand & Karlsson 1998)

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Feldman, M. 1982 *Three Voices [for Joan La Barbara]*. New Albion (NA018)

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<sup>i</sup> I will explore this notion in Chapter III.

<sup>ii</sup> "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed" (Sontag 1984:4). Thus it is appropriated again when employed in sonic art.

<sup>iii</sup> Edison's debut recordings of personalities included Florence Nightingale and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

<sup>iv</sup> Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent. When I pronounce the word 'permanence', by the time I get to the '-nence', the 'perma-' is gone, and has to be gone. (Ong 1999:32)

<sup>v</sup> R. Murray Schafer has pejoratively named the experience of the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic transmission or reproduction, schizophonia (Greek: schizo = split and phone = voice, sound), a nervous term that resonates with the psychotic condition of schizophrenia. (Schafer 1994:90)

Steven Feld summarises Schafer's thesis:

Sounds were once indexically linked to their particular times and places, sources, moments of enunciation, and human and instrumental mechanisms. Early technology for acoustic capture and reproduction fuelled a pre-existing fascination with acoustic dislocation and respatialization. Territorial expansion, imperialistic ambition, and audio technology as agent and indicator increasingly came together, culminating in the invention of the loudspeaker. Then came public-address systems, radio expansion, and after the second world war, the tape recorder, which made possible a new and unprecedented level of editing via splicing manipulation such that sounds could be endlessly altered or rearranged yet made

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to have the illusion of seamless, unbroken spatial and temporal contiguity. (Feld 1994:258-9)

Feld goes on to anticipate:

If Schafer were writing his book now, he would no doubt see digital sampling, CD-ROM, and the ability to record, edit, reorganize, and own any sound from any source as the final stage of schizophonia - total portability, transportability, and transmutability of any and all sonic environments. (Feld 1994:259)

vi "Thomas Hobbes was deeply intrigued by the way we can '*hear double or treble*, by multiplication of *echoes*', and regarded the phenomenon of echoing as positive proof that sounds are purely subjective, existing not 'in the thing we hear, but in ourselves'." (Rée 1999:23)

vii François-Bernard Mâche, an uncompromising composer who has long been associated with the GRM (Groupe de Recherches Musicales) in the production of *musique concrète* writes on the approach to composing using reduced listening by himself and his colleagues:

...one tried to disguise the origins often remained ineffectual. Their action tended in general to amputate the sound rather than purify it, often seemed a useless artifice whose effect remained below the raw original. (Mâche 1992:191)

viii In the work of the sonic artist Scanner, a.k.a. Robin Rimbaud, a radio scanner is employed in the live performance, used to tune into mobile phone conversations which are being made in the surrounding environment, which Scanner in turn feeds into his Techno music derived electroacoustic soundscape. He celebrates his work's invasive and voyeuristic nature, however he attempts to muddy the identities of the voices that he has harnessed.

ix The composer David Dunn has experimented with microscopic hydrophones, recording the sound world of insects living in rock pools. He has released a composition of these soundscapes in a work titled *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond*. The sounds have undergone minimal retouching, primarily transposition in order that the soundscapes fit comfortably and satisfyingly into a human audible range.

x Unfortunately The Planetary Society's plan to place a microphone on Mars was aborted on 3rd December 1999 with the loss of all communication with the Mars Polar Lander.

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<sup>xi</sup> Compared to, for example duplicating audio in the analogue domain where noise is always added to the final signal.

<sup>xii</sup> In his paper *From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On The Discourses and Commodification Practices of "World Music" and "World Beat"* (1994) Steven Feld explores the commodification of world music and his "role in producing a commercial CD representing a 'remote,' 'ethnographic' music culture and environment" (Feld 1994:258).

<sup>xiii</sup> A French observer wrote:

Not a single self-respecting camera professional could allow a portrait to be printed off a negative produced by light alone. The least a portraitist could do would be to brush the image free of blemishes, restore the line to blond and auburn hair and sight to eyes of blue or grey. As well soften the shadows under the chin, round out the angular profile, eliminate with a Negafake Erasing Pencil the sagging flesh of middle age. (Schwartz 1996:95)

<sup>xiv</sup> For an anthropology of post-mortem photographs see *Post-Mortem Portraiture in America* (1993) by Jay Ruby.

<sup>xv</sup> In a discussion after presenting an early draft of this paper in 1998 at the Hör upp! Stockholm Hey Listen! conference in Stockholm, similar feelings were relayed to me about people's field sound recording archives. They were prevented from destroying their old recordings as they felt they would be destroying life, although the recordings were practically of no use to themselves.

<sup>xvi</sup> Frazer's spelling.

<sup>xvii</sup> Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) plays out an inverse process of Homoeopathic Magic, with tragic consequences.

<sup>xviii</sup> David Hockney's photcollage using multiple viewpoints translates the mosaic impression of multi-channel recording technique into photography in a vivid and convincing way... [he] compares his spatial technique with cubism, but there is a fidelity to spatial relationships in his photcollages which transcends the cubism of Picasso, Gris, and Braque.. (Maconie 1993:49)

<sup>xix</sup> Evelyn Glennie, the profoundly deaf virtuoso percussionist, observed the haptic nature of sound being exploited at a concert of hers in Brussels:



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The deaf were offered balloons to hold so they could feel the music through the vibrations. They were also sitting on wooden benches that had been rigged up for sound to come through the benches so they could experience it through their bodies. (Glennie: 1991:74)

<sup>xx</sup> Acoustic engineers were called before the Warren Commission to analyse a recording inadvertently made during the assassination of President Kennedy. They were asked to verify that certain sounds were gunshots, and if so, what could be determined about their distance and direction from the tape recorder (Dellaira 1995:204).

<sup>xxi</sup> Bell has been likened to Victor Frankenstein, as for a time he carried around with him a dead human ear as part of his research in his quest to create an apparatus that could both hear and speak - the ear of the telephone was modelled on the human ear (Ronell 1989).

<sup>xxii</sup> For a detailed account of the metaphysics of the telephone and its genesis I refer you to Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (1989).

<sup>xxiii</sup> In *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1996), Michael Taussig unfolds an ethnography of 'His Master's Voice'.

<sup>xxiv</sup> My translation.

<sup>xxv</sup> Marshal McLuhan has devised a theory on the demystification of the Catholic church, instigated by the introduction of the microphone into the Mass (Gordon 1997).

<sup>xxvi</sup> Remember that "the term hearing refers to a kind of 'obedience' (the Latin roots of the word are *ob* plus *audire*, or 'to hear facing someone' (Viola 1998:153).

<sup>xxvii</sup> During the Watergate hearings, it came to light that Nixon had taped his conversations in the Oval Office. (Dellaira 1995:204)

<sup>xxviii</sup> Perhaps these latent feelings relate to Freud's explication of the Uncanny?:

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It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be reactivated and that everything which now strikes us as "uncanny" fulfils the condition of stirring these vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (Rivkin & Ryan 1998:166)



# Chapter 3

## Soundscape Composition: the convergence of ethnography and acousmatic music

### [3.1] Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter that explored the social and individual ramifications of sound recording and the appropriation of those sounds in sonic art, in this chapter I want to explore work that re-connects re-produced sound back to its autochthonous context:<sup>i</sup> work that strives to establish a dialogue between the sounds and the sites from which they were originally extrapolated; work that explores and underlines aspects of place, culture and identity in relation to sound; work with a Green agenda in the face of imminent ecological catastrophe; work that seeks to comprehend and explicitly convey our everyday auditory experience of the sounds around us; work that tackles head on the politics of representation. The genre of electroacoustic music that I am referring to has been classified under the umbrella term of 'soundscape composition'.

I will begin this undertaking by outlining the key concepts, as I see them, behind this emerging genre. This will be achieved by exploring different notions of the term 'soundscape' and probe into what composers have to say about their own work and that of their colleagues who position their work under the rubric of soundscape composition.

The second half of the chapter will propose another way of approaching and apprehending soundscape composition: to consider it as ethnography. In doing so we may

tap into a rich reservoir of rigorous reflexive reportage/ compositional methodologies that continuously question and re-question what it is to make representation.

I will conclude by describing the compositional strategies behind a work of mine that I consider as a soundscape composition. The work is titled *Phonographies of Glasgow* (1999) and takes the people and places of Glasgow as its subject of study and comment.

### **[3.2] Soundscape Composition**

So we begin by asking what is a soundscape composition? How does a soundscape composition distinguish itself from other genres of electroacoustic music?

#### **What is Soundscape?**

The first step in this endeavour is to clarify what 'soundscape' denotes. The pioneer of granular synthesis and acoustic communication Barry Truax explains 'soundscape' in his glossary for terms connected to the interdiscipline of Acoustic Ecology as:<sup>ii</sup>

An environment of sound (or sonic environment) with emphasis on the way it is perceived and understood by individual, or by a society. It thus depends on the relationship between the individual and any such environment. The term may refer to actual environments, or to abstract constructions such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an artificial environment. (Truax 1999)

R. Murray Schafer, who coined the term along with many other and concepts concerning soundscapes, approached the topic with the ears of a classically trained composer with an ecological imperative for the health of the World's soundscapes as paramount. Along with his colleagues at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, who formed the WSP

(World Soundscape Project) in 1970, they set about devising ways of discussing, analysing and comparing soundscapes from around the world.

There are several other terms in current usage that are synonymous with 'soundscape', terms that have slightly different meanings, that have surfaced in other fields with other underlying principles. Terms that have quite different but related meanings, however, are often mistakenly substituted for 'soundscape'. 'Acoustic environment', 'sonic environment', 'sound environment' and 'sound landscape' are used synonymously with 'soundscape', whereas 'acoustic space', 'acoustic atmosphere', 'auditory space', 'sonoric landscape', 'sonic ambience', 'sound field', 'sound world' and 'the music of geography' cross into the field of 'soundscape' or complement the concept of 'soundscape'.

### **Acoustic Space**

The WSP picked up in certain respects from where McLuhan and Carpenter (both quoted in the previous chapter) left off. The anthropologists McLuhan and Carpenter, based at the University of Toronto Centre for Culture and Technology, looked into the consequences of technological development on culture, in particular on orality and literacy. A key term in their speculations was that of 'acoustic space', which they use synonymously with 'auditory space':

Auditory Space has no point of favoured focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment. It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background. The eye focuses, pinpoints, abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background; the ear however, favours sound from any direction. We hear equally well from right or left, front or back, above or below. If we lie

down, it makes no difference, whereas in visual space the entire spectacle is altered. We can shut out the visual field by simply closing our eyes, but we are always triggered to respond to sound. (Carpenter 1970:67)

According to McLuhan, before writing became prevalent we lived in acoustic space.

With the onset of writing, space was transformed into something rational, linear, ordered and bordered.

The WSP's definition of 'acoustic space' is quite different to that of Carpenter and McLuhan. During the WSP's field studies they devised terms for different features of the soundscape to aid their listening and understanding of soundscapes. Their definition of acoustic space is:

The profile of a sound over a landscape. The acoustic space of any sound is that area over which it may be heard before it drops below the ambient sound level. (Schafer 1994:271)

This is similar to the notion of 'sound field', which can be best described as the distribution of acoustic pressure and/or particle velocity created by a source (or collection of sources) in a defined space. A sound field can be mathematically quantifiable.

### **The Music of Geography**

As human geography is concerned with the spatial aspects of human existence it is surprising that the discipline has taken little notice of the sonic environment in any depth.

One geographer who has undertaken to engaged his discipline is Douglas Porteous, whose research concerns extending the study of landscapes to 'otherscapes' that build up



the scenes within which we behave (Abdulkarim 2001:1). He opts for a more concise definition of soundscape than Schafer's. His preferred term is:

Listener-centred sonic environment. (Porteous 1990:50)

Another eminent geographer, Douglas Pocock, positions geography at the heart of the concept of the soundscape:

Sound is information to be described and experienced. The whole gamut of sound, both natural and man-made and varying from place to place, constitutes what might be called the music of geography. (Pocock 1988:62)

## Sound World

At CRESSON, *Le Centre de Recherche sur l'Espace Sonore* (Research Centre for Sonic Space) at *L'Ecole d'Architecture de Grenoble*, the geographer and architect Pascal Amphoux has devised his own approach to studying the soundscape. Key to his work is the notion of the 'sound World' (*Monde sonore*). A 'sound World' - "is in principle uncertain, indeterminate and open to all possibilities" (Hellström 2001). Thus he divides the 'sound World' under three headings:

- (1) within the level of the World that is already constituted
- (2) within the level of representation and our interaction with it
- (3) within the level of the separation between object and subject (Hellström 2001)



## **Sonic Ambience**

In his methodology for field sound recording in the process of analysing the sonic identity of a city, Amphoux uses the term 'sonic ambience' to mean:

The composition of the present sounds within a sonic environment, i.e. the sounds that gives a distinctive character - a sonic code - to a place. (Hellmström 2001)

However in this environment we are not searching for the sound's origin, rather we are examining the actual intrinsic qualities of the sound.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Sonoric Landscape**

Richard Leppert's research primarily concerns music and visual representation and the ways that these discourses mediate socio-cultural formation. In this endeavour he has coined the term 'sonoric landscape'. The term embeds the following observations and assumptions:

- (1) sounds surround us, helping to construct us as human subjects and to locate us in particular social and cultural environments
- (2) sounds produced or manipulated by humans result from conscious acts, and hence carry a semantic and discursive charge
- (3) all sounds - even those not produced by humans but "merely" heard by them - can be read or interpreted
- (4) drawn from the preceding three givens, sounds are a means by which people account for their versions of reality - as it was, is , and/or might be. That is, people do not employ sounds arbitrarily, haphazardly, or

unintentionally - though the "intentionally" haphazard may itself constitute an important sort of sonoric discourse (Leppert 1998:292).

## Acoustic Atmosphere

The German philosopher Gernot Böhme has offered another way of viewing the soundscape: as an 'acoustic atmosphere'. The aesthetics of atmospheres has its roots in Aesthetics, in its original sense as the theory of sensual perception, and subsequently in Ecological Aesthetics which is concerned with qualities in the environment that are experienced aesthetically, i.e. ones sensibilities being effected by a smelly factory.

Böhme sees the benefit of the concept of aesthetics of atmospheres in that it is already embedded into our daily life experience and expression.

If atmospheres are moods, which one feels in the air, then we are describing a phenomenon which is familiar to everyone; moreover the potential source material for discussing and characterizing atmospheres is nearly inexhaustible. One speaks of a sombre atmosphere, a foreboding atmosphere, an exalted atmosphere, but one also speaks also of an atmosphere of violence or holiness... (Böhme 2000:15)

For Böhme music is the fundamental atmospheric art, as 'music as such is a modification of space as it is experienced by the body. Music forms and informs the listener's sense of self in a space; it reaches directly into his or her corporeal economy... Similarly, a certain soundscape provides atmospheres in bars, and one renders visits to airports, subway stations and to the dentist pleasant through the use of Muzak and similarly sweetens and enlivens shopping malls, hotel foyers, etc. (Böhme 2000:16)

Taking all this into consideration he concludes that the adoption of the Aesthetics of Atmospheres is crucial to the development of urban sound design:

...one's conception of what a landscape is can today no longer be restricted to what one sees and that the city planning can no longer be content with noise control and abatement, but must pay attention to the character of the acoustic atmospheres of squares, pedestrian zones, of whole cities. (Böhme 2000:16)

## **Sound Event**

A key concept that requires elucidation in this context is 'sound-event' - another term formulated by Murray Schafer in his soundscape taxonomy.

The term intentionally resonates with the 'sound-object' (as explained in the previous chapter), however:

It differs from the sound object in that the latter is an abstract acoustical object... while the sound event is a symbolic, semantic or structural object for study, and is therefore a nonabstractable point of reference, related to a whole of greater magnitude than itself. (Schafer 1994:274)

Schafer's indicative example is church bells. As a sound-object it can be recorded and analysed taking its intrinsic qualities into consideration; as a sound-event its historical and socio-political dimensions and how the sound is regarded by the local community can be the focus of attention, i.e. its extrinsic qualities and its context(s). Schafer calls for a more holistic rather than reductionist approach to sound.

## Sound Effect

At CRESSON over the past ten years the research team under Jean-François Augoyard has been drawing up a repertoire of sound effects (*effets sonores*) of the environment. Bringing together architecture, acoustics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, musicology and cultural studies, their multi-disciplinary approach's aim was to develop a theoretical tool in the detailed analysis of urban life. The repertoire of sound effects (16 major effects and 60 minor effects) can be used "in order to identify and describe the vast amount of sonic configurations that arise in a built environment" (Hellström 2001:45). This has been published in *A l'Ecoute de l'Environnement: Répertoire des Effets Sonores* (1995).

## What is Soundscape Composition?

Now that we have charted some of the chief permutations and philosophies on soundscape and its neighbouring concepts, we are half way to our comprehensive definition of soundscape composition.

## Schafer's Perspective

One of Murray Schafer's introductory approaches to propagating a greater awareness of the soundscape was to invite people to consider it as a symphony, in which we, that is "anyone and anything that sounds!" (Schafer 1994:8), go to make up the orchestra. So as we concentrate on the sounds around us we can witness the unfolding of a musical composition and participate in that unfolding through our active listening and sound making, fusing the roles of composer, performer and listener.

## Westerkamp's Perspective

In winter of 1999 Hildegard Westerkamp, a leading composer in the field, was asked onto a jury to select the best soundscape compositions for *The Soundscape be)for(e 2000 Festival*, Amsterdam. The plethora of styles and approaches to composition that the jury reviewed led her to attempt to articulate what it was that these works had in common that made them (or on occasion didn't make them) soundscape compositions. She writes:

The essence of soundscape composition is the artistic, sonic transmission of meanings about place, time, environment and listening perception.... A soundscape composition is *always* rooted in themes of the sound environment. It is never abstract. Recorded environmental sounds are its 'instruments', and they may be heard both unprocessed and processed. (Westerkamp 1999)

After opening up what she regards as soundscape compositions she goes on to proscribe and prescribe the genre.

A piece cannot be called a soundscape composition if it uses environmental sound as material for abstract sound explorations only, without reference to the sonic environment... In the soundscape composition... it is precisely the environmental context that is preserved, enhanced and exploited by the composer. (Westerkamp 1999)

Precisely because one of the fundamental concepts behind the genre, as she saw it, concerned an individual's experience of a specific place Westerkamp found it questionable that such a genre of composition could be judged in terms of 'this composition is better than that one' at all. She suggests that it would require detailed knowledge of the physical places dealt with in each work in order to have an adequate understanding of the theme of the work in order to judge it, notwithstanding an existing cultural insight into those places.



## Truax's Perspective

For Barry Truax, another pioneer in the field, the principles of soundscape composition as derived from its evolved practice are:

- (1) Listener recognisability of the source material is maintained, even if it subsequently undergoes transformation;
- (2) The listener's knowledge of the environmental and psychological context of the soundscape material is invoked and encouraged to complete the network of meanings ascribed to the music
- (3) The composer's knowledge of the environmental and psychological context of the soundscape material is allowed to influence the shape of the composition at every level, and ultimately the composition is inseparable from some or all of those aspects of reality; and ideally
- (4) The work enhances our understanding of the world, and its influence carries over into everyday perceptual habits. (Truax 2000)

Truax picks up on the important role of the listener, completing the system into what makes up a soundscape composition. In soundscape composition the traditional Western Art Music roles of listener/ composer are on the whole maintained however many works demand a greater participation of the listener than most electroacoustic music through active and creative listening. The listener's aural history informs the work's interpretation; the externally composed soundscape is fused with the internal soundscape of the listener's mind.

## McCartney's Perspective

Andra McCartney another Canadian based composer and researcher in this field, has summed up the attributes of soundscape composition in comparison with the musicological classification of genres of electroacoustic music:

Soundscape composition is categorized as *concrète* rather than electronic, mimetic rather than aural, programme rather than absolute, using a syntax that is abstracted from materials rather than abstract. (McCartney 2000)

### (i) *concrète* / electronic

The first statement has already been clarified, as the primary material for soundscape composition is field sound recordings, not studio synthesised sound.

### (ii) mimetic/ aural

The second statement refers to Simon Emmerson's classification system which facilitates the whole of 'musical discourse' (Emmerson 1986:19). He establishes a conceptual spectrum of sound recognition, spanning the unquestionable identification of a sound and its origins in a composition, to the extreme abstract use of sound in a composition, where the listener is free to attribute associations to the sound: 'mimetic discourse' and 'aural discourse'.

He uses the term 'mimesis' to denote the imitation not only of nature but also of aspects of human culture not usually associated directly with musical material.

Under 'mimesis' he creates two sub-categories:

- (1) Timbral mimesis: where there is a direct imitation of a timbre ('colour') of the natural sound.
- (2) Syntactic mimesis: where there is imitation of the relationship between natural events, e.g. the rhythms of speech. (Emmerson 1986:17-18)

The term 'aural' denotes the use of sound in a composition where 'our perception remains relatively free of any directly evoked image' (Emmerson 1986:19).

Within this spectrum McCartney's study showed that soundscape composition is placed well towards the mimetic pole.

### (iii) Syntax: abstract/ abstracted

Again Emmerson has set up poles, this time concerning the micro and macro structuring (musical language) of a composition.

- (1) Abstract Syntax: concerns the creation and manipulation of abstract shapes created independently of the *perceptual* qualities of the materials used (Emmerson 1986:26), e.g. serial composition.
- (2) Abstracted Syntax: where the syntax is derived from the perceptual qualities of the sounds themselves, i.e. an untouched field sound recording.

As a common thread in soundscape composition is the perception of environmental sound, therefore abstracted syntax is the dominant structure in this genre.

#### (iv) Program/ Absolute

The third of McCartney's statements refers to the Romantic classifications of program music and absolute music, the heyday of which was the Nineteenth Century.

##### (1) Program music was understood as:

...instrumental music associated with poetic, descriptive, or even narrative subject matter - not only by means of rhetorical-musical figures or by imitation of natural sounds and movements, but by imaginative suggestion. (Grout & Palisca 1988:660)

##### (2) Absolute music related to a music that refers only to the abstract world of music (philosophically as well as sonically):

...the association of music "detached" from text, program, or function with the expression or notion of the absolute. (Dahlhaus 1989:3)

Clearly with its contextual concerns, as opposed to pure aesthetic concerns, when dealing with the notions of absolute and program, soundscape composition veers away from the absolute towards the programmatic.

## Fontana's Perspective

Finally I have inserted a quote from Bill Fontana whose work is often categorised as soundscape composition.<sup>iv</sup> He writes, on the overriding goal of his work:

The task of acoustic art and acoustic design is to fundamentally challenge all of the old historical definitions of noise and the resulting preconceptions that most people have about the sounds they live with. (Fontana, B. *Sonic Ecology and the Transformation of Noise*)

## Conclusion

Within these definitions of the characteristics of the genre of soundscape composition and the composer's agendas of such a music there is ample room for works of significantly different natures: e.g. untreated field recordings to heavily mediated assemblages, travelogue, *Hörspiel*, documentation of sound walks and active participatory listening exercises. A soundscape composition can be composed intuitively, or processed based. The work could be fixed in the studio or its structure could be generated randomly, unfolding in real time.

### [3.3] Soundscape Composition and Acousmatic Music

Often soundscape composition is grouped with, has been engulfed by, or has grown out of the genre of electroacoustic music known as acousmatic music (this can be observed in concerts, CD compilations and University syllabuses). Not only does this classification inform how soundscape composition is often listened to, but also how it is produced,



sonically and philosophically. In such work we can observe a common aesthetic (attention to pitch and rhythmic relationships, approach to form, dependence on digital technologies) that derives from the acousmatic music tradition. Such work may impart to the listener the artist's musical intuition, proficiency of the medium, aesthetic preference, *etc.*, however these considerations may distort the fidelity of the subject's representation within the work.

### What is Acousmatic Music?

In 1974 François Bayle, a member of the GRM, substituted the term *musique acousmatique* (acousmatic music) to label the genre of electroacoustic music previously known as *musique concrète* (explained in the previous chapter).

This term had been used by Pierre Schaeffer in his *Traité des Objects Musicaux* (1966) on articulating a mode of listening where sounds are heard but their cause or source is not visible, e.g. listening to the radio. Bayle extended this term to demarcate the group's developing practice.

[The term's] origin is attributed to Pythagoras (sixth century BC) who, rumour has it, taught his classes - only verbally - from behind a partition, in order to force his disciples [who sit in silence] to focus all their attention on his message. (Dhomont 1996:24)

The philosophy of acousmatic music, although deriving from *musique concrète*, was more inclusive, allowing explicit reference and imagery within its musical vocabulary.

Francis Dhomont, a seminal acousmatic music composer who introduced and nurtured this idiom in Québec, regards imagery as a highly significant feature of this blind medium:

Acousmatic art presents sound on its own, devoid of causal identity, thereby generating a flow of images in the psyche of the listener. (Dhomont 1996:24)

He defines acousmatic music as "the art of mental representations triggered by sound" (Dhomont 1996:25).

The other distinguishing feature of standard acousmatic music is that it is inscribed onto, and is attached to a fixed medium (e.g. CDR), i.e. the work is "shot and developed in the studio" (Dhomont 1996:25). Chion has named this process '*sono-fixation*' (Chion 1993:13).

Interestingly the first work of *musique concrète*, *Etude aux chemins de fer* (1948) was derived from field sound recordings of trains at the *Gare des Batignolles* in Paris made by the composer himself, Pierre Schaeffer. This was the first and last time that Schaeffer dealt with sonic material from the environment in a composition where he would ascribe any significance to the origins of the sounds, that is apart from his use of and vocal sounds, where there is often no attempt to conceal the sound's origins.

Schaeffer quickly realised that major problems of association had been created by using sources which retained a significant proportion of their identifying characteristics after processing. As a result the piece was more an essay on the activities of an apparently schizophrenic goods yard than a creative study in sound to be appreciated on its own terms. In an attempt to overcome this difficulty he reverted to more conventional sources of musical sound. (Manning 1993:21)

Ensuing from such formative experiences, Schaeffer was to develop the conceptual tools of reduced listening and the sound-object, to aid the composer in creating music out of concrete sound, instead of creating a collection of sound-events.

Chion, who edited and refined the *Traité des Objets Musicaux* in the *Guide des Objets Sonore* (1983) pejoratively named his colleagues who incessantly referred to their sound-object's history in their compositions as 'fetishists':

The composers of the GRM tended to Fetishisms which have to do principally with focussing attention on the sources of the sounds and the means where by they are produced, where as the sounds themselves are what really count, and they can be made in any and every way. (Chion 1993:53)

However 'fetishistic' this approach may be, the listener will always ask upon grasping a sound: 'What is its source?' It seems to be locked into our cognitive system to ask such questions. Trevor Wishart, a leading UK based acousmatic composer, writes:

...in our common experience, we are more often aware of the source of a sound than not and studies of behaviour and aural physiology would suggest that our mental apparatus is predisposed to allocate sounds to their source. We can see in a very crude way how this ability was essential for our survival in the period before our species came to dominate this planet. One needs to be able to differentiate between harmless herbivores and dangerous carnivores...(Wishart 1996:130)

Wishart sees the exciting potential for the acousmatic composer to exploit our primordial listening system:

Thus when we are sitting in the concert hall listening to the Beethoven symphony the landscape of the sounds [i.e. the source from which we imagine the sounds to come] is the orchestra. When we are sitting in our living room listening to a

recording of the Beethoven symphony the landscape of the sounds remains the orchestra. The loudspeaker has in effect allowed us to set up a virtual acoustic space into which we may project an image of any real existing acoustic space such as that of the concert hall or, for example, in the case of a wildlife recording, that of a wood at night. The existence of this virtual acoustic space, however, presents us with new creative possibilities. The acoustic space which we represent need not be real and we may in fact play with the listener's perception of landscape. (Wishart 1996:136)

## **Sound Diffusion**

The performance practice of acousmatic music varies depending on the composer's specifications and the performance venue's set-up. The established practice is for sound playback from an 'orchestra' of loudspeakers surrounding the audience. In English this performance practice has become commonly known as 'sound diffusion'. Jonty Harrison, another leading composer of acousmatic music in the UK and director of Birmingham Electroacoustic Sound Theatre (BEAST), a multi-speaker system designed for the performance of acousmatic music, defines sound diffusion as

The real time (usually manual) control of the relative levels and spatial deployment during performance. (Harrison 1998:117)

The number of speakers can vary from 4 to more than 100. When positioning the speakers the room's acoustic and the positioning of the audience, not forgetting human physiology is taken into consideration. If the work is stereo, a performer can then control the speakers live in performance, facilitating manifold configurations of the spatial parameters of the composition beyond the studio production. It is not altogether dissimilar to the performance practice of Western Art Music: the audience is silent, facing forward towards a stage, there are good seats and bad seats in the auditorium.



There are variations on this model in the world of acousmatic music, e.g. 8 channel work ideally performed in a planetarium where there is no front or back.<sup>v</sup>

### Anecdotal Music

In 1957 the Nagra III portable tape recorder was launched. Weighing only 5 kilograms, for the first time it was possible to make high quality recordings outside of the studio. Luc Ferrari, a GRM based composer, was one of the first composers to get hold of one and explore its artistic potential. Since Schaeffer's initial forays in 1948, Ferrari was the next GRM composer to get out of the studio in search of sonic material.

I would never interpose my will on the sound, only on the manner in which I recorded it. This is the distinction. I asked myself, why transpose the ideas of traditional instrumental composition into the domain of electroacoustic music? Why cut, mix, and assemble electronic sounds into the same kind of gestures one finds in instrumental music? This seemed absurd to me. It is in this way that I realized that the act of recording - that is, the way in which you capture a sound - was a creative gesture in and of itself. (Robindoré 1998:12)

Ferrari was inspired by the Surrealist's notion of the *objet trouvé* (found object), i.e. the Surrealist, such as André Breton, would go to a flea market in search of objects to be incorporated into or inspire art works. "The found object is one which when seen among a large number of other objects possesses an attraction - the art of the *jamais vu*, the never before seen" (Alexandrian 1970:141). In a similar manner Ferrari was on the hunt for sounds resonating in the air as they happened: "An outdoor sound is fugitive" (Robindoré 1998:12).<sup>vi</sup>



In 1970 Ferrari presented his new work *Presque Rien N° 1 ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* to his colleagues. The work consists of 21 minutes of seamless editing of an environmental recording that Ferrari had taken from a Yugoslavian village.

In an interview he said of the project:

What's nice about the "*Presque Riens*" is that you really notice the things you hear, and eventually there's a moment where sounds stand out more than they normally would. I went everywhere with my tape recorder and microphone, and I was in this Dalmatian fishing village, and our bedroom window looked out on a tiny harbour of fishing boats, in an inlet in the hills, almost surrounded by hills-which gave it an extraordinary acoustic. It was very quiet. At night the silence woke me up... that silence we forget when we live in a city. I heard this silence which, little by little, began to be embellished... It was amazing. I started recording at night, always at the same time when I woke up, about 3 or 4am, and I recorded until about 6am. I had a lot of tapes!

And then I hit upon an idea... I recorded those sounds which repeated every day: the first fisherman passing by same time every day with his bicycle, the first hen, the first donkey, and then the lorry which left at 6am to the port to pick up people arriving on the boat. Events determined by society. And then the composer plays! (Ferrari interviewed in Warburton 1998)

Such was the genesis of the work: edited audible highlights of the day. Ferrari calls this kind of work 'anecdotal music': music that employs recognisable sounds more for their 'anecdotal' or narrative aspect than for their abstract potential. In retrospect he has claimed that *Presque Rien* was a prototype for soundscape composition, although in fact the term did not exist at the time of composition (Robindoré 1998).

The work was radical in its day, causing a scandal at the GRM. In such work Ferrari was reacting to the GRM's compositional output which derived heavily from Schaefferian concepts. Other works by Ferrari have included field recordings, but with more elements

of play or colouring e.g. *Hétérozygote* (1963/64), *Petite symphonie intuitive pour un paysage de printemps* (1973), *Presque rien avec filles* (1989).

## Vancouver Soundscape

In 1973 the WSP produced a double LP and booklet titled *The Vancouver Soundscape*. In this landmark survey of a city's sounds (i.e. Vancouver), each of the tracks explores different sonic aspects of the city: its geography, its people, its identity.

R. Murray Schafer wrote this message to the listener on the original LP:

To record sounds is to put a frame around them. Just as a photograph frames a visual environment, which may be inspected at leisure and in detail, so a recording isolates an acoustic environment and makes it a repeatable event for study purposes. The recording of acoustic environments is not new, but it often takes considerable listening experience to begin to perceive their details accurately. A complex sensation may seem bland or boring if listened to carelessly. We hope, therefore, that listeners will discover new sounds with each replay of the records in this set - particularly the first record, which consists of some quite intricate environments. It may be useful to turn off the room lights or to use headphones, if available. Each of the sequences on these recordings has its own direction and tempo. They are part of the World Symphony. The rest is outside your front door.

In the episode titled *The Music of Horns and Whistles* you can hear a montage of field recordings of ship horns seamlessly spliced together. Such work veers away from a scientific study towards the art world with its concern for shape, pitch relationships and musical coherence.

*Vancouver Soundscape* and *Presque Rien*, two very different works from different continents, instigated the genre of soundscape composition. The contrast between the two

works represents the diversity of compositional procedures and politics that we can observe today among the multiple styles of work that find themselves positioned under the rubric of soundscape composition.

### **[3.4] Ethnography**

#### **What is Ethnography?**

The discipline of ethnography is the principal source of data for cultural anthropology. Ethnography is a qualitative research method based on direct observation of and reporting on a community or social group's way of life: their values, beliefs and social rules. Unlike many other fields of social research, ethnographic research examines entire environments, looking at their subjects of study in context.

The first stage in ethnographic study is participant observation, where the researcher goes into the field, acquiring first-hand experience by actively or interactively participating in that society's day-to-day life. In practice this means looking and listening but it may also involve participating in whatever is going on. The ethnographer may also collect documentary material such as photographs and sound recordings, as well as writing down the observations. Ordinarily this would be conducted over a long period of time in order for the society to get used to an outsider observing and enquiring into their day-to-day activities.

The second stage is face-to-face interviewing in the field with members of the society, although some ethnographies are completely derived from participant observation. There

are methodological procedures concerning how to interview in the field in order to yield reliable and fruitful data; i.e. how to instigate interviews; when to interject, or intervene, disrupting the flow.

A third stage is examining archives. This can be very broad, looking into every form of documentation and artefacts, e.g. letters, photographs, diaries, previous ethnographic and historical studies and other relevant data from whatever discipline.

The final stage is producing a report on the findings and conclusions on the society studied. This normally takes the form of an academic report or paper to be presented at conferences on ethnography and published in journals dedicated to the study of ethnography.

In sharp contrast to other academic disciplines, ethnography embraces the subjective sensuous experience of the researcher. Dwight Conquergood writes:

[Ethnography] privileges the body as a site of knowing... Ethnography is an embodied practice; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied ethnographer is the instrument. (Conquergood 1991:180)

However, as John Berger puts it, "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger 1973:8), ethnography calls for a high level of self-awareness, where the elements of subjectivity should be recognised and revealed in the report. An ongoing process of reflexivity is put into play.



In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research. These effects are to be found in all phases of the research process from initial selection of topic to final reporting of results. (Davies, C. 1999:4)

To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment. By extension, the reflexive ethnographer does not simply report "facts" or truths" but actively constructs interpretations of his or her experiences in the field and then questions how those interpretations came about. The outcome of reflexive social science is reflexive knowledge: statements that provide insight on the workings of the social world and insight on how that knowledge came into existence. By bringing subject and object back into the same space authors give their audience the opportunity to evaluate them as "situated actors" (active participants in the process of meaning creation). (Hertz 1997:viii)

Ethnography has undergone an in-depth examination of its cultural role and research methodologies in a post-modern and post-colonial world. Coupled with imperialism, the historical predicament of ethnography is that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures (Clifford 1986:2). Such invention is informed by the literary procedures that pervade the ethnographic report, notwithstanding the ethnographer's ideologies and agenda, often with the overriding ambition to 'tell a good story'.

The textual practice in ethnography, which concerns the translation of an alien culture into a written academic language (predominantly English language), describes a society in such a way that the chances are that members of that society will probably not be able to speak or read that language. Such a practice is in the service of the ethnographer's society, not the native's. The ethnographer goes to great lengths in fieldwork to share activities, and time with the society being studied, acknowledging the members of the



society as contemporaries. However, the written report, (i.e. the outcome of the fieldwork), is temporally and culturally distanced from that society through labels such as tribal, traditional, ancient, animistic, primitive, preliterate (Conquergood 1991:182).

Johannes Fabien's solutions are:

- 1) Challenge ethnographers to rethink themselves as communicators, not scientists. Ethnographers must recognise that fieldwork is a form of communicative interaction with an Other, one that must be carried out coevally, on the basis of shared intersubjective time and intersocietal cotemporaneity. To shift from textualized space to co-experienced time (Conquergood 1991:183).
- 2) The rethinking of ethnography as primarily about speaking and listening, instead of observing. Sight and observation go with space, and the spatial practice of division, separation, compartmentalisation, and surveillance. Metaphors of sound, on the other hand, privilege temporal process, proximity, and incorporation. The communicative praxis of speaking and listening, conversation, demands copresence even as it decentres the categories of knower and known. Vulnerability and self-disclosure are enabled through conversation (Conquergood 1991:183).

Talal Asad offers up the possibilities of other forms of outcome from the ethnographic study.

If Benjamin was right in proposing that translation may require not a mechanical reproduction of the original but a harmonization with its *intentio*, it follows that there is no reason why this should be done only in the same mode. Indeed, it could be argued that "translating" an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography, that under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt. (Clifford 1986:156)

To sum up, a new ethnography which is relevant to today's world dynamics requires a shift from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from monologue to dialogue, from authority to vulnerability (Conquergood 1991:183).

Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually - as objects, theatres, texts - it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphor for ethnography shifts away from the observing eye and towards expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's "voice" pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced. (Clifford 1986:12)

### **Ethnography and Soundscape Studies**

As we have discussed earlier, anthropologists such as McLuhan and Carpenter have taken an active interest, in fact pioneered the study of the soundscape. However, since then (i.e. the 1950s and 1960s), there appears to have been a hiatus in soundscape-orientated research in anthropology.<sup>vii</sup> One unique researcher who has endeavoured to advance the study of soundscape in an anthropological/ ethnographic context is Steven Feld. His point of departure was to research:

Ways sound and sounding link environment, language, and musical experience and expression. (Feld 1994:2)

Feld, unsatisfied with ethnomusicology in tackling these relationships, moved into the field of ethnography. His first intensive fieldwork in this endeavour was in the rainforests of south central Papua New Guinea with the Kaluli people of Bosavi in 1976-7. He studied their ritualised vocal expressions in context. He observed how the voices mimicked the rainforest birds. As birds to the Kaluli represent spirits, the mimicking of the birds: "recall and evoke the presence in being a bird" (Feld 1994:2). Also the texts of the Kaluli songs "sequentially name places and co-occurring environmental features of vegetation, light and sound" (Feld 1994:2). Thus he surmised that "the ecology of natural sounds is central to a local musical ecology, and how this ecology maps onto the rainforest environment" (Feld 1994:2).

Through this and further studies of the Kaluli people and their prevailing environment, Feld has devised an anthropological concept that he calls acoustemology:

[Acoustemology explores] acoustic knowing as a centrepiece of Kaluli experience; how sounding and the sensual, bodily, experiencing of sound is a special kind of knowing, or put differently, how sonic sensibility is basic to experiential truth in the Bosavi forests. Sounds emerge from and are perceptually centred in place, not to mention sung with, to, and about places. Just as "life takes place" so does sound; thus more and more my experiential accounts of the Kaluli sound world have become acoustic studies of how senses make place and places make sense. (Feld 1994:4)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Feld has released a CD of an assemblage of field recordings that evoke the day in the life of Bosavi and the Kaluli in *Voices of the Rainforest* (1991). This work takes on the double roles of an experimental ethnographic report and a soundscape composition. Feld writes on the work:



The recordings, although conventionally numbered as cue bands, are fused and continuous, and they include equally the natural environmental sounds and local musical expression found in Bosavi. All of these sounds, ambient and musical, are edited together to produce one fluid sixty-minute soundscape, a metacomposition that evokes, through my technological mediation, ways Kaluli experience and express the music of nature as the nature of music. (Feld 1994:280)

## **Ethnography and Soundscape Composition**

Reading through the above brief outline of ethnographic practices and theories we can immediately find parallels with the practice and theory of soundscape composition. Both disciplines engage the artist/scientist in open-air-research rather than arm-chair-research, focusing on fieldwork primarily through sensuous experience and the creation of an outward response to that experience from the inside. Both are interdisciplinary contextual enquires which take a holistic approach to the environment and its people. Both are tied up with translating their findings into condensed, itinerant forms.

Through its criticism ethnography can offer soundscape composition subtle and challenging ways to move forward in a relevant and socially functional way which reflects the complexities of today's cultures. Primarily this could mean a greater reflexive mode of operation for the composer, questioning and divulging what he or she may previously have regarded as givens. For example compositional processes that previously lay transparent could be exposed and discussed within the work.<sup>viii</sup> A common facet of soundscape composition is that work is driven by acousmatic music aesthetics and its concomitant technical innovation.<sup>ix</sup> Such work bears little correspondence to the site of study, unless that site is where acousmatic music is a feature of the prevailing culture.<sup>x</sup> It will convey to the listener more about the composer's cultural clique and listening habits,

than of the intended study. Critical reflexivity should expose such tendencies and offer solutions. Perhaps through the unfolding of the work artefacts derived from acousmatic music aesthetics could be peeled away. A contemporary ethnographic approach to soundscape composition may require that the composer shares authorship of the work, engaging in a collaborative process, allowing the local inhabitants to speak for themselves in "an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances". The final work should be made available to those that it explores, and their responses should be acknowledged and heard, allowing a dialogue rather than a one way communication (i.e. no communication in the accepted understanding of the word).

Shifting the visual bias, soundscape composition can offer ethnography alternative models of cultural poetics: that of the analytical and creative tools for grasping at the sound World. Perhaps as Talal Asad hinted at, we may well find ethnographers generating and presenting what the electroacoustic community would recognise as a soundscape composition, as a pertinent substitute to writing an academic ethnographic report.

### [3.5] *Phonographies of Glasgow*

In the winter of 1999 I was invited by Robert H. King to present some of my work at the *drift* festival of sound art and acoustic ecology. With its focus on soundscape and my ancestry connections and childhood experiences of Glasgow it became obvious for me to create and present a work that dealt with the Glasgow soundscape for the occasion. The outcome was a 40 minute work, *Phonographies of Glasgow*, which combined new work I



had constructed out of field recordings made from traversing central Glasgow, archive material of now disappeared sounds that my Father had recorded 40 years earlier (i.e. the Erskine Ferry horn) and pre-existing work (i.e. *Peregrinations* (1999)).

*Phonographie* (French spelling) is a term coined by the idiosyncratic composer François-Bernard Mâche. It actuates the notion of 'sonic photography' (an idea easily comprehensible by a visually biased culture) hand in hand with the action of writing or inscribing with sound. As I walk through Glasgow the sonic activity of the City inscribes itself onto the medium.

In an extended programme note of the work that took the form of a paper *Phonographies: fantastical/ phantasmic soundscapes* in the festival brochure I wrote:

In *Phonographies of Glasgow* everyday sonic city life is transferred and reframed into an immersive, sonic phantasmagoria: a controlled 'hi-fi' stratospheric and contrapuntal sonic environment of nuance and depth, where anamnestic phantoms of the territory collide and mutate; a liminal zone where sonic ephemera are frozen, straddling the abstract and the intimate.

The performance may take on the appearance of a rite: collective ritualistic practice that may bring about a neurophysiological effect on the brain of those engaged with the sonic environment, influenced by its rhythmic and harmonic patterns, accompanied by familiar imagistic or associative sounds, undergoing constant, 'unreal' transformations.

Accumulating my building blocks, I look for sounds that initially fascinate me, i.e. sounds that render me motionless by arousing awe. Secondly, I pursue the *genius loci*: the spirit or special atmosphere of a place. The art is one of framing sound: considering its perspective i.e. foreground and background, form, pitch relationships, definition, line, *etc...* The result is a public art that comprises of the convergence of the aesthetics of acousmatic music with the philosophy of soundscape composition. (Drever 1999:29-30)

In preparation I spent a weekend in Glasgow recording the sounds I came across in public places. As my knowledge of Glasgow was limited I took the approach of an aural *flâneur*.<sup>xi</sup>

*Flânerie*, the art of strolling and looking in the city emerged in the nineteenth century arcades of Paris as depicted by the poet Charles Baudelaire in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), evident in such collections of poetry as *Les fleurs du mal* (1875), and consequently developed by Walter Benjamin in the extensive Paris Arcades project, which he worked on for the last 20 years of his life until his death in 1940.

*Flânerie* is more specific than strolling. It is a spatial practice of specific sites: the interior and exterior of public spaces of the city[...] While *flânerie* is an individual practice, it is part of a social process of inhabiting and appropriating urban space[...] *Flânerie* is public and other directed. It is more than 'taking the air' or going for a walk. The *flâneur* is out to see and be seen, and thus requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take in the bustle of the city in the security of his anonymous status as part of the metropolitan throng. The crowd is also an audience. *Flânerie* is thus a crowd practice. A conisseur's 'art of doing' crowd behaviour. As an ethic it retrieves the individual from the mass by elevating idiosyncrasies of an individual's observations and point of view. Observation is the *raison d'être* of the *flâneur*, and seeing visual lures is the key to the *flâneur's* movement, drawn from sight to sight...The persona of the *flâneur* is a tortoise-like shell of artful indolence behind which *flâneur's* agency and intentionality is hidden. (Rob Shields 1994:65)

My process in the pedestrian zones of central Glasgow had no interest in the visual world. The microphone was the primary point of contact between me and the city. The city was brought into me through the microphone. With no fixed route or duration I was led through the city by its sound's. Sounds that interested me aesthetically; sounds that interested me culturally; sounds that one can hear in any city; sounds that are unique to Glasgow; sounds that you can hear in Glasgow everyday; sounds that occurred one time

only and are gone. When I came across the distant echo of a sound that interested me I would pursue it, e.g. an aerobics class playing very loud music with the amplified but distorted voice of the instructor spilling out of a window and into the street. The sound of a pushchair in desperate need of oiling would lead me down Glasgow's busiest street on a Saturday morning. I inhabited and appropriated the city in search of such sounds and was constantly blest with serendipity.<sup>xii</sup>

Bringing my open-air research into the studio (i.e. the armchair), I searched through my collected material for significant highlights of my aural *flânerie*. With basic cut and paste techniques I produced the opening section of *Phonographies of Glasgow: walk*.

Not only was the work a journey through space and place but also a journey through time. Ultimately, my goal as an artist in such works is to induce fantastic daydreams; disseminating a poetics of space, place and culture through the medium of sound.



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<sup>i</sup> A geological term meaning found in the place of origin

Ecology is the study of the relationship between individuals and communities and their environment. Soundscape [or Acoustic] ecology is thus the study of the effects of the acoustic environment, or soundscape, on the physical responses or behavioural characteristics of those living within it. Its particular aim is to draw attention to imbalances which may have unhealthy or inimical effects. Also termed acoustic ecology. (Truax 1999)

<sup>iii</sup> For a fuller description of Amphoux's soundscape study methodologies see Hellström, B. 2001.

<sup>iv</sup> Bill Fontana's work primarily concerns the live transportation of sounds from one environment to another, often with a political agenda. In *Sound Island* he transmitted live sounds of the sea from Normandy out of loudspeakers placed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

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The sound sculpture explored the transformation of the visual and aural experience of traffic. Live natural white sounds of the sea from the Normandy coast were transmitted to loudspeakers installed on the facade of the monument. The presence of the breaking and crashing waves created the illusion that the cars were silent. This was accomplished in contradiction to the visual aspects of the situation. The sound of the sea is natural white sound, and has the psycho-acoustic ability to mask other sounds, not by being louder, but because of the sheer harmonic complexity of the sea sound.  
(Fontana, B. - Sound as Virtual Image)

<sup>v</sup> Robert Normandeau's *Le renard et la rose* (1995)

<sup>vi</sup> *Crabfish* (1997) is an example of a sonic found object composition the materials of which I collected in Dartmouth, England.

<sup>vii</sup> Currently there appears to be a renewed interest in soundscape issues in anthropology. At *Sound Practice: the 1st UKISC conference on sound, culture and environments* at Dartington College of Arts and Dartington Hall, UK, in February 2001, there was a large representation of research from anthropologists and ethnographers, i.e. Ian Dent, Cora Bender & Tom Rice.

<sup>viii</sup> i.e. Hildegard Westerkamp's *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1989).

<sup>ix</sup> The discussion on the aesthetic quality versus political dates back to the 1930s See *Aesthetics & Politics: Debates Between Bloch, Lukas, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno* (1980)

<sup>x</sup> At present there is only one significant ethnographic study of an electroacoustic music society, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (1995) which is Georgina Born's study of *Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique* (IRCAM) in Paris.

<sup>xi</sup> Flânerie... became the dominant motif in writings on personal-stereo use together with many other accounts of urban experience. The work of Hosokawa (1984) and Chambers (1994), for example, situate personal-stereo use within forms of urban social contestation and de-centred experience drawing theoretically upon the work of De Certeau (1988) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987). In these accounts users become 'nomadic rebels' or '*flâneurs*' experientially remaking their urban experience aesthetically as de-centred subjects. If indeed *flâneurs* respond to and record the phenomena of the street then it is apparent that personal-stereo users are not *flâneurs* in the accepted sense of the word. In their solipsistic aesthetic recreation of experience the empirical facticity of the street is more often than not ignored or discounted. (Bull 2000:141-2)



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<sup>xii</sup> A pertinent parallel of aural *flânerie* is the olfactory spatial practice in Chapter 7 of Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1985): the protagonist traverses the streets of Paris, uninterested in the visual or the sonic dimensions of the environments, in the "hopes of getting a whiff of something new" (Süskind 1987:40).

## Chapter 4

### The Sublime in Acousmatic Music: listening to the unrepresentable

It is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented. (Jean-François Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?* 1982)

#### [4.1] Introduction

The perennial yet troublesome question I am posing in this paper is: 'what is it that I am doing in my acousmatic music composition?' Such an ostensibly nebulous question summons up knee-jerk evasive excuses such as: 'the answer lies within the music itself, go listen!' or 'any exegetic verbalisation by the author will only put limits on the interpretation and/ or appreciation of a work which otherwise would be boundless'. The English *avant-garde* composer Michael Finnissy demonstrates his position on such questions in the opening to his programme notes to his orchestral work *Red Earth* (1988):

Here comes another story to help you across the bridge from reality to the terrifying 'unknown' of music. It tells you that (unsurprisingly?) music comes from experience of life, but it does not (and cannot simply) tell you how. I can try to 'de-mystify' part of the process, but I will not rend the veil from the temple (irresponsibly pandering to a more or less scurrilous curiosity)! (Finnissy 1996:3)

With J. M. Keynes in mind when he remarked that those economists who disliked theory, or claimed to get along better without it, were simply in the grip of an older theory (Eagleton 1994:vi). Or as Terry Eagleton succinctly put it in his introduction to his book on *Literary Theory* (1994), "hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own" (Eagleton 1994:vii). In this paper I will attempt at a more critical yet creative answer which hopefully will open up a discussion

rather than cut one off before it has even started. In this endeavour I am not going to probe too far into the general rules of the game, more explore my own intuitive decision making processes concerning the formation of structure and juxtaposition of materials in several of my acousmatic music compositions.

Through listening to my works composed over the past 8 years, I have picked up on a recurring theme (or set of relationships), which has on occasion in post-composition retro-audition unwittingly assumed the role of the *raison d'être* of the work. Surprisingly, however this theme has not been rationally or empirically considered at the moment it was called into play during the devising of the composition. Such a naïve compositional process may give some sense to my auditory faculties and sub-conscious, however when asked to verbalise that sense I am rendered mute, save superficial narratives which are extrinsic to the work and knowledge of which are not at all contingent to a listener's grasp of the work. The recurrent theme in question is mutable. It is not uniquely a spectro-morphological idiom that can be analysed reducibly and as a consequence understood in greater depth. This theme is more an emotion that is aroused in me on listening to the works. A feeling, that upon collective consensus has been shared among other listeners, albeit to different degrees and configurations. Without hopefully sounding too pretentious, the woolly and unfashionable, yet overused term that I am going to exercise in this paper for this theme is the *sublime*. In other words I want to propose that the sensations that have arisen in my consciousness have something to do with the notion or notions of the *sublime*. In such a problematic discourse I will keep in the back of my

mind Napoleon's words spoken to De Pradt, Polish ambassador, after the retreat from Moscow in 1812:

*Du sublime au ridicule il n'y a qu'un pas.* (There is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous.)

#### **[4.2] Background**

My acousmatic works encompass a broad range of issues and approaches. Common to all the projects is that all the sounds used and presented at whatever stage of the process are either derived from field recordings or recorded in the studio, none are synthesised from scratch in the computer. Interdisciplinary collaboration has taken a key role in my compositions. I have worked with a number of writers and performers, often with the intent to challenge and develop my musical language and conceptual underpinnings to art's practice, both in realising and performing. Many of my works are spoken text based compositions, which take on the concerns of a poet. Other projects comprise of framing and/or juxtaposing found sounds with little to no retouching/ airbrushing, where the microphone takes the role of musical instrument. And some projects take minute samples to significantly long field recordings, which undergo considerable transformation, where frequency, amplitude, duration, panning and envelope are interfered with. In such works sounds may be transformed to such a degree that there is no audible correspondence with the original sound, losing all trace of origins or context whilst gaining new identities and relationships.

From the outset of my explorations into the field of acousmatic music, my point of departure as a composer was primarily a representational one rather than a formal one.



All the sound-objects I was appropriating and manipulating had strong extrinsic meanings to me once I had established their relationships intrinsically within the work. That is, once the process of recording and selection of sounds and their consequent physical transformations had been completed, the sounds adopted fixed meanings outside of themselves in my mind, over and above merely a description of the phenomenon itself. I was quick to mentally confuse representation with that of presentation for these sounds had a role to play in my system of representation. For me there was no meaningful difference. The presence of an electroacoustic sound could be as full, as immediate and as intimate as any acoustic sound.

More recently my overriding interest in sound and its creative organisation has veered towards soundscape studies, where compositionally I am very much concerned with the original context of sounds and how sounds are practised in the everyday. Although I am presenting compositions now where the sounds maintain reference to how they are heard in the real world, in most of my work there is an audible equivocation or play between abstract and concrete sound worlds. Some of my compositional projects in fact, such as *Peregrinations* (1998), sustain a level of abstraction from the 'real World' throughout the work, provoking an elastic semiosis by lying just below the threshold of concrete meaning. In *Soundings of Angel* (1999) which I will describe in more detail further on in this text, I attempt to evoke, invoke and provoke in the listener's mind the physical dimension of angels, a notion which I am not able to unambiguously represent within this electroacoustic music genre. It is work of allusion not representation.

### [4.3] Notions of The Sublime

It is not uncommon for someone today to name the experience of a sudden moment of beauty or ecstasy as sublime or awesome, be it from exposure to art or any other sensual stimuli. However what can we gather from such everyday exclamations more than that the sublime is differentiated from the beautiful or the ecstatic yet it is closely related? An initial etymological probe will teach us that the adjective *sublime* comes from the Latin word *sublimis*: *sub* - under, and *limin* - the threshold of consciousness or the limit below which a stimulus is not perceived. To further inform this study I will engage in a short archaeology on philosophical, psychological and religious notions of the sublime in the hope that it may proffer some greater understanding to my acousmatic music practice.

#### According to Pseudo-Longinus

Discussion surrounding notions of the sublime became prevalent in Europe during the Eighteenth Century with translations made available of the treatise *Peri Hypsous*, attributed to the Greek philosopher Pseudo-Longinus in 50 AD, of an aural and oral practice, that of rhetoric. He writes:

...sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown. The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport (Bolla 1989:36)... Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influence of the sublime brings power and irresistible might to bear, and reigns supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude. (Bolla 1989:37)

Through this description the tremendous irrational power that the sublime has over the listener and its capacity to mentally transport and bewilder the listener is proposed.

The English philosopher Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759) and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) take up the debate.

### **According to Burke**

In Burke's treatise he dictates the characteristics of what gives rise to the experience of the beautiful in music:

The first is; that beautiful in music will not bear that loudness and strength of sounds which may be used to raise other passions; nor notes, which are shrill, or harsh, or deep; it agrees best with such as are clear, even smooth, and weak. The second is; that great variety, and quick transitions from one measure or tone to another, are contrary to the genius of the beautiful in music. Such transitions often excite mirth, or other sudden and tumultuous passions; but not that sinking, that melting, that languor, which is the characteristical effect of the beautiful, as it regards every sense. The passions excited by beauty are in fact nearer to a species of melancholy, than to jollity and mirth. (Burke 1970:234-235)

Burke's compartmentalised philosophy makes a distinction between the sensuous experience of the sublime in sound from the beautiful in music:

The eye is not the only organ of sensation, by which a sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have a great power in these as in most other passions. I do not mean words, because words do not affect simply by their sounds, but by means altogether different. Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind, though we can observe no nicety or artifice in those sorts of music. The shouting of multitudes has a similar effect; and by the sole strength of sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that in this staggering, and hurry of the mind, the

best established tempers can scarcely forbear being born down, and joining in the common cry, and common resolution of the crowd. (Burke 1970:150-1)

Contrary to Pseudo-Longinus writings, Burke does not credit the spoken voice with the powers to invoke the sublime. Burke rather concentrates his notion of the sublime on large scale sound events, events of great magnitude that results in the listener's displeasure, that of pain and terror. However, as Jean-François Lyotard, who undertook an in-depth study of Romantic and Modernist theories of the sublime and their relevance in a Postmodern context, goes on to clarify, it is not only a displeasurable experience:

Delight, or the negative pleasure which in contradictory, almost neurotic fashion, characterizes the feeling of the sublime, arises from the removal of the threat of pain. Certain 'objects' and certain 'sensations' are pregnant with a threat to our self-preservation, and Burke refers to that threat as *terror*: shadows, solitude, silence and the approach of death may be 'terrible' in that they announce that the gaze, the other, language or life will soon be extinguished. One feels that it is possible that soon nothing more will take place. What is sublime is the feeling that something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take 'place' and will announce that everything is not over. That place is mere 'here', the most minimal occurrence. (Lyotard 1991:84)

### According to Kant

For Kant in the *Critique of Judgement* the contrast between the sublime and the beautiful has to do with the perception or lack of perception of form of an object in the viewer or listener's mind:

The beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having [definite] boundaries. The sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought. (Kant 1951:82)



A classic example of the recognition of 'boundlessness' through the perception of lack of form is:

When we gaze upon the starry heavens... it is not that there are no spatial relations or that they have no unity, but rather that we have no sensible standards to fully appreciate them - they are of such a magnitude that we are immediately led beyond them to an idea which has no counterpart in our sense experience. (Crawford 1974:99)

Kant splits the sublime into two parts: the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime.

The *mathematically sublime* can be experienced in phenomena that evoke the idea of infinite magnitude or largeness of which our understanding is too limited to grasp.

Nonetheless reason can form the idea of the infinite. The human mind can think it, but our powers of imagination are inadequate to apprehend the infinite as thought<sup>i</sup>... The feeling of pleasure involved in the mathematically sublime paradoxically results from the unpleasant conflict between the imagination and the reason - the former being inadequate to the latter. (Crawford 1974:136)

The *dynamically sublime* is that in nature which has might or power but, from the standpoint of our experience, has no dominion over us... Natural phenomena, such as a raging storm at sea, make nature appear almighty, but the sublime experience of its might under certain circumstances can be pleasurable... We experience a displeasure caused by the realization of the inadequacy of our powers in comparison with nature's might. And yet, under circumstances when nature's might is fearful but not actually causing fear in us, the experience is pleasurable because it arouses in us the feeling of there being something in us which is supersensible [i.e. not empirically knowable] and thus superior to nature and outside her dominion. (Crawford 1974:136-7)

Kant summarises the sublime as:

The mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense. (Kant 1951:89)

A classic example of the sublime in art is the ocular experience offered to us in the landscape paintings of the German Romantic landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) such as *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (Wanderer above the Clouds) (1818). In the foreground we have a humble human figure looking out into a vast wild landscape, where the individual is in a liminal state between the finite and the infinite. The aim of this transcendental<sup>ii</sup> art is for the viewers to loose themselves in the contemplation of Nature. Kant called such a technique 'negative presentation' (Lyotard 1991:85): as it is not possible to represent the absolute or the infinite directly in paintings because they are pure Ideas. However artists such as Friedrich have striven to allude to such notions in their work through other means.

### **Absolute Music**

The musicologist Carl Dahlhaus offers us the possibility of listening to the sublime in Music in his writings on *The Idea of Absolute in Music* (1978):

The idea of absolute music has many facets: ...the quasi religious function of listening, whereby proper hearing of sublime music can afford the listener a glimpse of the infinite, or Beyond, or at least produce an esthetic experience above mundane ideas, images, and things...(Dahlhaus 1989:vii)

In the nineteenth century large-scale symphonic music was singled out as the music where the sublime could be found by the discerning ear. On reviewing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (1808) in 1810 the writer E. T. A. Hoffmann, a man of his time, pronounced:

Beethoven's music presses the levels of terror, of dread, of pain, and awakens the endless longing that is the nature of romanticism. Beethoven is a purely romantic

composer (and precisely because of that, a truly musical one), which may explain why he is less successful with vocal music, which does not permit indefinite longing, but only those affections in the realm of the infinite that may be expressed in words, and why his instrumental music rarely appeals to the many. (Hoffman in Dahlhaus 1989:44)

Hoffman aligns the music of the Classical period with concerns of beauty and the music of the unfolding Romantic era with the sublime, with Beethoven as the prime exponent and the genre of the symphony its peerless medium (Dahlhaus 1989:44).

Edward Fitzgerald the celebrated translator of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859), (the sublime twelfth century Persian classic) on experiencing a performance of Handel's *Messiah* (1742), a work that inspired in part Beethoven's large scale symphonic mass for voices, the *Mass in D*, the *Missa Solemnis* (1822) (Grout & Palisca 1988:650), pertinently noted in a letter dated 1842:

I think Handel never gets out of his wig, that is, out of his age: his Hallelujah Chorus is a chorus, not of angels, but of well-fed earthly choristers, ranged tier above tier in a Gothic cathedral, with princes for audience, and their military trumpets flourishing over the full volume of the organ. Handel's gods are like Homer's, and his sublime never reached beyond the region of the clouds. (Fitzgerald in Crofton & Fraser 1985:73)

Whatever Handel's transcendental aspirations were, Fitzgerald's reading of the work from his mid-nineteenth century English perspective had got stuck on the cultural contingencies of the performance, where the angelic chorus despite its enormity is chained down to a fleshy, mortal existence.

## The Buddhist Sublime

The English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was well versed in the writings of Burke and Kant, felt a high regard for sound with its unrivalled capacity to excite the sublime:

Thunders and howling of the breaking ice, there are sounds more sublime than any sight *can* be, more absolutely suspending the power of comparison, and more utterly absorbing the mind's self-consciousness, in its total attention to the object working on it. (Homes 1989:230)

He shifts the sublime's operations on a subject into another sphere from that understood by Kant and Burke: that of the blurring of distinctions between subject and object, between the self and the absolute:

On entering a [Gothic] cathedral I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible expression left is, that "I am nothing!" (Bolla 1989:44)

What Coleridge is unwittingly describing is the Buddhist notion of the sublime that the great Buddhist teacher Nagarjuna (who was writing in India, around the same time as Pseudo-Longinus was in Greece) prefers to call 'emptiness' (Batchelor 2000:50).

In the Zen Buddhist teachings of D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966) these moments of pristine awareness, that Coleridge was articulating, are centered around silence:

This quietude and silence however, does not point to mere idleness or inactivity. The silence is not that of a desert shorn of all vegetation, nor is it that of a corpse forever gone to sleep and decay. It is the silence of an "eternal abyss" in which all contrasts and conditions are buried; it is the silence of God who deeply absorbed in contemplation of his works past, present, and future, sits calmly on his throne



of absolute oneness and allness. It is the "silence of thunder" obtained in the midst of the flash and uproar of opposing electric currents. (Suzuki 1994:35-6)

The exposure to extreme silent environments, it seems, can also provoke in the listener an intuition of the sublime. The exponent of deep ecumenicism Mathew Fox noted:

I remember Rusty Schweickart, the astronaut, talking about how it was the cosmic silence out in space that made him a mystic, after having trained for years as a jet-fighter pilot. People who go to depths of the sea or scuba dive have talked to me about the awesome silence down there. (Fox & Sheldrake 1996:94)

### **The Sublime is Now**

In 'The Sublime is Now' a paper by American Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970), published in 1948, the notion of the sublime took on a new significance to the avant-garde art world. Newman called for a break with the Western European Art tradition that was bound up with the quest for beauty in the perfect rendition of figurative art, stemming from the Ancient Greeks. However with the rejection of Western concepts of beauty in art he was still concerned with articulations of the Absolute in human experience:

We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions. We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend. We are creating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful. We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, or 'life,' we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history. (Newman 1948:574)

Lyotard explores Newman's paintings and the impetus behind them. He does not relate the experience of the sublime to some transcendental representational conditions between the object and one's capacity to reason but rather to the intrinsic physical properties of a painting:

A painting by Newman is an angel. It announces nothing; it is in itself the annunciation... Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation; he allows it to present itself (Lyotard 1991:79)... It is the feeling of 'there' (*Voilà*). There is almost nothing to 'consume', or if there is, I do not know what it is. One cannot consume an occurrence, but merely its meaning. The feeling of the instant is instantaneous... The picture presents, being offers itself up in the here and now. No one, and especially not Newman, makes me see it in the sense of recounting or interpreting what I see. (Lyotard 1991:80-4)

Lyotard makes an analogy with the experience of listening:

I (the viewer) am no more than an ear open to the sound which comes to it from out of the silence; the painting is that sound, an accord. Arising, which is a constant theme in Newman, must be understood in the sense of pricking up one's ears, of listening. (Lyotard 1991:83-4)

### The Sharawadji Effect

In the established canon of auditory theories the sublime does not feature highly. In Augoyard and Torgue's *Répertoire des Effets Sonore* (1995) there is an attempted to classify a psychological phenomenon that they have named the *sharawadji effect*. They explain it as:

A sensation of plenitude sometimes created by the contemplation of a complex soundscape whose beauty is inexplicable... [It] takes one by surprise and will carry the listener elsewhere, beyond strict representation - out of context. A beautiful Sharawadji plays with the rules of composition, manipulates them, and awakens a feeling of pleasure through perceptual confusion... Sharawadji sounds, as such belong to everyday life or to known musical registers. They only become

Sharawadji by de-contextualization, by a rupture of the senses. (Augoyard & Torgues 1995:126)

Their description is surprisingly similar to the work of Pseudo-Longinus on rhetoric where the listener is mentally 'transported' through listening to a complex voice (or in this case soundscape) and consequently evokes a feeling of 'plenitude'. The effect is the result a discordant estrangement with regards to the sound's context, for example the muddle of wandering cacophonous sounds in the contemporary city that renders us astonished, that fills us with wonder, and magically and brutally transports us elsewhere, yet evades classification. However they are careful to differentiate the sharawadji effect with the Kantian sublime, as the sharawdji effect is a sublime of the everyday: a subtle sublime without theatricalities or grandeur (Augoyard & Torgue 1995:126-8).

#### **[4.4] Examples in Acousmatic Music**

##### ***Momentous Momentum***

In Mark Taylor's acousmatic composition *Latent Energy for a Child of Wonder* (1997) he creates what he calls in the programme notes "two awesome experiences... evoking my childhood fascination with sound". In such reflexive work it is significant to note that Taylor is blind and thus the 'awesome' experiences are uniquely sonic.

In the opening of the second half of the work, sub-titled *Momentous Momentum*, we can clearly recognise the brouhaha of a crowd. Through the unfolding of this section the sound of the crowd gets subsumed by overwhelming, immense glissandi which metamorphose over time departing from the sound of planes taking off towards greater

and greater abstract sonic textures. The listener is transported from a representation of a chaotic everyday soundscape to a presentation of an abstract environment that has grown out of, but does not refer to real soundscapes, but rather induces a focus on the here-and-now, a focus on the sounds that are being presented to us. Remembering Burke's sublime attitude to the tumult of the crowd that, 'so amazes and confounds the imagination' (Burke 1970:150-1), I would suggest that the 'awesome experiences' that Taylor is concerned with derive from his notion of the sublime.

### *Soundings of Angel*

In my acousmatic composition *Soundings of Angel* (1999) I attempted to tackle the ultimate of sublime beings, angels. The work was inspired by and based around three readings of the same poem by Alice Oswald titled *Angel*. The poem was conceived in the grounds of Dartington Hall and inspired in part by the paintings of Cecil Collins. One of Collins' trademarks was the figurative painting of angels. The composition is in six parts. There are three readings of the text by three different performers including the poet herself. These readings are then set to a background of bird song and abstract sonic material derived from recordings of glass, excited and treated in different ways. The bird song was recorded in Dartington Hall Gardens at dawn in springtime. The three readings are interspersed by three interludes, which do not use voice, or field recordings, which act as my response to the subject matter of the poem. It is in these interludes that I have encountered the sublime.



The interludes comprise of very homogenous material, again derived from glass sounds, that for me possess a transparent quality. Often the pitched glass sounds are granular and on the verge of dissipating into noise, creating a volatile effect. The notion of angles to me is an abstract one. However these interludes don't rely on myth or metaphor, no traditional angelic symbols are called upon. These interludes are concerned with sound, with presenting a sonic dimension. The listener is deprived of concrete representational material as well as visuals. The glass sounds have been abstracted and transformed engendering an alien sound world, presenting a snap-shot of a sound world that points at the infinite and the absolute through minimal action and content.

The interludes also effect my perception of the passing of time. Through the suspension and attenuation of the momentum of the textures, the inner psychic pendulum of past and future slows down and becomes still. A sonorous present is at hand. I have become fascinated like a charmed snake. The moment I perceive its stillness, it is moving again into the future. The moment has passed. We experience all of this within the framing of the spoken voice and bird song, which underlines the absence or otherworldly-ness in the interludes.

### *Equal Signs*

In *Equal Signs* (2001) a collaboration with poet Tony Lopez, I layered up multiple tracks of Lopez reading his text in difference environments: at a pebble beach, in a busy café, etc.. As well as Lopez's voice, the recordings picked up the residual sounds of the environment where the field recordings took place, i.e. waves and crowds. The fabricated

soundscape becomes more and more complex and dense as the polyphony of Lopez's voice constitutes a crowd in itself, mixed in with the waves and other voices on the recordings. Towards the end of the work an abstract texture of ascending glissandi is slowly faded in, becoming the dominant material, whilst the voices and waves recede into silence. A very different sublime, compared to *Soundings of Angel*, is evoked in this work. Perhaps due to its complexity and at time random nature, it corresponds to what Augoyard and Torgue understand as the *sharawadji effect*. Furthermore the brouhaha of sounds is reminiscent of Kant's theory that the form that is too large or complex to grasp signifies boundlessness. In contrast the form of the final ascending glissandi texture is rationally comprehensible.

#### *Sand Ridges 4*

In *Sand Ridges 4*, from *out of image (sandra blow)* (1997), a collaboration with writer and performer Alaric Sumner the Kantian sublime is again invoked. In this movement the listener is presented with a very heavy, wave like texture, that in the context of the whole performance very obviously refers to large storm-like ocean waves. In relation to the magnificent waves the listener may feel overwhelmed. Of course vast oceans are a recurring motif for the Romantic.

#### [4.5] Conclusion

Perhaps the acousmatic medium has a particular contribution to add to the aesthetics of the sublime. Acousmatic music has the potential to present everyday acoustic sounds as they may be heard in their accustomed context however the audience is deprived of any

visual references to what is being presented to them. A sound can be isolated and drawn attention to, just as you could position your ear closer to the sounding object in real life, quite suddenly the sound may be augmented in perceived scale and loudness, developing into a complex texture of sounds both familiar and strange. The listener can then be transported sonically into a more abstracted sonic environment where the space appears boundless,<sup>iii</sup> and through a multi-channel speaker system the listener can be bombarded from many directions simultaneously creating perceptual confusion.

There is, of course, no fixed formula for evoking the sublime, however what is evident in tracing the developing notions of the sublime is that such concepts resonate deeply with mine and many other active acousmatic composers' intuitive compositional processes as well as listeners' experience. Further research into this field must surely provide greater insight into the potential of such work in its reception and its creation.

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**Discography**

Drever, J. L. & Lopez, T. 2001 *Equal Signs*, Dartington College of Arts (unpublished acousmatic composition)

Drever, J. L. & Oswald, A. 2000 *Soundings of Angel*, Dartington College of Arts (unpublished acousmatic composition)

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i For Kant the imagination is tied to the empirical world of nature, and no empirical presentation of the sublime is possible within this domain as the empirical world itself can only be understood in terms of relationships of relative, not absolute, magnitude. (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999:390-1)

ii From the Latin *trans-scendere* meaning to climb over.

iii Augoyard and Torgue in fact note the perception of a perpetual ascending or descending glissando created in the Bell Laboratories in 1964 by Roger Shepard (the effect has been creatively appropriated by Jean-Claude Risset in *Mutations* (1969) and James Tenney in *For Ann Rising* (1969)) as an electroacoustic music example of the sharawadji effect (Augoyard & Torgue 1996:132).

## Chapter 5

### Textual Collaborations

#### [5.1] Introduction

##### Collaboration

Five out of the nine compositional projects submitted in the portfolio of practical work accompanying this dissertation are the result of interdisciplinary collaboration. This chapter documents and comments on those projects, which were undertaken with the following performers/ writers/ collaborators: Alaric Sumner, Alice Oswald and Tony Lopez.<sup>i</sup>

These projects demonstrate a number of different working relationships between composer and writer. I have opted for the term 'collaboration' to express these working relationships, as it best exemplifies the shared authorial processes undertaken in these projects. However, considering the vicissitudes of arts practice, each collaboration in addition to each collaborator introduced distinct demands and dynamics on the working relationship and consequently on the compositional process. Collaborative roles radically shifted from project to project and from moment to moment, i.e. from recipient to donor, donor to recipient. My primary intention with these collaborations - to challenge and loosen-up my own deeply ingrained aesthetic and conceptual proclivities in acousmatic composition - was successful to varying degrees as I have documented below.

Previous individually composed works had naïvely employed spoken text as a material and narrative thread (i.e. *Cloud of Forgetting* (1996) and *Butterfly Lovers* (1997)),

however my overriding concerns had been of a musical predilection rather than a writerly one. These projects had whetted my appetite for working with text and spoken voice, however it was evident that only through collaboration with artists with expertise in the writing and the sounding of text, would I be able to develop this line of interest to any significant degree.

### **The Meeting of Poetry and Acousmatic Composition**

The tradition of spoken text-based acousmatic art spans more than fifty years. Its forms and functions are multifarious: from work which amplifies and dissects hitherto unheard human utterances<sup>ii</sup> (e.g. Henri Chopin's *poésie sonore Le Ventre de Bertini* (1967)) to melodramatic work where the delivery and placing of the spoken text drive the composition (e.g. Pierre Henry's electronic oratorio *Apocalypse de Jean* (1968)).

Bearing in mind that the phonograph was originally considered a medium for voice,<sup>iii</sup> poets and composers alike and together have embraced electroacoustic media, transforming and extending their practice. The poet Steve McCaffery, on the significance of the mass availability of the tape recorder to poets writes:

Considered as an extension of human vocality, the tape recorder permits the poet to move beyond her or his own physical limitations. With the body no longer an ultimate, inflexible parameter, voice becomes a point of departure, not a teleologically prescribed point of arrival. The tape recorder creates a secondary orality predicated on a graphism (tape, in fact, is another system of writing, where writing is described as any semiotic system of storage), thereby liberating the sound poem from the athletic sequentialities of the human body. (McCaffery 1997: 157)

As we shall see, each of the textual collaborations in turn have highlighted different approaches to, and configurations of text-based acousmatic practice. These are works of an interdisciplinary nature where the poet and composer, working from within their respective disciplines, have come together to create an acousmatic or a poetic hybrid, depending on their point of view. As a consequence of this crossing of disciplines the outcome may fall outside of either artist's camp; creating an awkward work that demands from the listener an appreciation of both acousmatic composition and contemporary poetry and what perhaps may fall in-between.<sup>iv</sup>

## [5.2] The Projects

### *out of image (sandra blow)*

*out of image (sandra blow)* (1997), a collaboration with writer and performer Alaric Sumner, was the first collaborative project that I had undertaken in my arts practice. It was instigated by Alaric who was planning to present a spoken text performance in The New Millennium Gallery, St Ives, for the *A Quality of Light Festival*, during Sandra Blow's exhibition of recent paintings and collages. Alaric's plan was to creatively comment on and criticise Sandra's painting in the presence of those paintings, and was interested in introducing my creative response to the paintings and his text in the performance.

This was not the first time Alaric had focused on the work of Sandra Blow - who was also a personal friend. In his 'diary' *Waves on Porthmeor Beach* (1995) Alaric marked his day-to-day observations and meditations on Porthmeor Beach (that is overlooked by the



Tate Gallery, St. Ives and also where Sandra Blow's workshop is situated) and documented his inquiry into the workings of the drawings by Sandra which bear some relation to the prevailing landscape - copies of which are also inserted in the book.

The first stage of our collaboration was to experience the paintings in the gallery in St. Ives. We both spent a considerable time in front of the paintings, simultaneously Alaric would note down his impressions and observations that arose through close perusal, taking each painting in turn. In fact Alaric went as far as to regard his task as a mode of criticism. In comparison my approach was markedly passive: I wasn't concerned with the processes that had gone into making the paintings, nor inclined to ponder on what passed through Sandra's mind when she made those marks. I was more interested in the overall sensuous experience of the exhibition and the prevailing environment of St. Ives where the paintings were generated, rather than any close reading of the intricacies of the work and its genesis.

The second stage was to share our findings. Through lengthy discussions four key issues concerning Sandra's exhibition came into focus:

- Although she is known as a resolute abstract painter Sandra's works in the gallery could be read as seascapes similar to those found around St. Ives.
- In these works she had used found objects from the beach such as sand and bits of washed up wood, inextricably linking the paintings to the beach.

- The shapes and colours of the paintings resonated off and complemented each other. (Of course this was in part due to decisions made by the gallery curators rather than Sandra herself.)
- In the background of the paintings one could make out sketched geometrical shapes that Sandra had used as a guide or perhaps a blueprint for the final work, yet the paint and found objects she had superimposed on top of the precise pencil marks were rough and inexact.

On our return to Dartington College of Arts, Alaric prepared his notes and further comments into a more polished poetic form. I developed abstract grainy wave-like textures in the studio in response to the exhibition. I had considered using recordings made from around Porthmeor Beach (i.e. the waves, the seagulls) however remembering the representational ambiguity of the paintings, I felt that such direct references to the sea and its surroundings would not only close down possible readings of the work, it would simply not correspond in an effective way to the paintings. With my highly processed sounds in the studio I aimed at realising a similar level of abstraction in sound from sand and sea that Sandra had achieved in her paintings. I also had in the back of my mind an aesthetic taken from Sandra's paintings of a blueprint with a highly geometrical form that I would disrupt, leaving hard cuts and ragged edges which I otherwise would normally fade out.

We then recorded Alaric reciting the text that had been completed so far and discussed ways of integrating the spoken text and the grainy sonic textures. With several of the

texts (i.e. *Ridges in Sand* and *Sand Cross Movements*), I generated a harmonic accompaniment to the readings out of the readings themselves using tuned comb filters (i.e. amplifying an input's signal and harmonics) and time stretching (i.e. extending time using a resynthesis technique).

The final result of our collaboration was a site-specific performance work in 20 movements plus a CD version of the work. The performance at The New Millennium Gallery comprised of:

- live unaccompanied amplified readings by Alaric
- live solo readings by Alaric accompanied by acousmatic textures created in the studio by me
- live amplified readings by Alaric in combination with pre-recorded readings by Alaric, some of which had been treated in the studio by me and Alaric
- a polyphony of pre-recorded readings by Alaric recorded by me and mixed in the studio by Alaric
- treated studio recorded readings with acousmatic textures mixed together in the studio by me
- solo acousmatic textures by me

Many of our works had appropriated the titles from the paintings to represent the different movements of *out of image (sandra blow)* (such as *Surface Tension*, *Sombre Stretch*, *Curve*, *Sand Cross Movements*), however as the paintings in the room were in

dialogue with each other, so our works did not or could not only discuss one painting at a time. Moreover we did not want to definitively position one of our works with one of her paintings.

In many ways the performance on the 25th July 1997 in the New Millennium Gallery, St Ives was the only definitive performance of the work, as poetry, acousmatic music and painting were bounced off each other. In his introduction to his book *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) Nick Kaye focuses in on what makes an art work or performance site-specific. He writes:

To move the site-specific work is to *re-place* it, to make it *something else*. (Kaye 2000:2)

It is very much in this frame of mind that I consider *out of image (sandra blow)*: however effective the CD version of the work is it is mere audio documentation of the performance.

It is interesting to note that although Sandra did not change the paintings in response to Alaric's words and my sounds and she did not discuss her work to us until after the performance, Alaric considered her as the third member of the collaboration. Ironically Sandra's one response to me was that she found the paintings got in the way of my sounds, and preferred to experience the performance with her eyes firmly closed.



## *Hope*

The subsequent collaboration with Alaric Sumner, *Hope*, was composed for the International Symposium of Electronic Arts 1998, Revolution in Liverpool, for a CD collection of one minute audio works on the theme of 'Hope' curated by Collin Fallows. On this occasion I approached Alaric. Alaric responded swiftly with a highly concentrated poem that lasted approximately 56 seconds when he read it. After we had recorded the poem and without much discussion this time I was left to complete the work.

As the syntax, accenting and overall shape of the reading of the poem was fundamental to how it functioned, I decided to set the poem whilst preserving those elements. Extending techniques I had initiated in *out of image*, I worked with comb filters again and shuffling (i.e. where an input signal is randomly fragmented to varying degrees) using automation; allowing sophisticated transformations where multiple plug-in parameters could be changed in real time.

In *Hope* the voice enters after 3.5 seconds of high pitched resonating material. After the first line of the reading, that is accompanied by the same resonating material which has undergone varying degrees of shuffling, the pitch drops, at first imperceptibly, into a descending glissando which descends quicker and quicker the lower it gets. After about three-quarters of the way through the work (i.e. 39 seconds) the pitch reaches a plateau for a few seconds of rest, and then begins to ascend, with a steeper inclination than the descending glissando. The pitch comes to rest again when it has reached the original frequency and harmonic content as the opening of the work, giving it a somewhat

palindromic form. Mixed with this material is the recording of Alaric's reading as it was recorded, however each group of words is put through contrasting configurations of low-pass and high-pass filters, rejecting the upper and lower frequencies of the voice, and with contrasting positioning in the stereo panning. The result is a phantom-like bleached voice that is never presented in its fullness, and whose distance and localisation is shifting.

My setting of Alaric's text and the reading of the text was intended to metaphorically reflect an emotional journey that the text may evoke. All sonic material was derived from the recording of the voice.

### *Sound*

*Sound* was composed from another call from Colin Fallows for short audio works for a CD compilation, this time the theme was 'trace', the specified duration was 2 minutes and the event was The Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, 1999. I again approached Alaric, who just as swiftly as the 'Hope' proposal, generated a poem titled *Sound*. We recorded the text with Alaric reading and I embarked on another setting of Alaric's work.

This time the studio recording of the reading was presented in its entirety, my only transformations of the reading were to give it an accompaniment for it to lie on or be supported by. Again all the accompanying material was derived from the voice; in particular time stretching and transposition to generate pitched material. This time by granulating the reading I superimposed the original reading with a texture that resembled

the voices of a crowd. This technique added depth to the work which otherwise may of sounded somewhat synthetic due to the dominance of the abstract pitched material. I also attempted to highlight the poem's syntax making the voice punctuate and impact on the pitched material using quite traditional harmonic relationships and amplitude.

### *Soundings of Angel*

Out of these five projects, Soundings of Angel is the least collaborative, if collaborative at all. The poem that I used, *Angel* by Alice Oswald, was already written before I embarked on the project. However the project did spring from my discussions with the poet concerning working with her poetry.

Soundings of Angel was composed in Easter of 1999 and was commissioned by the *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel - Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (Ina-GRM) in Paris, where it was part composed, as well as at Dartington College of Arts.

The poet Alice Oswald was Artist-in-Residence at Dartington Hall in 1997/98. The poem 'Angel' was very much inspired by the gardens at Dartington and the paintings of Cecil Collins (1908-89) who was associated with Dartington in the 1930s and 1940s: a recurring theme in Collins' work was 'angels'.

On considering how to set a complex poem that took about 1 minute to read in a 15 minute acousmatic composition dedicated to the poem, I remembered Morton Feldman's *The O'Hara Songs* (1962), a work that sets the American poet and playwright Frank

O'Hara's short poem *Wind*. Feldman approached the task by setting the same short poem three times. In each version there are different accompanying instruments and the second song only uses the first two lines of the poem. I was very taken by this approach as it allowed the listener to be more acquainted with the poem, whilst musically colouring it in subtly contrasting ways, without giving it only one definitive interpretation by the composer. As with *Sound*, I did not transform the recordings of the voices apart from place them in a new sonic environment.

My approach with Alice's poem was to set three readings of her poem by different people, herself, the playwright Peter Oswald who is also Alice's husband, and Alaric Sumner. After each setting I inserted my responses to the poem only using sounds derived from recordings I made of glass being excited in different ways. Inspired by notions of angels in the field of new cosmology described in the interdisciplinary book *The Physics of Angels: Exploring the Realm Where Science and Spirit Meet* (1996) by Matthew Fox and Rupert Sheldrake, as well as Alice's poem, I attempted to evoke the sonic dimensions where angels may reside.

The other key element in the work was birdsong. Alice and Alaric's readings were both accompanied by birds: Alice by a robin and Alaric by rooks. The bird song was recorded from around the Dartington gardens at dawn at Easter time. Alice's voice was recorded in Dartington Church and was recorded in a way to make the reverberant acoustic of the church audible. Mixed with the outdoors bird song, the reverb highlights the very



different spaces where the different materials were recorded, making the opening reading of the work subtly surreal.

### *Equal Signs*

The avant-garde poet Tony Lopez approached me, having heard some of the work I had done with Alaric. As with *Soundings of Angel* he had already written a text that he was interested in developing into an audio work with an acousmatic composer.

Tony had collected the material for *Equal Signs* at conferences where he had picked up sound bites. In his text *Equal Signs* those sound bites have been taken out of context and collated into a list, 15 sound bites per verse, 30 verses.

After discussing our backgrounds to each other and how we might approach the project we decided that the first step was to record Tony reciting the texts in different environments: a common interest was how his readings would be effected by the other sounds in the prevailing environments. Recordings were made in a coffee shop, in a car, and at a pebble beach near Exmouth.

I then worked with the recordings in the studio where it became apparent that the information content in this context of the sound bites was minimal, they were redundant where delivery of information was concerned. Extending this notion, I drew parallels with noise, in a broad sense of the word, introducing to the readings different kinds of noise: computer generated white noise and naturally existing noise from a river. I also

made the recordings of the text more 'noisy' by layering many recordings on top of each other, creating the brouhaha of a crowd out of Tony's voice.

Unlike Alaric's or Alice's texts that I worked with, the order of the verses and lines in *Equal Signs* was not a high priority in the aesthetic that Tony was concerned with. Tony in fact encouraged the possibility of my chopping up and obfuscating the text further.

The first performance of the work was in Dartington's Great Hall at *Sound Practice: the 1st UKISC conference on sound, culture and environments* in February 2001. After some discussion we decided that Tony would also speak live, adding sound bites that he had picked up at the conference to the studio mixed work that was projected out of a multi-channel speaker system. In retrospect we agreed that the live voice did not integrate well with the rest of the work, as the work that I had mixed in the studio was already a complete work which did not require any more elements. The layering of the voices worked particularly well through the multi-speaker system in the reverberent performance space; instead of sounding cluttered, the individual voices separated throughout the space creating a rich polyphony.

### [5.3] Conclusion

Contrasting techniques and approaches to collaboration and textual based acousmatic composition were adopted and developed through the realisation and presentation of these projects. Key to all the projects was interdisciplinary dialogue with the collaborator

on conceptual and processual matters. An insight into each other's practice and knowledge of each other's past work was essential. A sense of trust in sharing the authorial process was important and consequently the need for each other's approval. Ideally the outcome of such collaboration would be a work that could only have been created through the union of disciplines, creating a work whose sum is greater than the two parts that came together to make it. And I believe that on a number of occasions in these projects this has been achieved.

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<sup>i</sup> In chronological order of collaboration.

<sup>ii</sup> The fact is, we cannot find our voice just by using it: we must be willing to cut it out of our throats, put it on the autopsy table, isolate and savour the various quirks and pathologies, then stitch it back together and see what happens. The voice, then, not as something which is found, but something which is written. We may have escaped from the judgement of God, but we have not yet escaped from the judgement of the Autopsist - the truth is not in how your voice sounds, but in how it's cut. (Whitehead in Noetinger & Whitehead 1996:100)

<sup>iii</sup> From *phone* meaning 'voice' in Greek.



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<sup>iv</sup> Roland Barthes wrote on 'the unease in classification' of interdisciplinary work in his paper *From Work to Text* in 1971:

Interdisciplinary is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down - perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion - in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. The mutation in which the idea of the work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than of a real break. (Barthes 1990:155)

## Appendix: Programme Notes

*Hippocampus*: a fantastic/phantasmic soundscape by John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 1]

Duration - 23'45

*The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place.*  
(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* 1984)

*Hippocampus n., pl.* 1. a mythological sea creature with the forelegs of a horse and the tail of a fish. 2. any marine teleost fish of the genus *Hippocampus*, having a horse-like head. 3. a structure in the floor of the lateral ventricle of the brain, which in cross section has the shape of a sea horse. It functions as a major neural centre for memory, especially that of smell.

*Hippocampus* is a soundscape work built up from a field recording of a public swimming pool. That recording is presented linearly through fluctuating modes of transformation, projecting an intense dream-like meditation. It was composed at Dartington College of Arts, May 1997, and has been selected by SPNM in their call for works 1998/9. First performed at the *1st Sonic Arts Network Conference*, 1998, Birmingham University.

*out of Image (sandra blow)* by Alaric Sumner & John Levack Drever

[CD I, Tracks 1-20]

Duration - 63'54

*out of image (sandra blow)* is a site-specific performance work. Comprising of a conflation of spoken text, (live & recorded), and electroacoustic soundscapes. The work

engages with and discusses the recent paintings of Sandra Blow RA: paintings that allude to forms of seaside landscapes, incorporating found materials taken from the beach. The completed work consists of 20 separate movements

Track No.		Duration
1	Ridges in Sand	3'23
2	Reading 1	2'33
3	Reading 2	3'23
4	Sand Ridges 1	5'14
5	Curve	0'48
6	Sand Ridges 2	3'19
7	Reading 2	3'50
8	Sand Drone	6'55
9	Leap Forward	4'30
10	Empty Balance	5'25
11	sand/ sea movements	0'43
12	Sand Ridges 3	3'44
13	Surface Tension	0'44
14	Assemblage	6'11
15	Sand Ridges 4	3'16
16	Reading 3	2'53
17	Sand Ridges 5	3'15
18	Zero	0'58

19	Sombre Stretch	1'00
20	Sand Cross Movements	1'39

Tracks 2, 3, 7, 9, 14 & 16 by Alaric Sumner

Tracks 4, 6, 8, 10, 15 by John Levack Drever

Tracks 1,5, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20 by Alaric Sumner & John Levack Drever

*out of image (sandra blow)* was written for and performed among the exhibition of the recent paintings of Sandra Blow RA at The New Millennium Gallery, St Ives, as part of the international A Quality of Light Festival, Cornwall, 1997.

*Crabfish*: a sonic postcard by John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 2]                      Duration - 0'51

A sonic postcard from Dartmouth, Devon, summer 1997.

This ephemeral sonic event has been abstracted from its autochthonal seaside environment, and without any further temporal or spectral modifications is fixed, re-presented and re-framed.

In this work we can observe a highly structured linguistic/ narrative/ musical form generated by four performers in an un-staged (notwithstanding the visible presence of a microphone) everyday social interaction.



*Hope* by Alaric Sumner & John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 4.]                      Duration - 1'

Electroacoustic manipulations – John Levack Drever

Text & Voice – Alaric Sumner

*Hope* is a 60 second long sound work based on a poem written for the composer, John Levack Drever, by Alaric Sumner. The bleached presentation of Alaric's voice reciting the text, and the accompanying textures, metaphorically reflect an emotional journey that the text may invoke. The recording of the voice and the more abstract sonic material derived from the voice inform each other. It was composed for and presented at isea98 (Liverpool) in response to Collins Fallows call for one minute sonic works on the theme of 'hope'. *Hope* was composed at Dartington College of Arts, 1998.

*Peregrinations* by John Levack Drever

[CD III, Track 2]                      Duration - 20'49

This work may evoke soundscapes of transport or travel; the unintentional overwhelming vibrations experienced in a lift or a plane; of water pressure in pipes; the continuous prevailing sonic by-products of everyday electrically powered objects. Though this work may allude to sounds whose common experience results in psychic discomfort, here they are transformed into a shifting textural panorama, which perhaps may point the listener to introspection and contemplation. 'Peregrinations' was composed at Dartington College of Arts, February, 1999.

*Sound* by Alaric Sumner & John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 5]                      Duration -2'00

Electroacoustic manipulations – John Levack Drever

Text & Voice – Alaric Sumner

*Sound* was composed for The Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art in response to the call for 2 minute sound works on the theme of 'Trace'.

All the sonic material in 'Sound' is derived from the voice. It was composed at Dartington College of Arts, 2000.

*Soundings of Angel* by Alice Oswald & John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 3]                      Duration - 15'

Voices (in the order they appear in the work) – Alice Oswald, Peter Oswald, Alaric Sumner

Throughout history and trans-culturally (notions of) 'angels' have inspired artists. This work presents and responds to three different readings of 'Angel' a poem by Alice Oswald, which was inspired in part by the paintings of angels by Cecil Collins and the gardens at Dartington Hall. Alice was Writer in Residence at Dartington College of Arts 1997/98, the location where the poem was conceived. Cecil Collins also had associations with Dartington: he realised a great number of his paintings there. The bird song in *Soundings of Angel* was recorded at Dartington Hall gardens at dawn in early April of

1999. The three abstract episodes with follow the spoken episodes are the composers interpretations of the poem.

The title of the work was suggested by Alaric Sumner.

The work was commissioned by the *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel - Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (Ina-GRM) in 2000. It was composed in Studio 116b of the Ina-GRM and the Audio Suite at Dartington College of Arts. It was premiered in the *Salle Olivier Messiaen, Maison de Radio France*, Paris.

*Phonographies of Glasgow* by John Levack Drever

[CD III, Tracks 1-6]                      Duration - 41'49

Track No.		Duration
1	Walk	7'10
2	Peregrinations	20'49
3	Erskine Ferry	1'07
4	Sand Ridges 1	5'14
5	Underground	6'21
6	Last Tram	1'02

*Phonographies of Glasgow* was written for *drift*: a festival of sound art + acoustic ecology, in Glasgow, November 1999, curated by Robert H. King. The complete work is 40 minutes long in duration.

*Phonographies of Glasgow* is an electroacoustic soundscape oscillating between abstract and everyday worlds. A cinema for the ears presenting imagistic, stratospheric, contemplative, nuanced and phantasmic soundscapes. Past work (i.e. *Peregrinations* and *Sand Ridges 1* from *out of image (sandra blow)*), field recordings the composer made walking the streets of Glasgow and archive material recorded by the composers Father in the early 60s are mixed, re-framed and are re-presented in the concert hall.

*Equal Signs* by Tony Lopez and John Levack Drever

[CD II, Track 6]                      Duration - 9'40

Poet & Voice - Tony Lopez

electroacoustic manipulations: John Levack Drever

The text is comprised of sound bites collected at conferences by Tony. Tony was recorded reciting the text in different locations such as on a pebble beach and in a coffee shop. John mixed the recordings in the studio working with different notions of noise.

*Equal Signs* was first performed at *Sound Practice: the 1st UKISC conference on sound, culture and environments* in February 2001.