

Musique et écologies du son Propositions théoriques pour une écoute du monde / Music and ecologies of sound Theoretical Projects for a Listening of the World

Reviewed by Maile Colbert

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The international symposium *Musique et écologies du son: Projets théoriques et pratiques pour une écoute du monde / Music and ecologies of sound: Theoretical and practical projects for a listening of the world*, was held at Université Paris 8, May 27–30 of 2013. I was fortunate to attend and present a paper myself, and having experienced first hand the value of the work presented and discussed there, I was looking forward to reading this fourth publication of the proceedings from that very exceptional event.

I approach this review with enthusiasm, and feel also impelled towards transparency. My perspective is within a frame I will describe, my background is not in a specific tradition or education of music or musicology, I came to working with and thinking about sound through cinematic sound design and sound art, which led me through a wonderful winding path to soundscape ecology. My native tongue is English, and my French is limited, though I am better at comprehending text than spoken word. I say this because within this frame and possible obstacles to some of the text—many of the essays are written in French without translation, as are the English texts vice versa—I found this book in its entirety and diversity compelling and expanding, and very contributive towards multiple fields in the study of sound and music, weaving and interconnecting threads of thought and rippling waves of question though the borders of both emerging areas in sound-music studies, and those considered established.

Interconnectivity and an urge against dualism is a continual theme throughout the text. From thought on nature and culture, to urban and rural, to music and noise; what is desirable and undesirable in and from sound, what is individual and what is social in our relationship to sound, conservation and preservation, phonography and phenomenology, landscape and soundscape and the human within them, and the non-human within them? The tension between these and related categories, and what can be found and discussed between them, or what can be found and discussed if we do away with them, or what can be found and discussed if we interconnect them, forge towards theories and methodologies on sound-music ecologies and ecosophy¹. As Ljubica Ilic writes in her essay, “Between Retreat and Return: Rethinking the Sonic Pastoral”: “We are, globally, faced with the fact that the environment is one whole ... The symbolic mesh that we live in, intertwined in all possible manners, requires more subtle choices, even when sound is in question.” (256)

The environment when considered as a whole is a complicated and interconnected rhizome. A drop of water falls into a puddle and creates a wave. A wave is a disturbance that travels through time and space, affecting everything it touches, creating other waves. It continues colliding and transferring energy to molecules that do the same in turn to other molecules. It can be water, it can be light, it can be sound. It can be many things that collide into our molecules, and our system translates. The water is cold, the light is bright, the sound is loud. This is passive information. But when we actively feel and consider how cooling the water is on a very hot day, when we actively feel and consider how strong that sun is, and when we actively enjoy how the sound of the crash of an ocean wave makes our heart race, our world becomes richer, and there is information in that experience. “Every sound is evidence of a particular, earthly vitality, and

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the provenance and impact of these vitalities is of course the business of sound ecology,” reads one of my favourite statements, from the text “But Does the World Listen? Some Thoughts on Rhythmic Bonding Between Humans and the Sounding World”, from author Peter Nelson. The essays in this book consider in various ways, from various angles, the embodied information gained from the sound of place connecting the listener to their surroundings, such as the text from Makis Solomos and Frédéric Duhautpas, considering sound and music’s ability to allow us the experience of place, and this ability allowing the “capacity to create links, connections, and bonds,” taking as example works and writing from Hildegard Westerkamp. (75)

Increasingly more known and recognized (and certainly to readers here) the study of the soundscape—soundscape ecology—

focuses on the relationship between living beings and their environment through sound. This relationship is then of course inclusive to music and sonic designs, and interconnected with really any sonic studies one might consider. An author, Frans Mossberg, points out in the section “Fragmentation of the Field” in his wonderfully comprehensive, *Soundscape, Noise, and Music in Interdisciplinary Research and Design*: “The complexity of exposure to sound in today’s life and urban environment calls for interdisciplinary approaches that encompass technical, medical, psychological, and cultural disciplines to get an understanding of the effects of sound on the multitude of levels involved.” (184) Ecology is by definition a large register of inters... interconnected, interactive, interdisciplinary. The inter attempts to sense a whole in seeing part of the whole and its connection to other parts of the whole. These connections can help us begin to create definitions. As the authors describe in their introduction:

In recent music as well as in sound art, sound has emerged as a cross-road of theoretical and practical questions. Many of these questions concern the permanent interaction of sound with what surrounds it: physical space, the environment, the audience... This interaction

leads to the idea of an ecology of sound in the broad sense of the term “ecology” as a relationship between music or sound and oikos, the common home, the world. Félix Guattari designates three ecologies: environmental, social and mental. What then are the links between music or sound and the environment (or nature), society and subjectivity? More generally, what are the links between music-sound and the world? Studying these links will help us define the boundaries of a flourishing artistic field. (5)

Sections within the book, following the introduction co-written by the editors: Makis Solomos, Roberto Barbanti, Guillaume Loizillon, Kostas Paparrigopoulos, and Carmen Pardo, include *Lécoutte, le son, l’écologie du son et la musique* /Listening, Sound, Ecology of Sound and Music, with texts by; Pascale Criton, Agostino Di Scipio, Kostas Paparrigopoulos, François Bonnet—Gérard Pelé, Philippe Michel, Frédéric Duhautpas—Makis Solomos, *Musique et nature*/Music and Nature, with texts by; Rosalía Martínez, Jean Paul Olive, Georges Bériachvili, Ljubica Ilic, *Field recording, phonographies*/Field Recording, Phonography, with texts by; Guillaume Loizillon, Marie-Hélène Bernard, *Paysages*

et environnement sonores, son et architecture/Soundscape, Sound Environment, Sound and Architecture, with texts by; Jordan Lacey, Mylène Pardoën, Aimilia Karapostoli –Nikolaos Tsinikas, Frans Mossberg, Silvia Zambrini, and *Vers une approche écosophique*/Towards an Ecosophical Approach, with texts by; Carmen Pardo Salgado, Peter Nelson, Mihai Iliescu, and Roberto Barbanti.

About the Author

MAILE COLBERT is an intermedia artist with a focus on sound and video. She is currently a PhD Research Fellow in Artistic Studies with a concentration on sound studies, sound design in time-based media, and soundscape ecology at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, through the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, and a visiting lecturer at the Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto. Her current practice and research project is titled, *Wayback Sound Machine: Sound through time, space, and place*, and asks what we might gather from sounding the past. www.mailecolbert.com

Endnote

1 Guattari, F. 1989. *Trois ecologies*. Paris: Editions Galilée.

Todd Birdsong, Artist Statement

When asked to contribute images for this edition of *Soundscape*, I was reminded of the Walt Whitman poem *I Sing The Body Electric*:

The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,
Knowledge becomes him, he likes it always,
he brings every thing to the test of himself,
Whatever the survey, whatever the sea
and the sail he strikes soundings at last only here,
(Where else does he strike soundings except here?)”

Whitman’s talk of the importance of the body and the soul and their inter-connectedness celebrates the significance in constructing connections between people. For me, the *Deep Listening* recording (along with other works by Pauline Oliveros) strengthens the “sacred” linkage of our physical and spiritual selves. Our generated experiences building a conduit to our metaphysical existence.