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What can we learn from the current approaches to work with environmental sound ambiences and the way that sound is currently understood as environment at the intersection of sound ecology and popular music? Can we think ecotonally, using the ecological concept of ecotones – places and/or times where several ecosystems overlap, producing richness and instability (Gosz, 1993) – to think about complex confluences in disciplinary perspectives, moments, and places where several systems come into contact with one another, in competition, symbiosis, and partial conversations?

When asked to coordinate a keynote panel focusing on environmental sound praxis for the 2011 IASPM conference in Montreal, I started to think about what important concepts and approaches might be shared by acoustic ecology, studies of sonic ambience, and contemporary popular music studies. I want to draw out some connections among these sonic fields: popular music studies and what one might refer to as sound ecology, soundscape studies, or studies of the role of sound

in environmental ambiances. I want to think about environmental sound praxis and popular music studies through a response to how the terms soundscape and acoustic ecology, and ideas of their praxis, are understood and discussed in three recent publications that might be familiar to researchers in contemporary popular music studies. I must emphasize that I am not attempting to write a book review, but rather to consider more specifically how ideas and practices of acoustic ecology, soundscape, or environmental sound ambiances are represented in each book.

The first publication under consideration is *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (2010), by Steve Goodman. When I went to the Concordia library catalogue and entered the search term "sound ecology," this book was the first to appear, the most recent relevant acquisition according to the indexing system. The book moves between theory and practice, written by someone who is a sound studies theorist and dub-step producer, and so seems related to ideas of praxis in popular music production and theory. It explicitly considers the term acoustic ecology, which is an area of study that fellow panelist and ethnomusicologist Helmi Järviluoma and I have been involved in for many years, and discusses the work of CRESSON (Centre de recherche sur l'espace sonore et l'environnement urbain), the research centre in Grenoble, France, where another of our panelists, Jean-Paul Thibaud, situates his work on audible ambiances.

The second book is by Michael E. Veal, *Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (2007). I was curious what the author meant through the use of the word

soundscape in his title, and how this might relate to ideas of sound ecology. The author is also a recording musician, although this is not something he highlights in the book, so ideas of praxis must inform the text to some extent.

The third book is one that I included even though it does not explicitly reference soundscape studies or sound ecology in its title, but it deals with many aspects of work with environmental sound that are not addressed in the first two books, such as field recording practices in contemporary music. This is *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (2010), by Tara Rodgers. She is also a researcher-creator: a producer of contemporary electronic music and theorist of sound studies. I was interested in all three books as examples of writing that might be familiar to popular music researchers, that brings together theory and practice to think through ideas of sound ecology and soundscape, and that engages with music listening practices.

Let me start with Goodman. In his book's introduction, Goodman frames acoustic ecology as crucial to his argument:

The main argument of the book is found in the tension between two critical tendencies tagged *the politics of noise* and the *politics of silence* insofar as they constitute the typical limits to a politicized discussion of the sonic... being somewhat crude, at either extreme, they often cash out pragmatically, on the one hand, in the moralized, reactionary policing of the polluted soundscape or, on the other, its supposed enhancement by all manner of cacophony. *Sonic Warfare* refuses both of these options, of acoustic ecology and a crude futurism, as arbitrary fetishizations and instead reconstructs the field along different lines. (p. xvii, emphasis in original)

I was excited by this part of the book, looking forward to a thorough scholarly critique of the field of acoustic ecology. But to my surprise, the concept is barely mentioned after this, and is just briefly discussed a few times. There are no citations from practitioners or theorists in the field, and no discussion of the kinds of sound work done in acoustic ecology. It remains frustratingly abstract and narrowed in scope. I would argue that Goodman is the one doing the fetishizing. In a footnote, he cites just two of the original World Soundscape Project researchers – Murray Schafer and Barry Truax – and includes in the references (but never cites directly) a book by Schafer based on research in the '70s as emblematic of contemporary acoustic ecology; there is nothing more recent, and none of Truax's works are cited directly. Where are the other well-known current practitioner-theorists of sound ecology, such as composer and radio artist Hildegard Westerkamp, who articulates populist approaches to soundwalking and soundscape in radio? Or musicologist and soundscape researcher Helmi Järviluoma, whose Acoustic Environments in Change project offers key insights about acoustic memory and subjectivity? These women theorist-practitioners' words about acoustic ecology cannot be found in this book. Goodman maintains an idea of acoustic ecology as moralizing about noise pollution only by paring the field down to a narrow slice of what it is in practice.

Goodman portrays the work of CRESSON as a step in the right direction, but not enough of a step. Although he cites the book *Sonic Experience* several times, he claims that the work is too anthropocentric for a real ecology, and describes this book as recent research. These theories are not recent, but instead recently translated into English. The

book was published in French in 1995, 16 years ago. The more current work at CRESSON expands beyond ideas of the sonic effect into concepts of ambience – beyond sound itself and toward its interaction with other senses, architecture, neighbours, memory, social context, and geographical location (see, for instance, Tixier, 2002; 2009; Thomas, 2005; Thibaud, 2003; 2011).

Veal, while including the concept of soundscape in his book's title and using the term repeatedly, never defines it explicitly. He refers to the importance of Brian Eno as "an important pioneer of soundscaping in popular music" (p. 3), because of his experiments with atmospheric textures. The one representative of sound ecology who is mentioned is Schafer, with a reference to that same text, *The Soundscape*, originally written in 1979.

Strangely, and despite Goodman's articulation of the international importance of dub virology, both Goodman and Veal seem unaware of each other's work on dub. Goodman takes a Deleuzian theoretical approach intertwined with examples from electronic music making in the abstract, while Veal employs an ethnomusicological approach that discusses the work of specific producers and studios with a focus on Jamaican culture, linking the concept of soundscape with ideas of local culture and ambient production techniques. Why are these dub systems so separate? It is important to note that both of these books borrow ideas from soundscape studies and sound ecology to focus on popular music recording studio environments. There is no discussion of the practice of acoustic ecology in either case. Field recording practices are considered by many soundscape artists as integral to engagement with specific places, including mobile

recording technologies and the inconveniences, ethics, and challenges of doing audio field recording outside in public places and different weather conditions. The indoor studio soundscapes described in these two books also seem more or less devoid of women.

I turn therefore to *Pink Noises*, which does not explicitly refer to soundscape or sound ecology in its title. In this book, however, Rodgers does discuss the challenges and specificities of field recording as well as indoor studio work in contemporary sound creation. The discussion of field recording is focused through interviews with several practitioners who are influential in creative work with environmental sound: Pauline Oliveros, Maggi Payne, Christina Kubisch, and Annea Lockwood. The book focuses primarily on American women sound-makers, and includes lengthy interviews that detail ideas and approaches to work in the studio, and out in the field, considering questions about technologies, aesthetics, and methodologies

[...] as I was listening and trying to find the spots on those tapes, I would just drop in and hear this sound, and I would go, *I remember that!* I recorded that in *this* location, at about *this* time in the afternoon, and it smelled like *that*, you know? (Maggi Payne, quoted in Rodgers, 2010, p. 69)

Here, Payne explores the potential of field recording as a mnemonic tool to remember recording experiences that shape the work. This quote also points to connections with other senses, and their role in the ambience that is created in a particular place. Payne's account thus resonates with one of the recent research trajectories of the CRESSON

group, the ambiances.net research network, in which researchers consider the roles of all senses in relation to ambiences.

I heard some mysterious signals coming into my own sound transmission. I found out that behind the walls where my work was installed was a computer office. I decided to include these sounds and tried to know more and more about magnetic fields created by digital technologies [...]. But the walks are as well a work of personal discovery of cities which, though familiar to you, change completely when walking around with electromagnetic headphones. This links again to "the true and the false," and what is behind the surface. (Christina Kubisch, quoted in Rodgers, 2010, p. 113)

Here, Kubisch discusses how field recording and transformations of wave frequencies can bring to the recordist's attention surprising sounds that can be followed and discovered, leading to new areas of research that open up new ways of experiencing the city, reaching below the surface of what initially appears to the observer of a scene. Her experience as a sound maker is explicitly linked to the experiences of listeners walking around in the city wearing headphones, focusing on the power of transformational work with technological perception.

I was curious about how the sounds of moving water affect us. And so I decided to do this absurd thing of recording all the rivers of the world, making an archive of all the rivers of the world – obviously impossible. (Annea Lockwood, quoted in Rodgers, 2010, p. 117)

Lockwood here indicates some associations between archiving and creative work. While she has not recorded all the rivers of the world, this desire has led her to do several related projects on rivers in several locations, allowing her to focus on rivers while

experiencing different places, to note similarities, differences, and specificities of different river sound environments.

In these interviews, specific concerns about field recording and questions of sound ecology are discussed: the role of field recording in memory; how such work leads to the consideration of new areas of research; what might be the relationship between archiving and creative work; and how returning to old field recordings might make one aware of environmental and technological change. All are important questions about sound, technology, and environment that are not considered at all in the other two books – but how could they be when the authors stay inside studio walls to think about questions of soundscape and acoustic ecology?

So what questions am I trying to ask about sound ecologies and popular music? What implications do the interpretations of these books have for listening praxis, especially in urban environments?

Borrowing an idea from Donna Haraway (1988), I could describe each listening perspective as a partial perspective, partial in the sense of not being complete, as well as having certain tendencies and yearnings, certain desires: being partial to particular ideas and approaches, ways of representing sound environments and our experience of the world.

It is important to ask of each account: how is it partial? In what ways? When a listening or sound making praxis is represented by an author, how is the environment of listening and working discussed? Is it the control room or studio space only? What and who is the focus of attention and what is left out of the account? Does it include a larger context? How is it framed? Who and what inhabits that space, in this representation, and how do they inhabit the space? Is there talk-back? Does this representation consider different performance scenes? Does it approach different points of audition and listening rooms of various kinds with their attentive, distracted, and indifferent inhabitants? Does it address the academy with its disciplinary perspectives? Does it represent the wide range of architectural and intricate ecotonal environments encountered during field recording? What is meant by soundscape or sound ecology, in the context of popular music? If ecology is the attempt to study complex relationships in environmental systems, does it make sense to parse the idea of ecology into sound ecology, vibrational ecology, or an ecology of fear to simplify matters, to make generalizations about noise, frequency, or affect? Is it possible to approach complexity in our thinking about sound environments? How complex are these articulations? How much can we comprehend through this account, of overlapping, intermingled systems of listening and sound making practice?

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