

Amplification/Annihilation: In sonic defiance of extinction

Cafe Oto, 20th August 2017

"There are those who want to talk about climate change, yet don't want to talk about how those who are affected the most can't prioritise it in the first place, because prioritising it would mean being forced to pull the layers back and also talk about the poverty, the racism, the injustice, the privilege, the hush money, the hit lists that climate change is operating from, the rounds it makes on earth starting with the most vulnerable. Everyone is affected by climate change, yet some are affected first, but no one cares until it's affecting them." Terisa Siagatonu – 'Layers'

These are lines from the spoken word poetry of Samoan-American artist Terisa Siagatonu. Her words and voice articulate the violences of climate change, and they do not hold back. With this event I wanted to amplify the voices and sounds that counterpose the aesthetic narratives of environmental change, that peel back the layers underneath the dripping glaciers/bird calls/exotic geographies; works that ask questions, that might even demand answers. It's not easy to do radical politics in the sound world; it's not always easy to put sound to work as a political force. The works included here are not strictly just sound, nor do they all approach politics in the same ways. But they are part of a commitment to facing climate change and asking for those listening to be present, to be more than present – to intervene. (A.K)

Popular music's conceit to authenticity is both crude and altogether well known. Essentially, souls bared, performers heroically elude corruption by the processes that deliver them to their audience. This belies a bigger story, wherein whatever is deemed 'natural' becomes privileged as a site where an older, innocent pre-modern culture is preserved. This is as evident where music is imbued with a primal energy as where the 'countryside' is assigned purifying or regenerating qualities. Indeed, these two attributes, the pastoral and the primal, intersect throughout the history of pop: folk and blues revivals, psychedelia, country, new age, to name but the most overstated.

Sonic representation of ecological crisis is not reducible to changing ideas of the natural, though crisis is nonetheless discernible in growing suspicion of ideals of authenticity. At the same time, the contemporary prominence of field recording as musical accessory or as a genre in itself, implies further permutations. Equally, existential experience of ecological and economic collapse is discernible in British Industrial or Detroit techno's confrontation with deindustrialisation and thus globalisation, New Orleans MCs' tales of negotiating FEMA flood relief, metal's black forests, or all those musical expressions of loss and forfeiture usefully called 'hauntological'. At the very least, these betray a changing experience of what is natural and the assorted ways that experience is lived. (P.R.)

Climate and conservation scientists share an underlying drive, in that their work seeks not only to document and understand, but also to create the knowledge and conditions for effective intervention. Here, sound and listening can be tools to monitor ecological change, yet the complexity of both wildlife communities and soundscapes so often eludes quantitative interpretation, and we're returned to the purely affective dimension: comparing eerily silent forests to the glorious fuck-you exuberance of the resurgent dawn chorus at Chernobyl, now long devoid of humans. Similarly, field recordings open intimate windows into unfamiliar lives and temporalities – the ultrasonic chirps of whales and bats, the sigh of glacial ice – yet so often aesthetically reify the notion of a vast gap between ourselves and an unknowable nature. The unequally distributed violences of global climate change and ecological devastation instead require us to rethink what constitutes the natural and the external, to understand our collective interdependence, and to hear the past and present structural processes that link the silenced voices of empty forests and oceans with those of vanishing islands, oppressed communities, 'redeveloped' urban spaces and empty towerblocks. Meaningful sonic interventions are those that stay with and confront these dynamics head on: that resist the extinction of communities, knowledges and ways of life with anger, solidarity and noise. (R.G)

Featured works

Disobedient Films and Jamie Perera – Trump Paris pullout Speech (2017)

Joanna Brouk – Playing in the Water (1981)

Steve Halpern – Dawn (1987)

Jonathan Prior – Tenby Skylarks (2017)

Alice Damon – Waterfall Winds (1990/2013)

Edgar Froese – Marouba Bay (1975)

Stratis – By Water (1984/2017)

Iasos – Libra Sunrise (1975)

Emily Dolittle – Social Sounds Whales From Whales at Night for Oboe D'Amore and Tape (2017)

Rob Thorne – Kauhanga (2014)

Ursula K. Le Guin - Kinship (2014)

Venus Ex Machina – Paraquat (2017)

*AR – Now This Terrestrial Sea (2015)

Jana Winderen – Aquaculture (2010)

Heike Vester – Seine Feeding Killer Whales (2009)

Andrea Polli – I Don't Have The Data (2009)

Andrea Polli – Heat and the Heartbeat of the City (2007)

Toshiya Tsunoda – Low Frequency Observed At Maguchi Bay (2007)

Michael Corey and Jim Briggs – The Oklahoma Shakes (2015)

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson – Caribou Ghosts and Untold Stories (2016)

Elysia Crampton – American Drift (featuring Money Allah) (2015)

Peter Cusack – Dawn Chorus Chernobyl Town (2012)

Ultra Red – A Pico Aliso (Hemos Bastante) (2000)

Graciela Munoz Farida – El Sonido Recobrado (film, 2014)

Kate Carr – Brisbane River (2011)

Leah Barclay – Intrinsic Connections (2017)

Anja Kanngieser and Polly Stanton – And then the sea came back (radio, 2016)

Teresia Teaiwa – Bad Coconuts (feat. H. Doug Matsuoka and Richard Hamasaki) (2010)

Terisa Siagatonu – Layers (2015)

Ziibiwan – Loon Song (2016)

Minerva Cuervas – A Draught of the Blue (film, 2013)

E+E – Fire Gut (2013)

Fis – CMB Inna (2015)

Chris Watson – Vatnajokull (2003)

Jar Moff – Financial Glam (2014)

Rob Thorne – Revelation Reprise (2017)

Drexcia – Digital Tsunami (2002)

Babyfather – PROLIFIC DEAMONS (2016)

Nkisi – Parched Lips (2017)

Ariel Karma – Rainy Day (2014)

Egyptrixx – Lake of Contemplation, Pool of Fundamental Bond (2017)

Natalie Hyacinth – Waves (2017)

Bone Thugs N' Harmony (feat. Mariah Carey) – Breakdown (1997)

Dave Noyze – Acorn (2008)

Patrick Cowley – Jungle Dream (2015)

Jungle Wonz – Bird in a Gilded Cage (1993)

Anthony Child – Waiting and Watching (2015)

Ake – Answer a Call of Nature (2017)

Black Merlin – Wave (2016)