

Following The Gray Fox

In a metaphor that is as characteristically sensual as it is sharp, Gary Snyder suggests “[t]he word *wild* is like a gray fox trotting off through the forest, ducking behind bushes, going in and out of sight”¹. The elusiveness that shadows the wild is shared by the kindred notion of wilderness and for Snyder this capriciousness is neither more nor less than how nature has marked itself:

“But we do not easily *know* nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfil our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations of theoretical models ... The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional.”²

Though in tracking the spoor of this vocabulary to discover the different definitional shapes that the wild and the wilderness have each been pulled into, I will tease apart the concepts and loosen some of the ties that have snagged them, these disentanglements are only strategic advance forays before I turn in the opposite direction and commit critically to deeper and knottier entanglements. As I will make clear, I believe that the condition of entanglement is as ultimately the way of the wild as it is the textured character of all sensorially embodied, hazardous, muddled and overlapping lives wherever and however they unfold in the materialised time that is experienced on this planet. I believe, further, that these environmental entanglements may be most acutely accessible through the perceptual register of sound and I will explore expressions of the audibly entangled wild through two perhaps unexpected aesthetic modes: listening first to the sonorous within philosophical accounts of the sublime before subsequently attuning my aural attention to the presence of the sonorous within the literary genre known as nature writing. I will then follow the trail out onto the more familiar ground of field recording, encountering four dimensions of the wild, each its own entangled knot: silence, weather, distance and the relationships between the human and the more-than-human. The language of knots, snagging and entanglements is deliberately deployed throughout the essay as commitments to a roughness that some conceptualisations of sound as fabric can smooth over in expressions of stitching, untangling and weaving (that I also use). That fabric can be a verb, as Dugal McKinnon’s chapter in this volume argues, allows the heard wild to be conceived as at once construction and representation, and to acknowledge the operations of the recurrent notion of the aesthetic frame.

Wilderness-Cultivation

¹ Snyder, Gary *The Practice Of The Wild* 2nd Edition (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 9

² Snyder, Gary *No Nature* (NY: Pantheon, 1992), v

Despite Snyder's cautions, the idea of wilderness has tended to be moulded into a pure and pristine cast, out of which pour such projections as humans once relating "to the patterns of the stars, to the stutter of the capercaillie and to the glare of the elk. The wild was them."³ This Edenic oneness is assumed to have persisted until landscapes "were mapped in the mind ... Cognitive maps bound trails and camps, views and waymarks into unitary areas and hafted attachments to homelands. Mind-maps prepared the way for domesticating the wilderness."⁴ Once the separation from cultivation had coalesced, wilderness became that realm of nature that William Cronon has acerbically described in terms of "a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization."⁵

Cronon's sardonic tone reminds us that wilderness, "[f]ar from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation ... [I]t's a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made."⁶ Recent research has excavated more deeply into the encultured and historical idea of wilderness and is unearthing the pristine's political charge. In *Swamplife*, Laura D. Ogden's ethnographic engagement with the Florida Everglades, she observes how the "lobbying for Everglades protection and conservation recalls the romanticism inherent to the creation of wilderness throughout the United States. In particular the wilderness paradigm reverberated with Edenic overtones that positioned rural inhabitants of wild lands as uncivilised threats to nature's purity."⁷ The exclusion of the complex, generationally-embedded ecological engagements of poor white settlers from the Everglades was negotiated through emphasising a pristine environment, untouched by the alleged impurities of the anthropogenic.

John Hausdoerffer's collaboration with Gavin Van Horn ratchets this critique upwards a few notches to establish the sense that "[w]ilderness was a tool of colonialism. Colonists, looking at a landscape whose biodiversity was produced by the people who called it their homeland, could call that 'wilderness' and erase all that Native American knowledge, all that Native American shaping of the land. Once it's seen as wilderness, it's available for theft, without having to call it theft because it's 'wilderness.'"⁸ According to Hausdoerffer and Van Horn, it was Snyder's thinking which enabled them to problematize wilderness for its colonialist disarticulations yet valorise wildness for its relationality and

³ Crane, *The Making of The British Landscape* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2016), 12

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19

⁵ Cronon, William "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in ed. Cronon, William *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995), 2 [Accessed November 12, 2017]

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ogden, Laura A. *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 2

⁸ John Hausdoerffer and Gavin Van Horn, "A Conversation on Wildness" *Minding Nature Journal* (10: 3, Sept 2017), 40

inclusivity: “wildness—where humans are embedded in that agency—rather than wilderness, where humans are removed.”⁹

The critiques of Ogden, Hausdoerffer and Van Horn are powerfully persuasive but there is value in seeking to recover the category through recognising its inextricable hybridity. This move would acknowledge, with Snyder again –now recruited for different purposes than Hausdoerffer’s and Van Horn’s - that “[t]here has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years.”¹⁰ The architectural theorist Paul Shephard has done much to chart this imbrication, oscillating between mapping the cultivated within the wilderness and, significantly, the wilderness within the cultivated. Shephard stylises the outward swelling of the cultivated in his evocation of a world where “[h]igh on Everest, Snickers wrappers nestle in the snow. Plastic bottles ride the Gulf Stream. Radio waves, carrying coded messages, cascade across the atmosphere.”¹¹ This description of cultivation’s reach, from loftiest peak, over deepest ocean, up to the over-arching sky, steers us close to accounts of “the biogenetic age known as ‘anthropocene’, the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet”¹², where wild species are pushed towards the death horizon at extinction rates far in excess of long-term averages and where ice-free lands once considered wild undergo rapid depletion.¹³ Unusual in Shephard’s approach is his insistence that the entangling of cultivation and wilderness threads outwards and inwards simultaneously and wilderness is “not just in the oceans, not just in the deserts and the mountain ranges, but everywhere. It trickles down the staircase of the minaret and into the prayer hall of the Great Mosque at Damascus. It seeps through the filters of the air-cooling plants at Rockefeller Center.”¹⁴ Shephard’s interweaving of two processes that others seek to maintain in pristine separation involves his claim that “wilderness is not just something you look at; it’s something that you are part of. You live inside a body made of wilderness material. ... The wilderness is beauty because you are part of it.”¹⁵

This enmeshing of wilderness and cultivation - “[t]he blue mountains walk out to put another coin in the parking meter, and go on down to the 7-Eleven”¹⁶ - is not, of course, evenly distributed: and wilderness might clot to a prominent thickness here just as cultivation may protrude to form a clump there. Moreover, the enmeshing is sensitive to changes over time in terms of the respective ratios of wilderness and cultivation and these changes are what make the anthropocene a “territorialisation” of “the Earth’s geological, lithospheric, and biological systems. From climate change to biodiversity loss, to even altering the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 7

¹¹ Shephard, Paul *The Cultivated Wilderness or, What Is Landscape* (London: MIT Press, 1997), 9

¹² Braidotti, Rosi, *The Post-Human* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 5

¹³ Vaughn, Adam “Human impact has pushed Earth into the Anthropocene, scientists say” <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/07/human-impact-has-pushed-earth-into-the-anthropocene-scientists-say> [Accessed March, 16th, 2017]

¹⁴ Shephard *ibid.*, 9

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232

¹⁶ Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 111

Earth's rotation with the filling of the Three Gorges Dam, a growing consensus suggests that humans are leaving a planetary mark that will be clearly legible in the planetary archive of the future."¹⁷

The Calls of the Wild

Conceiving of a wilderness that is hybridised with cultivation – spatially uneven and temporally dynamic – may be discordant to the ears of those for whom the wild sounds out in terms of purities, whether these purities are amplified in a distant encounter or whether they are under threat from encroaching noise of cultivation. Towards the end of his memoir *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey captures this purist sonic sensibility:

“Wilderness, the word itself is music.

“Wilderness, wilderness ... we scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound of it draws all whose nerves and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned, deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination.”¹⁸

Abbey's eloquently experienced truth resonates with the analytical approach that Bernie Krause has sustained over many decades of fieldwork and enshrined in recordings, performances, exhibitions and publications, for which the 2012 book *The Great Animal Orchestra* is illustrative. Krause echoes the speculative paleo-anthropology that rings from Crane's reference earlier to the stuttering capercaillie and chimes with David Hendy's claim in *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* that the “sounds of the wild also determined the first music our ancestors made, the first words they spoke. For the most important feature of early humans' relationship with nature was that they mimicked it.”¹⁹ Krause's position is less thickly-textured than Crane's and Hendy's:

“Geophony – natural sounds springing from nonbiological categories such as wind, water, earth movement and rain. The sounds of geophony were the first sounds on earth – and this element of the soundscape is the context in which animal voices and even important aspects of human sonic culture, evolved.”²⁰

For Krause, conventional attempts to render the wild as sound rely upon “a vague idealised notion of wildness ... voices of celebrity ... animals, geological or weather events”²¹. Inspired by Dorothea Lange's understanding of her camera, Krause identifies the recorder and “amplified sound” as mechanisms to “decipher the language of the wild in ways my musically trained, cultured

¹⁷ Neimanis, Astrida *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11

¹⁸ Abbey, Edward *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Random House, 1990 [1968]), 207

¹⁹ Hendy, David *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 23

²⁰ Krause, Bernie *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* (London: Profile, 2013), 39

²¹ *Ibid.*, 144

listening couldn't otherwise grasp."²² Jeopardising the "rich libraries of musical scores from which the entirety of nature performs for its own sake"²³ is anthrophony, the human-generated sound that can stress biomes in ways that are multiply manifest. Aircraft noise, for example, masks animal vocalisations during overflight and subdues species in the plane's wake. As an immediate consequence, "the momentary break in the biophony left open the possibility that many creatures would become victims to opportunistic predators;"²⁴ over time, as such anthrophonic incursions regularise, consequences extend to negative shifts in species diversity and density, reductions dramatically revealed in Krause's successive spectrograms of study sites.

"As the truly wild sites become fewer in number, the likely result of human habitation or industry will always be close enough within range that anthrophony will almost never be completely absent. ...I'll make an educated guess that anthrophony can be heard in more than 80 to 90 percent of [wild habitat] biomes much of the time."²⁵

While Krause leans towards a pristine wild, healthful, exquisite, uniquely structured in that "[o]ne day's biophony will not remain static or repeat ever again. It is this divine, highly selective mutability over the course of time that is the authentic biophonic manifestation of the wild,"²⁶ his research that corroborates anthrophony's impact constitutes a tacit acknowledgement of hybridity, where cultivation is entangled with wilderness. For Krause this anthrophonic entanglement is sorrowful circumstance, as audible in the impoverished biophony of his study sites as it was for Rachel Carson in her emblematically entitled *Silent Spring* where the anthropogenic effects of pesticides led to a "Spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbled with the dawn chorus ... there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh."²⁷ What Krause and Carson mourn is catastrophic bereavement indeed. Yet if we derogate absolutely all human environmental influence and seek the purity of disentanglement, we might also risk obliterating a space of possibility. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, this disentanglement may no longer be possible since "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history."²⁸ Thus, in the Anthropocene, anthropophony must be considered inseparable from biophony and geophony: as one of those responding to Chakrabarty has it, the Anthropocene, if it is anything is a "biogeophysical force and not only—as postulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty—a geophysical one. To fully understand the Anthropocene, the biological and biogeochemical alterations that follow from human activities must

²² Ibid., 16

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 181

²⁵ Ibid., 186

²⁶ Ibid., 224

²⁷ Carson, Rachel *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000 [1963]), 4

²⁸ Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2009) "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, Winter, 201

be considered. One component cannot be isolated from the other: they intertwine at all spatial and temporal scales.”²⁹

It is this conceptual space that we have heard identified by Hausdoerffer and Van Horn as the “wildness—where humans are embedded in that agency”; it is what Anna Tsing designates in detailing “‘anthropogenic’ landscapes... that are co-created with their human inhabitants, forming places that are neither domesticated nor wild;”³⁰ and it is what Ogden demands when she problematizes contrasting “approaches [that] tend to disarticulate the humanity of nature by focusing solely on anthropogenic ‘stressors’ to ecological systems or by conceptualising humans as externalised beneficiaries of the ecosystem’s services.”³¹

The space of possibility is what I have been calling entanglement, using that word in a less technical register than Karen Barad does, though vibrating in sympathy with her sense that “the specificity of entanglements is everything. The apparatuses must be tuned to the particularities of the entanglements at hand. The key question in each case is this: how to responsibly explore entanglements and the differences they make.”³² When our journey reaches the four knots that might fasten field recording practices to the wild, we will be listening out for Barad’s specificity, for her responsibility and inter-relations.

The entangled wilderness – and I am arguing that there is no other kind of wilderness - is where Krause’s ‘natural’ categories of geophony and biophony are forever accompanied by the ‘cultivation’ of anthrophony. The specific ratios of each may be spatially uneven and temporally dynamic but their mutuality is inexorable: the wind will breathe through playground’s shiny curves and lines, the rain will spatter the corrugated roofs of the stacked shipping containers, the passenger jet’s tearing of the sky will interrupt the frogs’ croaks in the curl of the creek, the churn of the tanker’s blades will carry deep to the rolling whale, the soft pressures of the solitary listener’s feet on the dune will radiate in radial waves. Sound’s irrepressible indifference to boundaries, sound’s textural grasp of the rough energies that are released in every action and sound’s intimacy with distance (the near and the far) are what make entanglement inevitable and what arrogate to listening a profound diagnostic power, a power that the sound arts have long heard and that the wider humanities are coming to perceive.

This is anthropologist Anne Tsing, again, talking of “polyphonic assemblages” for which “one must listen both to the separate melody lines and their coming together in unexpected moments of harmony or dissonance ... This is the listening practice.”³³ And here is geographer Anja Kanngieser providing another

²⁹ Boggs, Carol “Human Niche Construction and the Anthropocene,” in eds. Emmett, Robert, and Thomas Lekan, “Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty’s ‘Four Theses,’” in *RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* 2016, 2, 27

³⁰ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 174

³¹ Ogden *ibid.*, 4

³² *Ibid.*, 74

³³ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On The Possibility of Life in the Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2015), 158

account of sound's power from a social science perspective in her inspiring, necessary, article "Geopolitics and the Anthropocene: Five Propositions for Sound" that issues a demand for "sound to be considered as a geophilosophical provocation to, and a method for, political thought," in which the five propositions of her title are acoustic "affordances" that amplify lived conditions of "inequality, imperceptibility, translation, commons, and the future."³⁴

"Sound is not just about hearing and responding, or communicating. It is about becoming aware of registers that are unfamiliar, inaccessible, and maybe even monstrous; registers that are wholly indifferent to the play of human drama. Sound is not only of the human, it undermines human exceptionalism; everything vibrates on some frequency and is touched by vibration, regardless of how imperceptible to human sensibility this might be."³⁵

Though they may be heard to bear some of the same weight as that which freights Tsing's and Kanngieser's humanities, the four knots form the focus for the final section of this chapter are constituted from expressions of the audibly entangled that derive from field recording conducted under the expanded auspices of sound arts. In advance of the knots, I want first to separately explore the sonorous in philosophical accounts of the sublime and the acoustic attentions of nature writing, motivated by a desire to discover more of how the wild has been addressed as sound and how that encounter involves a perceptual entanglement (the sonorous sublime) and a representational entanglement (acoustically attentive nature writing).

Sonorous Sublime

The sublime is an obstinate concept, coined long ago to address a literary device by an anonymous Greek philosopher who subsequent intellectual history named Longinus, it has endured periods when its lustre became tarnished by neglect, periods when it was brightened through new interpretative handlings and periods of denunciation which have dulled its sheen. What current critical diction takes for the sublime depends largely on the eighteenth century fashionings of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. In both Burke and Kant, the sublime encounter is manageable terror in which the thresholds of perceptual tolerability are not quite breached. Burke has it that "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*"³⁶ and that the sublime operates as a horrifying suspension which "at certain distances, and with certain modifications ... may be, and they are, delightful."³⁷ Though Kant strips out some of Burke's intricacies only to stitch his own more densely embroidered delineations in their place and may attribute reason with a more robust

³⁴ Kanngieser, Anja (2005) "Geopolitics and the Anthropocene: Five Propositions for Sound", *GeoHumanities* (1) 1, 80

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81

³⁶ Burke, Edmund *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) (Oxford: World Classics, 1990), 36

³⁷ Burke *ibid.*, 36 – 37

“resistance” than his predecessor, their two conceptions of the sublime resemble structural analogues.³⁸

Two specific aspects of Kant’s and Burke’s philosophical enquiries into the vulnerabilities and resiliencies provoked by the sublime earn them their role this chapter. First, the theatre of the sublime confrontation is staged by the two philosophers on a set that is decorated as the wild – the familiar backdrop is painted by Kant in his famous language of “[b]old, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks, clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peaks, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like.”³⁹ Second, the wild is recurrently a sounded wild, as audibly discernible in Kant’s crack of lightning, the rumble of thunder, volcanic detonations and roar of waterfall, river and furious sea as it was sonically present in Burke’s letter to Richard Shackleton with its atmospheric “melancholy gloom of the day, the whistling winds, and the hoarse rumbling of the swollen Liffey.”⁴⁰ Although the sublime was absorbed into ensuing art history as primarily a visual concern, the influential passages where Burke and Kant thematised the concept can be read for their invocation of a heard sensuality and Burke is explicit that the “eye is not the only organ of sensation by which a sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have great power in these as in most other passions ... The noise of great cataracts, raging storms, thunder or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind, although we can observe no nicety or artifice in those sorts of music.”⁴¹

There is much more of the sublime that could be folded into this chapter: how the two philosophers’ contrasting conceptions of artistic representations of experience might re-calibrate field recordists’ attempts to engage audiences; the extent to which Kant’s claim that the rescaling of nature rendered by instruments such as microscopes and telescopes cannot be “termed sublime when treated on this footing”⁴² has implications for the sound devices, amplified playback and spectrograms of Krause and others; whether the array of succeeding adaptations and critiques of the sublime might also attach to entangled wilderness that has started sprouting across these pages. The surest significance of Burke’s and Kant’s sublime for this chapter endures in its fastening of the wild to sensed sound and what can be interpreted as its entangling of that heard wild. This entanglement is there in the topographic hybridity evoked in Burke’s letter to Shackleton, where the cultivation of the Dublin from which he is writing is permeated by the audible wilderness of

³⁸ “[P]rovided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature” Kant *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1966), 93

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100

⁴⁰ Edmund Burke, ‘Letter to Richard Shackleton, 25th January, 1746’, from *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of The Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: CUP, [1923] 2014, 83

⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry* *ibid.*, 75

⁴² Kant, *ibid.*, 80

weather and its riverine effects. The entanglement is there, too, in the mirror's reverse perspective, since, though not perhaps what Hausdoerffer and Van Horn were thinking of when they defined wildness as "where humans are embedded in that agency,"⁴³ in the sublime of Burke and Kant, cultivation in the fantasy form of the lone traveller infiltrates the wild's reaches, hence those critiques that amplify the sublime's colonialist and masculinist tones. The third entanglement of the sublime relates to what might be anachronously termed the 'affect' of the encounter, with the wild impinging in palpable excitations of horror, terror and, because cognitive and bodily integrity are ultimately not breached, stimulations of delight. This third entanglement is important for it emphasizes that the wild is not only a place of calm, fragrant caress but also a process which provokes the sharp, "scattered, studded or dotted, never single ... chaotic whirlpools of the senses."⁴⁴

Nature Writing

If Burke's and Kant's sites of literal bewilderment are only the figments of their philosophical thought experiments, it is the very veridicality of the experienced wild that gives the genre of nature writing its leverage. William Batram's *The Travels* and Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selbourne* locate the paradigmatic origins of nature writing in the same historical period as the re-theorisation of the sublime, its reach then extended by Thoreau and Muir deep into the nineteenth century with the canonical baton being passed down the intervening years until eventually arriving at the 2008 issue of *Granta* magazine dedicated to a supersession of the "lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wandered."⁴⁵ The new generation of nature writers announced in the magazine's pages "don't simply want to walk into the wild, to rhapsodise and commune: they aspire to see with a scientific eye and write with literary effect;"⁴⁶ their commitment is that "[t]he best nature writing is also an experiment in forms: the field report, the essay, the memoir, the travelogue". In the decade following *Granta's* publication, new nature writing has flourished, the labelling of bookstore shelves chiming with the melodious branding of the wild prefix as a consumer relationship to such outdoor pursuits as camping, swimming, walking and foraging.

The proliferation of textual evocations of the wild are many and the best of them are alert to the entangling movements of Snyder's blue mountains and of Shepherd's hybridisation. This alertness can mean the place of the wild is less a pristine distance and more the intricate muddle of the near, as Tom Jeffreys appreciates in his formula that "there are other kinds of wildness too ... the outskirts, the edgelands, the unmanaged and the overlooked. The waste lands."⁴⁷

⁴³ Hausdoerffer and Van Horn *ibid.*, 41

⁴⁴ Serres, Michel *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985) (London: Continuum, 2008), 56

⁴⁵ Cowley, Jason, "Editorial" in *Granta: The New Nature Writing* 102, 2008, 10

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴⁷ Jeffreys, Tom *Signal Failure* (London: Influx Press, 2017), 323 – 324

Though its sentences are rarely raised to the yowling pitch reached in the affective stimulations attributed to the sublime, the new nature writing does not eschew expressing the emotions that might load an environmental encounter. There is a legible openness to entanglement in the aesthetic mode and this stands in contrast to the *Granta* editorial's contention that nature writers "aspire to see with a scientific eye". The editorial's parallel implication of an ocularocentrism – there in the reference to the eye – seems equally dissonant when, as the following extracts demonstrate, there is much across the span of the genre that speaks of a sonic sensitivity, one that is present whether the writer is a bird spotter or a bird shooter, is walking Grasmere at the turn of the 18th century or high in the Cairngorms in the middle of the World War II, has drafted a diary not intended for publication or has committed words to a literary audience.

*"Saturday Morning [15th] ... The hills and the stars and the very white waters with their ever varying yet ceaseless sound were very impressive". Sunday 16th November ... Some low ashes green - A noise of boys in the rocks hunting some animal."*⁴⁸

"All this time the ear is straining and the senses are alert. You are not aware of this at first and then, as it were, you suddenly catch yourself listening intently, and find you are subconsciously holding your breath. Very far away, on the edge of hearing, there is a faint crying."⁴⁹

"A hidden bird began making a noise like a small mechanical pump. The singing grasshopper warbler sounded as if it was drawing more and more dark up to the surface of the fen. Others have heard it as sewing machine, a spinning wheel or fisherman's winding line in its insect stridulations but for me the grasshopper warbler's song is the silvery breath of the earth itself, its dark warmth expressed as a reeling drone at the end of the day."⁵⁰

"I realised the night was not as silent as I first thought. My slightly huffy breath after running up the slope had drowned the sound of a different kind of breathing. When I first became aware of it I thought I was hearing the sound of water – maybe an overflowing sheep trough, but the cause became obvious as soon as I began walking towards it ... a beech clump ... quivering restlessly in an isolated nocturnal breeze."⁵¹

"For the ear the most vital thing that can be listened to here is the silence. To bend the ear to silence is to discover how seldom it is there. Always something moves. When the air is quite still, there is always running water; and up here that is a sound one can hardly lose ... But now and then comes an hour when the silence is all but absolute, and listening to it one

⁴⁸ Wordsworth, Dorothy "The Grasmere Journal", in ed. Mary Moorman *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (New York: OUP, 1985), 51

⁴⁹ BB (Denys Watkins-Pitchford), "Dark Estuary" (1953) in *Best of BB*, 2nd Edition (Ludlow: Merlin Unwin Books), 163

⁵⁰ Dee, Tim *The Running Sky: A Bird-Watching Life* (London, Vintage, 2010), 24

⁵¹ Yates, Chris *Nightwalk* (London: William Collins, 2012), 28

slips out of time. Such a silence is not a mere negation of sound. It is like a new element.”⁵²

Nature writing does not, in every instance, raise the volume of the heard and on those occasions where the acoustic is emphasised it may well form part of a rendering of perceptual arousal that spans the whole sensory spectrum. Still, when nature writing does turn its ears to sound, as in the above samples, there are expressions of listening attention and of expressive inventiveness that bear close resemblance to the ‘sound writing’ practices of Daniela Cascella and Salomé Voegelin. When philosopher Timothy Morton parodies nature writing as part of his critique of what he calls ecomimesis, it seems apt that he peppers his satires with evocations of the sonorous. “Overhead the cry of the gull pierces the twilight sky ... The crackle of pebbles on the shore ... a western scrub jay is chattering outside my window ... chiming with a signal from the dishwashing machine.”⁵³

Morton’s aversion to nature writing is motivated by his conviction that it “partly militates against ecology rather than for it. By setting up nature as an object ‘over there’ – a pristine wilderness beyond all trace of human contact – it re-establishes the very separation it seeks to abolish.”⁵⁴ Ecomimesis is Morton’s terminology for the process through which nature writing reifies the surrounding world, its insistence that the reader believe that “[t]his environment is real; do not think that there is an aesthetic framework here.’ All signals that we are in a constructed realm have been minimised.”⁵⁵ Even the reflexive “conscious, reflexive, postmodern version is all the *more* ecomimetic for that.”⁵⁶ In the strong form of ecomimesis, according to Morton, “[r]ather than describe ‘where I am coming from’ (‘as a blue-blooded young Portuguese hot dog salesman’), I invoke ‘where I am’ (‘as I write this the smell of hot dogs wafts through the Lisbon night air’).”⁵⁷ If many contemporary nature writers show little reticence in invoking where they are coming from and are rarely shy in presenting the reader glimpses of their person, Morton’s charge of ecomimesis may still stick if the nature writing, though confessional, continues to camouflage the aesthetic framework and to conspire to enact the separation and the reification of transcendent ‘nature’.

Four Knots In The Field

Morton’s dark ecology is no “pot of gold at the end of a rainbow”⁵⁸ but a commitment to “refuse to produce an idea of nature as a way of being,”⁵⁹ to refuse “the relaxing ambient sounds of ecomimesis [when it is] the screeching of

⁵² Shepherd, Nan *The Living Mountain* (1977) (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), 96

⁵³ Morton, Timothy *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-33

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

the emergency brake” that is needed.⁶⁰ Since the field recording practices to which I now turn participate in the mimetic as their methodology, being instantiations of “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference,”⁶¹ the question becomes whether the practices exceed the attenuated ambition “that all we can sense of nature is an echo of our ‘sounding out’ of it”⁶² and instead become ecomimetic, disentangling, creating separation and reification, dissolving the aesthetic frame.

Wild Silences

Morton’s “relaxing ambient sounds” might be what the uninitiated would anticipate in field recording’s palette: soft, shadowed dawn and gentle settling dusk, all a sonic balm for the urban irritations and a parallel to what the wild walk offered philosopher Frederic Gros:

“Once you have left streets, populated roads, public spaces (all that speed, jostling and clamour, the clatter of thousands of footsteps, the white noise of shouts and murmurs, snatches of words, the rumble and whir of engines), silence is retrieved, initially as a transparency... Walking: it hits you at first like an immense breathing in the ears. You feel the silence as if it were a great fresh wind blowing away clouds.”⁶³

The finer-grained accounts of silence in nature writing and the snarling wild of the sublime complexify Gros’s assumption of a city noise / country quiet duality and this complexity is extended in Bernie Krause’s and Edward Abbey’s experiences of having been submerged in wild silences where the amplitude has dropped down the scale. Krause claimed to be “driven insane by the lack of acoustic cues ... so disorientated that I started to talk and sing to myself and throw rocks at canyon walls just to hear some kind of sound other than the blood in my head and the growing internal din in my ears;”⁶⁴ Abbey wrote of adjusting “his nervous system to the awful quietude, the fearful tranquillity.”⁶⁵

One element in this particular knot of wild sound is that silence does not necessarily correspond to the tranquil salve that Gros imagined; drawing the entanglement tighter is the obverse sense that wilderness may not itself be ‘silent’ but closer instead to that affective encounter described in the sonorous sublime, the roar, crack, crash, churn and boom. Within field recording, this rendering of wilderness might be illustrated by Rodolphe Alexis’ *Sempervirent* (2012) involving fieldwork across the dry, wet and evergreen primary forest habitats of Costa Rica. Though room is made of moments of moist delicacy, Alexis’ material, revelling in astonishing clarity, also delivers biophonic sounds of harshness and loudness that are intensified further for me through the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 196.

⁶¹ Taussig, Michael *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993), xiii

⁶² Morton, *ibid.*, 68.

⁶³ Gros, Frédéric *The Philosophy of Walking* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 107

⁶⁴ Krause *ibid.*, 215

⁶⁵ Abbey *ibid.*, 215

unfamiliarity of their bird and animal sources. In the concert setting of an abandoned biscuit factory in London in 2012, Alexis delivered a four channel mix that powerfully explored the very edges of the audiences' ears' tolerance of volume and frequency. Any advertising of Morton's "aesthetic framework," necessary to defuse the charge of ecomimesis, is muted in *Sempervirent*: although equipment is carefully listed in the sleeve notes, microphone 'presence' is not audibly detectable in the recording, and similar absences attach to the editing process (apart from fades at the beginning and end of each track) and, crucially, to the recordist himself (the closest we get to a confession of "where I am coming from" is a list of acknowledgements).

Gordon Hempton's approach to wild silence is documented in the film *Soundtracker*⁶⁶ and in his own exquisitely-rendered commercial audio libraries – "nature at its most pristine" – available through his Quiet Planet website.⁶⁷ Hempton's pursuit of 'one square inch of silence,' the talismanic quarter of the earth where anthropogenic noise cannot be detected for at least 20 minutes that gives his book a title, is fraught with the separations and reifications that embody ecomimesis. These sharpen further with the realisation that diagnosing the patch of pristine wilderness uncontaminated by cultivation depends on the corroborating presence of the recordist and it might be that any attempt to disentangle silence into a smoother, un snagged experience will always catch itself on such performative contradictions.

Near Distance

The knot that fastens the far to the near is brilliantly encapsulated by François J. Bonnet in *The Order of Sounds*:

"Even a distant sound, as it is apprehended, can be heard *right inside the ear*. Listening realizes the intimacy of the faraway, the intimate embrace of the distant. It can transcend space, or at least change our relation to it. It reconciles two poles, without ever merging them into one another, bringing about a proximity or intimacy superposed on a distance or a distancing."⁶⁸

What Bonnet describes is synonymous with entanglement itself for it brings together what has been artificially held apart, confuses pristine perimeters and it resonates strikingly with Paul Shephard hybridisation of wilderness and cultivation, where wilderness is as proximate as cultivation is distant. Nevertheless, while it is sound that is the sensory form best suited to collapsing remoteness into intimacy, it does not follow that all listeners will be inspired by sound's "superposition" and Krause and Hempton, for example, are listeners for whom the disentanglement of the biophonic and geophonic wild from the

⁶⁶ *Soundtracker: A Portrait of Gordon Hempton*, dir. Nicholas Sherman, 2012.

⁶⁷ Hempton's website publicised the audio libraries as "nature at its most pristine ... all the necessary ingredients to immediately produce stunning natural soundscapes." <https://quietplanet.com> [Accessed September 2, 2017]

⁶⁸ Bonnet, François J. *The Order of Sounds: A Sonorous Archipelago* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016), 142

anthrophonic cultivation remains a priority, as concept and as concrete, activist ambition.

The collaboration between Dawn Scarfe, Grant Smith, Kirsty Collander Brown and Maria Papadomanolaki forms the Soundcamp⁶⁹ collective who organise an annual event called Reveil to coincide with International Dawn Chorus day and link up live with streaming microphones⁷⁰ positioned in time zones that span the globe, enabling audiences who gather at various physical locations and audiences who connect online to hear relayed the sounds that follow the rising of the sun. In 2016 I was commissioned by Soundcamp to listen to the Reveil broadcast and contribute to their *Sounds Remote* publication; two of the texts I wrote during their 24 stream might capture something of the knot that entangles the near and the far, the cultivated and the wild.

Sat 2303

Rhythmic stridulations of insects – repetitions that are not quite repetitions – possess a sound character I associate with the night before sleep rather than the dawn that follows sleep. I hunt my shelves for a copy of *The Dream and The Underworld* to find the reference to the ancient Chinese gradations of night-time. I cannot find the book. Returning to my chair in front of the computer, I hear the announcer reveal that these night creatures are calling to me from a Chinese panda sanctuary. Another cut out and I find the book: “sunset, dusk, after dusk, waiting for dawn, dawn”.

Sunday 0012

The signal falters and for a breath or two it is now my own self-noise that is all that I can hear, a kind of pressure at my eardrums. The candlelight flickers and then a car passes wetly, something creaks in the kitchen, my fingers tapping these words. The transmission surges back, the geese seeming louder after their absence, a gull and maybe a tern behind them and then one goose’s call wavers on the edge of a piped ‘chase me round the maypole’ melody. The calendar left the green day of May behind a quarter of an hour ago.

Wild Weather

To say that the weather sounds heard in nature writing and the sonorous sublime can also saturate field recording practices risks the platitudinous, since whether the field is the wilded city or the anthropogenised ice flows, local climatic conditions inevitably exert audible presence. However, our heard experience of weather is a specific form of entanglement, locating our lived lives in what Tim Ingold calls “the incessant movements of wind and weather, in a

⁶⁹ www.soundtent.org [accessed September 2, 2017]

⁷⁰ Precedents for deploying internet audio streaming protocols to transmit sounds from local microphones, can be located in earlier investigations conducted by Locus Sonus research group, with whom Soundcamp co-organise events. www.locusonus.org [accessed September 2, 2017]

zone wherein substances and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings that, by way of their activity, participate in stitching textures of the land”⁷¹. The weather, and the experience of its sounding, not only involves another knotting of the near-far, it is what can imaginatively bind us to others, human and more-than-human, with whom we are as equally startled by thunder-claps, made drowsy by murmuring breeze, or acoustically insulated behind shelter. The processes through which field recordists approach the weather can demonstrate different degrees of entanglement, different forms of separation, reification and exposure of the aesthetic frame and compressing four artists’ responses to wind will be instructive.

The muscular turbulence that drags the listener through the apparent single ‘take’ of Chris Watson’s “Low Pressure” (1996) offers a sense of nature as sublime other, with field notes revealing “[t]he blast here was so strong that it took some time to fix the microphones securely - I felt surrounded by the full force of the elements being channelled through the site, and wanted the recording to reflect the bent-double posture and sheer physicality I was experiencing.” Francisco López has explored wind’s contribution to our weatherworld on several occasions, notably on *Wind [Patagonia]* (2007) and his 2017 “Untitled #345” from the *Khandroma* LP initially insinuates a blustery kinship with Watson’s “Low Pressure.” However, once López’ track stretches itself out, a transcendent “over there” nature gets muddled up with the heard “here” of an aesthetic frame as audio layers are perceived to be successively added and removed, sometimes abruptly; as those temporally intermingled layers betray acoustic evidence of having been recorded in different locations and under different conditions; and as equally tangible manipulations of those layers’ pitch content occur.⁷²

While Cathy Lane’s “*Gaoth* (Wind)” (2014) does not shelter itself from more ferocious squalls, in the creation of the recordings, in their arrangement and in their manipulation, Lane eschews addressing the wind in its alterity alone and reveals the aesthetic frame. We hear microphone wind noise unadorned and unaltered but more importantly, we are also made to hear the entanglement of Hausdoerffer’s “wildness—where humans are embedded in that agency—rather than wilderness, where humans are removed.” The percussive rattle of fence and gate, the thrum of turbine blade, the whistling between glass and brick, the winds are imbricated in our lives, in our gathering of energy, in water for our thirst or our crops’, in the design of our dwellings, in our management of livestock, and in the dunes that shelter us from the seas. To read the writing that accompanies *The Hebrides Suite* is to become sensitive not just to the role in such compositions as “*Gaoth* (Wind)” of Lane’s own memories of over two decades on

⁷¹ Ingold, Tim “Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather” in Tim Ingold *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 121

⁷² From the sleeve notes: “Composed, edited and mastered at ‘Mobile Messor’ (Den Haag) and Dune Studio (Loosduinen), Summer 2016. Original environmental sound matter recorded by Francisco López at multiple locations in the Mustang Region of Nepal: Kalopani, Chhoyo, Jhipra, Marpha, Syang, Thini, Kagbeni, Tiri, Jhong, Putah, Chhusang, Chele, Ghyakar, Tsarang, Saukure, Marang, Namgyal, Lomanthang”. The *Khandroma* LP was a collaboration with the Soundwalk Collective and an installation at the Rubin Museum, New York.

the islands but of the memories “collected in interview and conversation as well as oral history material from national and local archives.”

Andrea Polli’s work *Energy Flow* (2017) illuminated the Rachel Carson Bridge in Pittsburgh with 27,000 multi-coloured LED lights, the system powered by wind turbines installed on the bridge by her collaborator, the turbine manufacturer WindStax. Although she has previously used the conventional methodologies of phonography, Polli’s approach to sound here is structurally distinguishable from Watson, López and Lane who all, irrespective of the signal processing they each commit to, seek some form of symmetry between the sound heard at the point of recording with the sound heard at the point of audition. Polli recorded wind speed and direction using sensors on the bridge’s structure to generate data that was then visualised through the LEDs in real-time. The process is still mimetic in Taussig’s terms - it still involves “the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference” – but occurs at a deferred register from more traditional field recording, a register closer to Kanguieser’s “unfamiliar, inaccessible, and maybe even monstrous,” revealing the buffeting geophony of wild winds in the city’s built environment and opening a opportunity to connect these to the politics of energy use and climate change.

Already A Crowd: Wild As Human and More-Than-Human

The final knot for this chapter relates to the audibly entangled associations between the human and the more-than-human. Rosi Braidotti acquaints these relationships within a broader “dialectics of otherness [that] is the inner engine of Man’s power, who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance,” whose functions she identifies, following Borges, to “confine the human-animal interaction within classical parameters, namely, the oedipalized relationship (you and me together on the same sofa); an instrumental (thou shalt be consumed eventually) and a fantasmic one (exotic, extinct infotainment objects of titillation).”⁷³ Braidotti recognises that the complexity she calls the post-human might enable a re-calibration of human-more-than-human relationships around a zoe-centred egalitarianism. This would not just be a “negative bonding in terms of sharing the same planetary threats: climate change, environmental crisis or even extinction” but “a more affirmative approach to the redefinition of posthuman subjectivity, as in the counter models of transversal, relational nomadic assemblages.”⁷⁴ In parallel to the knot devoted to wild weather, I perform a condensed exploration into three field recordists’ practices in terms of whether they reduce the biophony of wild, feral and haggard species to a disentangled listening exercise in exotic infotainment.

David Dunn is clear that “[t]he sounds of living things are not just a resource for manipulation”⁷⁵ and he further problematizes the

⁷³ Braidotti, following Borges, 68

⁷⁴ Ibid., 103

⁷⁵ Dunn, David, “Nature, Sound Art, and the Sacred”, in eds. David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus *The Book of Music and Nature: An Anthology of Sounds, Words, Thoughts (Music / Culture)* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 98

manipulation of soundscape compositions that miraculate pristine wilderness, in terms reminiscent of Morton's critique of ecomimesis:

"The premise appears to be that these recordings will somehow sensitize the listener to a greater appreciation of the natural world, when in fact they are more often perpetuating a nineteenth-century vision of nature and, at best, merely documenting a state of affairs that will soon disappear."⁷⁶

Dunn's album *The Sound of Light in Trees* deploys specialist recording techniques to access the "unfamiliar, inaccessible, and maybe even monstrous" signals emitted by bark beetles burrowing within the trunks of New Mexican piñon pines, trees that are hollowed out as a consequence of insect damage and rendered susceptible to fire. The composition sets the recurrent scrabbling, abrasive signature of beetles devouring the inner xylem of the pine into an exchange with the vibrational energies set in motion inside the infested trees by buffeting winds. If this follows the fantasmic of Braidotti's taxonomy, subsequent collaborations between Dunn and scientists from a university School of Forestry shade into her category of the instrumental with playback of modified insect sounds being designed to reduce "beetle reproductive output, tunnelling distance and adult survival."⁷⁷ With the spread of beetle activity spurred by climate change and thought to constitute "the largest insect infestation of North America in the fossil record of the Earth,"⁷⁸ Dunn's work is sonifying an otherwise inaudible zoological clotting of wilderness-cultivation and is disclosing shifting entanglements that extend beyond the receptive and representational.

Jana Winderen's cassette release *The Noisiest Guys on The Planet* (2009) parallels Dunn's *The Sound of Light* in that an apparatus, for her a hydrophone, discloses a biophonic atmosphere that though initially approachable as exotic infotainment which separates and reifies 'nature' soon develops into a more complex encounter. Part of the complexity, and one that differs from the closed field of *The Sound of Light* where precision has established the order, family, genus and species of what is being heard, relates to what Winderen acknowledges as a certain opacity: "[u]nderwater there is very little known about the soundscapes created by living creatures, and few understand the details of variations between the various grunts, knocking sounds and rumbling". What "might be a creature from the order of Decapods"⁷⁹ resounds from the tape in crackling submarine clouds until joined, near the end of Side One, by what resolves into the

⁷⁶ Dunn, *ibid.*, 103

⁷⁷ Hofstetter, Richard W., David D. Dunn, Reagan Mcguire and Kristen A. Potter "Using Acoustic Technology to Reduce Bark Beetle Reproduction", *Pest Management Science*, 70 (1), 2014, abstract.

⁷⁸ Dunn quoted in Rapoport, Steve, "Music Professor Receives Patent to Help Fight Bark Beetles Ravaging Western Forests" University of California Santa Cruz, News Center, February 09, 2017, website [accessed September 2nd, 2017]

⁷⁹ Winderen quotations from the website of her record company, Touch, http://touchshop.org/product_info.php?products_id=305 [accessed September 2nd, 2017]

recognisable presence of a boat's engine that I can't help hear as another instantiation in sound of Shepheard's cultivated wilderness.

In keeping with Dunn, Jana Winderen registers an aversion to biophony as "resource for manipulation" and inflects this concern in terms of her own refusal to "'tune' the fish or play them as if they were instruments. That just feels disrespectful."⁸⁰ This question of disrespect might amount to an intimation of Braidotti's affirmative zoe-egalitarianism, since it could implicate a challenge to human sensory exceptionalism, attaching us to the "importance of the inaudible, to that which lies outside our senses and our possibility of perception. This is a field which we are *not* able to experience and yet other creatures are operating there. For me, it is important to hear this field since it is inhabited by beings who have existed for many millions of years longer than our species."⁸¹

Dunn's and Winderen's work suggest a delicate space beyond exoticism and subliminal awe where there is at least some potential for an imaginative inhabitation of other species' sensoria. In this space, rather than it being dissolved, as Morton claims happens within nature writing, the aesthetic frame is audibly divulged as, in part, the very mechanism through which the other-than-human can materialise. This encounter need not, however, depend on such technological accomplices as Dunn's contact mic or Winderen's hydrophone as Catherine Clover's work, the last strand in this last knot, exemplifies. As part of *Points of Listening*,⁸² I participated in a soundwalk in 2016 that took us for a winter's stroll, drawn by the Clover's stated ambitions:

Rather than looking at remote wildernesses I consider how these birds adapt and thrive in the city, and rather than the plight of animals on the verge of extinction I address birds that are numerous and highly adaptable, birds that we see and hear everyday from our windows, along the pavements, in the street trees, in city parks, under bridges, nesting on tower blocks, sharing our urban spaces with us, birds that are so numerous and common that they are often made unwelcome.

There are risks in such entanglements, risks that accompany Braidotti's jeopardies of the oedipal, the instrumental and the fantasmic, risks in ascribing to birds the human category of language and risks in transcribing from them phonetic inscriptions that depend on human hearing. As Jeremy Mynott argues in *Birdscapes: Birds in our imagination and experience*, birds "have far greater 'temporal resolution' ... we and the birds are actually hearing different things."⁸³ Yet my experience on this focused soundwalk did provoke something of shifting of auditory and empathic gears, a temporary transmission away from the

⁸⁰ Winderen in Lane, Cathy and Angus *In The Field: The Art of Field Recording* (Axminster, uniformbooks), 155

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 157

⁸² *Points of Listening* is a programme of workshops, performances and talks devised by my colleagues Mark Peter Wright and Salomé Voegelin. <https://pointsoflistening.wordpress.com/archiveanddocumentation/> [Accessed September 2nd, 2017]

⁸³ Mynott *Birdscapes: Birds in our imagination and experience* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 180

exclusive attention to the anthrophonic (jet overflights, traffic noise, voices and footfalls) that this spatial practice conventionally magnifies and towards the avian biophonic, understood as a wildness that is as simultaneously entangled with cultivation as our agency is embedded in it.

Polyphonic Assemblages

Recording practices in the wild field that are snagged by the four knots of silence, weather, distance and human-more-than-human relationships exhibit entanglements and disentanglements, dissolve or solidify the aesthetic frame, separate and reify transcendent, pristine nature or muddy it, hybridising and complexifying. For Tsing, “rather than limit our analyses to one creature at a time (including humans) ... if we want to know what makes places livable we should be studying polyphonic assemblages, gatherings of ways of being.”⁸⁴ In different ways, the works of Clover, Soundcamp and Lane insinuate this gathering yet field recording still tends to approach the cultivated wilderness in the lonely footsteps of the sublime and of nature writing: “What if I fell in a forest? Would a tree hear me?”⁸⁵. There are resources for amplifying gatherings, collective and collaborative enterprises such as Steven Feld’s “dialogic recording” and Leah Barclay’s “sonic ecologies framework”⁸⁶ and these should be listened to, unless the figure of the tourist ear is to persist in marking out the alterity of a ‘them there’ from the perspective of a normalised ‘me here.’

The trick for field recording will be to draw the distance of the trotting gray fox into intimacy; to listen to its movements across the forest floor not for sounds of separation but for their insinuations of an audible entanglement in which our agencies are so inexorably knotted that they should not be camouflaged but instead startlingly disclosed, even at the risk of beauty fleeing the scene. Seeking solitude in nature can offer solace but imagining what is healthful or damaged in the heard wildness, how this might be represented and how it should be repaired needs a gathering’s warmth.

⁸⁴ Tsing, *Mushroom* *ibid.*, 157

⁸⁵ Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim At Tinker Creek* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011), 80

⁸⁶ Barclay, Leah, “Sonic Ecologies: Exploring the Agency of Soundscapes in Ecological Crisis,” *Soundscape*, 12 (1), 2012-2013, 29 - 33